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*Used ... by their elders  
Abused ... by pedophiles  
Disabused ... by life ?*



### ***“Street Pedophilia” in Cambodia*** *-A Survey on Phnom Penh’s suspects and victims-*

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*and sponsored by the British Embassy in Cambodia*

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## Introduction

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International Organizations and NGOs working in Cambodia have provided many reports that focus on prostitution in the country. These reports include child prostitution, but sometimes underestimate the important target groups represented by individuals involved in these activities, such as the offenders and their victims.

In this report, the tackled issue will be identified as “Street pedophilia”: it does not include brothels indoor pedophilia which mainly concerns young female prostitutes (including virgins) and a larger perpetrators’ population (in terms of nationality and number). *APLE* has focused its investigations and actions on perpetrators who act individually and cautiously because of an existing gap in prosecuting these traveling sex offenders.

These men, who constitute *APLE*’s target group, appear to be mainly Westerners. They use specific methods and environment (family/friends/neighbor circles), different approach of their victims and constitute a particular case among child abusers. Their number tends to increase but it remains hard to define in which extend.

These two target groups, street pedophiles and vulnerable children on which *Action pour les Enfants* focuses its program, both remain difficult to observe and approach as they mingle outside common places usually meant for sexual interactions, such as bars and brothels. Thus, in order to explain why pedophilia differs from other forms of prostitution, this survey proposes to draw up an analysis of the current environment which pedophiles benefit from in Cambodia. It will focus on western males in the Phnom Penh region who represent the majority of the offenders and also on young boys who constitute their main target.

This survey has been carried out based on the investigations conducted by *Action pour les Enfants*’ experts in the field from 2003 through 2005, as well as on recent diverse reports available in the local/international Medias and on interviews with persons involved with various projects related to assisting the victims.

Organized under a comprehensible frame, it aims to better define the target group implicated in pedophilia activities and highlight trends of time and areas: when and where street children become victims of sex offenders. The final purpose of this survey is to develop a different approach to the issue, creating new methods of investigating, and more appropriate means of action, as well as to provide relevant information to any organizations involved in the fight against pedophilia in Cambodia.

# What: the need for a comprehensive definition of the issue<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Social environment : a few elements to remember

- Sexuality in Cambodia

Sexuality in Cambodia remains a sensitive topic even though, paradoxically, many measures carried out by social workers are linked with sex and its major effects on society: prostitution, child abuse, HIV/AIDS, etc. However, few reports currently available focus on the cultural aspect of sexual behavior among the Khmer society. This necessary background, if better recognized and accepted, could provide a new perspective and understanding of the issue, if not the deviation of certain forms of sexual activities, then the significance of the current and rising issue of sex tourism in Cambodia and the consequences it has on the people and authorities.

Here are a few facts to keep in mind when observing the cultural sex practices of the Khmer:

-Sexual activity should only occur within a marriage, with the exception of premarital sexual education for men and post marital affairs with prostitutes. Women should be virgins during the time of marriage and remain faithful to their husbands.

-Thus, adultery and commercial sex in daily life are very common for men, a part of sexual education and an economic necessity for rural families, etc.

-Housing promiscuity, community life, early marriage, certain abstract concepts (such as the legal age for sexual intercourse), and misunderstanding the meaning of consent, are all factors that can lead to sex offenses (including rape).

- Sex industry/commercial sex

Prostitution, under all different forms and unfortunately to the extent of pedophilia, has constituted the sex industry in Cambodia since the beginning of the 90s. Several now well-known factors helped instigate this prolific market: the extension of the Thai market, a rise in demand with the presence of UNTAC workers' in Cambodia at the beginning of the 1990s decennia, poverty and instability in the country forcing many women to fall into prostitution, higher incomes allowing local men to afford prostitutes, etc.

Vast amount of literature covering the sex industry in Cambodia already exist. However, what is most alarming to NGO's is the dramatic growth of child prostitution. The purpose of this report is to cover a specific form of the sexual exploitation of children to its current extent and also the methods involved. It is a part of this overall situation, a consequence of the sex industry development and its promotion around the world and as a result, a new contributor to its development.

- Rape/Pedophilia: A "phenomenon"?

Child abuse, sadly, has become very common in Cambodia. Fortunately, the Cambodian people frequently condemn the perpetrators of cases made known through the local media, which does not mean it is a new issue, but that awareness among the public (including families of the victims) has increased. The perpetrators actions are now considered a crime. However, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of the men who are actually arrested for sexually abusing children in Cambodia are local Cambodians.

Another category of sexual abusers are Asian men (Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, etc.), who prefer virgin girls. They have become more present in the country, but none of

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<sup>1</sup> For conventional definition of the different issues of this report (prostitution, sex exploitation, child sex abuse, etc.): [http://www.ecpat.net/eng/CSEC/definitions/Child\\_sex\\_tourism.htm](http://www.ecpat.net/eng/CSEC/definitions/Child_sex_tourism.htm)

these perpetrators are actually linked to street pedophilia since their practices keep them away from obvious public areas and require intermediaries (pimps) and/or occur in pre-defined locations (brothels/hotels).

According to Cambodian media reports and many inquiries carried out by local and international NGOs, child rape by local perpetrators have been on the rise over the past few years. Several factors contribute to the rise: the wide accessibility and use of pornography (the primary sex education tool for youth as well as a different –Western, Asian<sup>2</sup>- point of view on nudity, desire, techniques, and specific features), a culture of impunity (limited involvement of authorities/the judicial system), the impact of alcoholism, social attitudes toward victims (stigmatized, led to prostitution), lack of social moral structure and education in rural communities, housing promiscuity (most of the offenders are direct relatives – father/step-father/uncle- or neighbors), relative banality of criminal activities and the recall of ancient beliefs associated with contextual sanitary situations: “The myth that sex with a young girl is good for health and fears about HIV infection, together with the prohibitive cost for most men for a virgin, and the growing sense of impunity in society, certainly appear to be valid explanation as to why so many young and sexually immature girls are raped”<sup>3</sup>.

Due to the social stigma that families could suffer from if their cases were publicized, a large number of rape cases remain hidden from the community. Even if the media uncovered more and more cases daily, it would not necessarily indicate that the current phenomenon differs from what it was a few years ago, or even more prior times. Social awareness, changing concerns vis-à-vis sexual crimes, and improvement of judicial monitoring may be some of the reasons why rape appears to have become a recent and rising social preoccupation, although this may not be the right analysis.

In order to face the barriers encountered in dealing with victims’ families and witnesses for instance, there should be a deeper understanding and knowledge about sexual issue in Asia, especially when considering the cultural/social point of view, as in the following example:

-In the Cambodian society, there is reluctance on the part of many Cambodians to get involved in people’s domestic relations and/or sexual activities of other people.

-The fear of social stigma as a result of revealing incest/rape/abuse among the family circle, the village or the community. The reputation of a family is highly priced and remains even more important than rectifying a situation of sexual abuse suffered by their child.

Any actions aiming to tackle sexual abuse in the Cambodian society and to encourage further involvement of the victims’ family to fight sexual exploitation of their young, should take in consideration the impact it would have in the community and the reasons it may fail to be supported should be analyzed. What is the primary concern of the community: the offenses taking place or their own reputation?

## **2. Cultural perspectives to understand the victim/ family’s behavior in dealing with pedophilia:**

- Education practices
- ✓ Among Khmer families: Poverty of verbal exchanges and interactions as well as obvious maintained cleavage between children world and adult world keep children apart from adult preoccupations and activities during their education. It makes them

<sup>2</sup> Pornography sources are mainly from Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong and western countries.

<sup>3</sup> Rape and Indecent Assault: Crimes in the Community, A LICADHO Special Report, February 2001, pp.12-13.

unprepared to outside world whenever they get separated from their families, and easily vulnerable.

- ✓ Child, as an individual, can not be considered an autonomous entity. A child is interdependent on his family and subordinate to his elders. His entire attitude can only be understood in reference to his position within the kinship group. In the case of street children, gang can become the reference.
- ✓ In addition: older girls usually care for their younger (4/5 years old) brothers very early on in order to lighten their mother's daily duties: the responsibility of education/supervision relegated to girls does not facilitate raising the awareness of boys concerning the threats of the outside world.
- ✓ Until puberty, the behavior (good or not) of a child is accepted/tolerated because parents believe that since children are unable to understand their surrounding world before becoming an adult, and therefore should not be responsible for their actions/mistakes.
- ✓ Children feel responsible for taking care of their parents and will do whatever is necessary to earn income. Children strongly respect their parents and are the only source parents can rely on to care for them when they are elderly.
- ✓ Current evolution: In Cambodian economic context, parents keep busy earning their living and tend to grant less attention to their children who are invited to individualize themselves in a new way, which means that the community becomes less in charge of them. New ideas on education, coming from educated people/urban families, are diffused to rural communities: child becomes more educated, less obedient and tend to escape more to the family ascendancy. Social upheavals have a serious impact on the original coherent system.

- Sexual exploitation and its links with educative environment of children

- ✓ The educational process aims to let children participate in family life. It is inconceivable that they could have a destiny of their own: conformity, interdependence and submission to their family "Very soon, the child acquires the feeling that he can't live on his own. To be loved and accepted, he must conform to ones expectations from him"<sup>4</sup>. Children are not encouraged to affirm themselves but to agree with adult perceptions which, as a consequence, restrict their creativity and spontaneity. Cambodian children are rarely spontaneously about expressing what they really think, feel, or worry about. This could explain why after encountering a situation of sexual abuse, they seldom tell their family or community and feel reluctant to testify to authorities as well as cooperate with social workers without their family's consent.
- ✓ Education: boys are given relatively flexible freedom of action and behavior at an early age. They are encouraged to study and make their living, thus they usually leave the family cocoon without interference from their parents (opposed to girls, who are sheltered and expected to do housework, help their mothers, and learn about womanhood, inside the family cocoon). In the case of street boys, this relative freedom, and being disconnected with the family even earlier than other children, could explain their involvement in prostitution and their ability to take advantage of earning money (including with pedophiles). No one prevents them from this exploitation since they no longer live under the care and protection of their family anymore.

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<sup>4</sup> Népote, Jacques, Parente et Organisation sociale dans le Cambodge moderne et contemporain, Genève, Etudes Orientales, Editions Olizane, 1992, p.21.



- ✓ According to the received education, children hardly have an independent mind nor judgment or critic ability, little curiosity: these attitudes are not encouraged and this could explain why children are so disturbed after having been abused. Not only the abuse itself causes a trauma but also the attitude to adopt while expressing this suffering is unclear. Psychological consequences of this confusion may be expressed in silence, refuse to collaborate, hostility, etc.
- ✓ Lack of knowledge that leaves the door open to misunderstanding: parents may be somewhat ignorant of certain concepts such as sexual assault, decency, physical respect, etc. For instance they wouldn't consider that touching their child's genitals is regarded as a crime. As a result they tend to ignore, minimize or deny the significance of such gesture.
- ✓ Contextual factor in urban areas: a more open attitude regarding sexual activities could have an impact on the accepting of certain practices that used to be intolerable and reprehensive (sex with young girls for instance) but which became less unusual with time, thus more acceptable.

### 3. Other perspectives

- Buddhism

In the Cambodian society and strongly connected with Buddhist beliefs, we must keep in mind that incest, abuse, and rape may be considered by others to be the result of bad Karma that the victim must endure (consequences of what he has done in his former life). This belief could be an explanation to the apparent neutrality of some parents and the absence of community participation on measures implemented by social workers. This interpretation of Buddhism could be the influence of popular practices to some extent, as has been the case in Thailand.

- Street children considered individuals

Whatever their goal might be, the offender's attitude toward the child during their initial approach (even after abuse has gone on between the offenders and their victims) has a strong impact on how the victim views them. One should consider how the traditional Western education of children differs from the Cambodian approach to children. In Western tradition, children are considered individuals with a personality. They benefit from a lot of affection from their parents and other surrounding adults in general during their entire childhood. Offenders may notice the difference with the Cambodian children, and thus they know how to get their attention, to fulfill their care's need, and how to please children who usually go unnoticed in their environment, especially those from broken families (street families). This may provide one explanation of the victims' lack of reaction or unwillingness to denounce the individual who paid attention to them (as a target of course, but also as a person). Despite the abuse acts which are not excusable for all that, we could argue that this new education model encountered by the children, especially street children, may represent an attractive approach.

- Consumerism (economic context)

In a new competitive society whose emphasis is on materialism, the desire for possessions (beyond necessities) becomes strong, and some families are willing to exchange a child and their dignity for a more comfortable life. (one case has been investigated where a family allowed a perpetrator to abuse their daughter from age 8 to 12, in exchange for a house, and other material benefits, up to thousands of dollars). However, in many cases, the

money earned from sexual exploitation by children remains a necessity for some families' survival (food, accommodation) and habits (alcohol, gambling...).

- Psychological effects of sexual abuse: reproducing a scheme

It is attested that victimized children of sexual abuse by adults, apart from the physical consequences of such acts, may suffer from anxiety, hyperactivity, and aggressive behavior. They often lose confidence in themselves and have feelings of guilt, and anger, while becoming distrustful of adults -including parents. Facing the issue of having to testify after a suspect has been arrested, causes some children to be silent and apparently unwilling to collaborate with the authorities. Some victims with these feelings take an unconscious vengeance on life by exposing their fellow acquaintances to similar risks by introducing them to potential child sex's abusers. Here emerges the "pimp": many of the young adults/older children providing children available for sex on demand at notorious areas (Svay Pak, River side) were formerly abused children themselves. Although motivated by financial interests, the behavior of these young pimps should be considered a long-term result of their sacrificed youth to the sex trade and due to personality changes, pessimistic view of the future, lack of trust, and an absence of moral interest for younger children.

- Weak participation from the community

An active collaboration of the community for child protection remains essential to the encouragement of social consideration with regard to the sexual exploitation of children. Due to the reluctance of victims in revealing their abuse or offenders, and also the social stigma their family wishes to avoid, the common behavior of the Khmer society perpetuates silence and avoids involvement in other family's problems (as far as a family reputation is concerned). As a result, individual who exploit child sex can benefit from the lack of attention and involvement from society. At last, the general background of violence in Phnom Penh doesn't encourage denouncement. People try to avoid troubles because of the unexpected consequences their involvement could induce; social networks are complex and violent reprisal became very common.

## **Who: the people involved in sexual activities involving children**

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Recent awareness among the media and international organizations regarding the proliferation of pedophilia by foreigners in Cambodia tends to perhaps exaggerate a phenomenon which is certainly growing according to observers, but may not be happening to the dramatic extent some reports would indicate. Moreover, it is not surprising that Khmer society and the Cambodian tourism industry could appear in any other way, since international awareness has been peaked and a few cases have been given wide-spread media coverage.

Serious investigators agree on the assertion that perpetrators of domestic rapes involving children are definitely the first priority to be considered when taking an overview look at pedophilia in Cambodia. Following this are those people who frequent the sex industry, who are increasingly searching brothels for under-age girls. This group includes foreigners, but foreigners still constitute a minority. Finally are those involved in street pedophilia, independent and cautious, which mainly involves street children and boys.

Attempting to quantify the pedophilia population is not realistic and figures lack relevancy given the circumstances of these crimes. The specific and now well-known trend of sex tourism (especially the impunity in the surrounding environment) attracts new comers, while old customers may be migrating to new spots closer in-land in Cambodia. Trying to define who is involved in the sexual abuse of minors and examining the specifics of this group seems essential in order to adopt better measures in the struggle against this now much-publicized situation.

### **1. From suspects to pedophiles**

- Child Abuse in Cambodia: to what degree are western men involved?

Sexual abuse of children in Cambodia is certainly not a western man's affair, nor even a foreign one. On the contrary, Khmer men are the main perpetrators. If it is hard to quantify the role played by foreign pedophiles in the country, the number of cases of incest, domestic rape (rape perpetrated by someone close to the family), gang rape, and other forms of sexual crimes in rural society and in cities reported by the media and police is tragically increasing and represents about five-sixths of all sexual crimes perpetrated against children<sup>5</sup>. According to the 24-Hour-Police Hot-Line service launched in October 2000, 90% of the phone calls received (800 a year) concern sexual crimes perpetrated by Cambodian men and are made by the victims themselves, their families or witnesses.

The impact of violence, alcoholism, pornography (as the only sexual outlet available for most men) and the absence of a strong familial and social structure aggravate a pre-existing situation which was formerly kept secret and dealt with by the immediate community.

Therefore, Asian and Western pedophilia does occur in a relatively "ripe" field.

- An attempt to profile the pedophile

Different from the conclusions of medical and psychological reports, it is very difficult to draw a profile of the pedophile which could help social services and the police expert control over the activities of pedophiles and deal with the disastrous consequences of

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<sup>5</sup> Child rape, Virgin trafficking, Exploitation, Debauchery

their illegal sexual assaults on the societies they interact with or provide more effective protection of their potential victims.

- ✓ These are the four basic internationally recognized characteristics of a pedophile<sup>6</sup>:
  - Long term and persistent pattern of behavior
  - Children as preferred sexual objects
  - Well developed techniques in obtaining victims
  - Sexual fantasies focusing on children
- ✓ Attracted by easy targets in the third world, especially in Asia, they began to focus on Cambodian children after the Philippines and Thailand, the major destinations of sexual tourism in general, reinforced laws against underage prostitution. The current laxness of local government authorities offers an environment that is nearly free of consequences, giving the offenders a feeling of freedom of action and aiding the absence of scruples. Some have homosexual tendencies and mainly focus on young boys, but not in all cases. These perpetrators generally pretend that they love children in their own way. They convince themselves that their actions are understood/normal, because it is part of the local culture. Some men also believe that going abroad to sexually abuse a child is acceptable and that they are actually helping poor people support their families. Among this group, foreign residents of Phnom Penh and other cities are included.

- Specific psychological behaviors of the pedophile

- ✓ They are most of the time single, unable to become socialized according to their own society's accepted standards (marriage, fatherhood). In cases where they are married, those closest to them (families/wives/friends/colleagues) are often the most surprised, as offenders keep their desires and acts very secret.
- ✓ Psychotic pedophiles/perverts: men with a long term psychological predilection for sex with children: they are more organized, demanding, some belong to networks. They consider themselves child-lovers and often argue over the consent of their victims, a point which allows them to they believe that there is no abuse, for example the so-called tradition of tolerance vis-à-vis child sexual maturity (especially boys) [see [www.ageofconsent.com](http://www.ageofconsent.com)]. They tend to assess their behavior based on "cultural conduct" which is one method by which they convince themselves that they have done no harm.
- ✓ They suffer from an inability to grasp the gap between their own behavior (having sex with a child: including all acts from touching body parts to actual penetration) and normality (social consensus: defined as sex among consenting adults). They are, most of the time, recidivists and unable to control themselves, even when they have already been condemned for similar acts in the past.
- ✓ The social world of a pedophile is a visual one. The specific sexual community he may belong to constantly requires new stimuli. Therefore, organized individuals share (and sell) fantasies, documents and pictures with other like-minded individuals, mainly via the Internet. This is one of the main reasons they keep pictures of their victims: these pictures constitute very valuable items for trade on dedicated web-sites (many of the suspects arrested were well-equipped with computers, digital cameras

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<sup>6</sup> Understanding and Investigating Child Sexual Exploitation, Law Enforcement Against Sexual Exploitation of Children Project, Ministry of Interior, General Direction of National police, Kingdom of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, 2000, 71 pages.

and magazines which demonstrates the psychological and financial importance of recording their sexual acts).

These remarks assent to the three categories of pedophiles usually recognized in scientific definition and have all been observed in Cambodia:

- the frustrated: they suffer from neurotic, have difficulty to accept their sexual tendency and do not necessarily act, contenting themselves with sexual touching or even only sighting and children company.
- the perverts: they refuse social taboos, justify their act, and spread a discourse on pedophilia which can be very convincing, they actually have sex with children
- the psychopaths: they are sadist and could be dangerous; they may use violence in sexual acts.

- Sexual tourists

This group include all tourists (including both those who come to Cambodia on a regular basis or those who do not) willing to have sex with local sex-industry workers and those who will occasionally have sexual interactions with a minor without consciously considering their sexual interaction as sexual abuse of a child, because, for example, the minor is provided by a brothel.

The vast majority of these perpetrators are actually *situational* child abusers, men on holiday who “experiment” with children in an act they would never consider in their own country, motivated by curiosity more than a specific tendency to engage in sex with a child.

## 2. Children involved in sexual abuse: accident/rape or “activity”?

- Cultural perspectives for a comprehensive approach to sexual abuse of children in Cambodia

**Victims** are defined as being children, under the legal age for sexual relations, who have sex with adults; the legal age of consent is 15 years old. The youngest victims are as young as 6-7 years old.

- ✓ *Rape and Prostitution*

Victims in general include victims of rape (including domestic rape and incest), human trafficking, as well as informal child prostitutes. These child prostitutes are forced by poverty into prostitution, knowing there is increased demand for sex with children, be they street children, with/without a family/pimp as well as young girls in brothels and other types of victims.

Before going further, it is crucial to touch on the link between rape/sexual abuse and prostitution. This link must be understood within its appropriate cultural frame, a fact attested to by an overwhelming number of inquiries: prostitution is considered the only recourse after the loss of virtue brought about by rape/sexual abuse.

*“The shame associated with loss of virginity often becomes the focal point of rape. Victims may take several months to tell anyone and the victim’s parents may not want to go to authorities because of potential damage to the family’s reputation. This attitude also gives insights into why parents would agree or encourage their daughter to marry a man that raped her. Alternatively, some parents even encourage their daughter into prostitution because of the money that can be made, especially if they are no longer virgins. The value placed upon virginity shifts the focus in rape cases from the perpetrator and his unlawful violent act, to the victims and the “problem” of the loss of her virtue. (...) At home, friends, neighbors and even family reflect these*

*social attitudes in the way victims are treated. (...) Victims often blame themselves, or are blamed by their family for allowing the rape to occur.”<sup>7</sup>*

Victims in general also include street children and boys. They become **victims** when they become prostitutes. They do not deliberately choose their condition, but are forced into prostitution, in cases where they have a family, by the need to find a more effective way to earn a living (better than selling books, shining shoes or begging) or, in cases where they are on their own, by poverty. Increasing demand is powerful attractant. Whatever the arrangement made between a victim and the perpetrator, the apparent "consent" (which allows perpetrators to continue their illusion of non-culpability) results from a non-choice; the children still suffer, sometimes to a far greater extent than they "agree" to, from sexual abuse and molestation, and facing no other comparable means to earning a living (pedophiles can be very generous), they accept their situation and do not attempt to consider their own comfort or health.

✓ *Street pedophilia*

Contrary to the sex with minors occurring at brothels involving girls, also pedophilia, street pedophilia involves more boys than girls. However, street pedophilia doesn't necessarily involve street children, who are abandoned to handle life themselves and are easily targeted. Street pedophilia is defined as when the first encounter between the victim and perpetrator happens in a public area. Street pedophilia involves both children who have been separated from their families (whether or not they are living on the street), and are thus vulnerable, as well as children who are used by those close to them as a source of income, no matter what the cost to the child. In all cases, these are children who do not benefit from the protection of their parents or from legal assistance. These are children who are left to the will of any abuser without defense or options to escape sexual exploitation.

• Street family/group: a definition

UNICEF defines street children as noted below (a definition established for a former report concerning street children in Laos<sup>8</sup>):

*“Any human being below the age of 18 years who lives or spends a significant amount of time on the street of urban areas taking care of himself/ herself and/ or his/ her family, doing various small jobs or begging.”*

*“UNICEF use two terms to distinguish between two types of street children.*

*Children of the street (homeless street children): meaning boys and girls who think of the street as their home. They might have family ties somewhere but for the most part have no contacts with their families or they might have completely severed ties with family. They look for shelter, food and sometimes a sense of family among other children on the streets. This category would include abandoned children, orphans or children who have run away from home. These children might sleep in empty buildings, temples or literally the street- sometimes with other street children, family members or alone. This category also includes homeless families who sleep on the street even though one or both parents are present; the family is homeless and sleeping on the streets.*

*Children on the street, (street children with a home): this includes those who still have family connections. They live at home (although often in very poor conditions); some might attend school but are sent to the streets by their parents or decide themselves to go to the streets to help support their family. This group is usually larger in number than the children of the streets are.*

*These two terms can be thought of as a continuum. Many street children are rarely completely homeless or completely at home because they move between different degrees of being connected to their family and not being connected.” pp.20-21*

<sup>7</sup> Rape and Indecent Assault: Crimes in the Community, a LICADHO Special Report, February 2001, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> A short version of this report is available on: <http://www.streetchildren.org.uk/reports/Laos%20Child.doc>

- Street children as potential victims: a first glance

Of the street children involved in many of the cases investigated by APLE, it appears that many of them, who happened to be victims of sexual abuse, are now considering making a living from such activities. Most of them are boys. The overall evaluations show that girls remain in brothels, even if some street girls also suffer from sexual abuse. Pedophiles attracted to young girls prefer purchasing their victims at brothels.

Among these children, some do make a living from selling items to tourists (books, flowers, snacks, etc.), shining shoes or selling newspapers. Such children will agree to a sexual encounter with adults if requested. Some are “free” to accept or reject such a deal, meaning the decision is their own, even if made under economic pressures which affect their resistance). For other younger or/and more vulnerable children, they remain under the control of pimps or gangs, hardly older than they themselves. However, as their "elders", they are respected and obeyed.



*A suspect with street girls selling books on the riverside*

In Phnom Penh, street children live around markets, the river side, restaurant areas and food-stalls. They sleep under tarpaulins, in slums, in shelters or directly on the pavement. Some benefit from part-time schooling, but they still live and work on the street. They sometimes speak some English and easily interact directly with foreigners, known (or supposed) as being more generous.

- ✓ *Accident (consensual sex/rape involving both boys and girls)*

These victims are children and can be either from the street or from a more ordinary environment. They are raped by suspects who do not necessarily spend time on a grooming strategy. In some cases they are drawn into a room or a house by the suspect under any number of excuses and abused, including the use of physical violence and/or threats. One could argue that all sexual abuse of children should be considered rape. Here, however, special attention should be given to the fact that this act involves increased violence, which surprises a victim who is unaware of the danger/intention of the suspect. Furthermore, the victim him/herself perceives the abuse as a physical and psychological trauma. One also could argue that all supposed “child prostitutes” will have experienced rape before "getting used to" such an offense and considering it an occasional means by which to earn money. It is true; all children involved in this survey's topic are rape victims, abused youth.

Also, a distinction should be noted among each victim as an individual. Each has his/her own way of handling this kind of trauma, based on the factors which led him/her to sexual awareness. A child who has become familiar with pornography long before the first act of sexual abuse by a trusted offender may react differently than a violently molested child who did not even know the man who abused him.

✓ *Occasional acts of sexual abuse*

It seems well-known that in areas of the city known for the availability of prostitutes, children can be procured for sex by special request. Some children, victims of trafficking (sold by poor families, kidnapped and/or exploited) are brought from the countryside, kept in brothels and raised there until they are old enough to become prostitutes (many girls, but also boys). Some intermediaries (for instance moto-dups, familiar with these areas) go to these places, negotiate with owners and provide - without much difficulty to their customers - children, virgins and boys. Once abused, these children become occasional victims, supplied in response to requests from customers for specific young bodies, sent by their "owner" to suspects' homes or even abused on the premises of the brothels (as Svay Pak village was known for in its more active period). As many prostitutes come from Vietnam, children are also sometimes Vietnamese (born in Cambodia or in Vietnam), sold to traffickers or born in environments like these mentioned.

✓ *Child prostitutes*

*-Regular*

Familiar with tourists, foreigners, western behaviors, some formerly abused children choose to actively participate in child sex activities as an easy way to earn a living. These children have experience and have a large customer base. They know what to expect, who to negotiate with, what "sexual services" to offer and have the language skills to explain it. Professional child prostitutes are hostile to any offer of help from social workers and reluctant to provide information on their abusers. On the contrary, they prefer to step aside and will actively prevent their customers from being caught in the act, something that would have a serious negative affect on business. When offered rescue, schooling and shelter on a long-term basis after having being involved in a case, they may refuse or accept and then escape after a certain period, convinced that street life and sex industry work is more "suitable" (of course, pressure from families, gangs and elders is also known to be a major contributing factor to their decisions). This is why some children whose identities are well-known to NGOs, social workers, the police and judges, reappear in different judicial cases.

These children represent a minority among the abused child population, but they retain some of the major links necessary to access to the pedophilia population and their collaboration, when accepted, can be very valuable.

*-Irregular: supplementary income - sexual services for foreign customers*

When competition among children who make their living from selling items in the street becomes too hard to handle, some can be tempted by sexual offers made by foreign men. They consider such an activity the least attractive, to be considered only when food and money are desperately needed. They can be difficult to persuade and very disturbed afterward. Sometimes, these are children who come to foreigners and ask for money. When they are refused financial help, they might insist and when sex is requested in exchange of money, they face a dilemma.

✓ *Drug addiction and gang power*

Social workers have been in contact with many street children in Phnom Penh and confirm the impact of drug addiction among them as well as its link with sex abuse. When



children live by themselves on the street, they recreate a social group to be able to survive. Some gangs offer protection in exchange for service and obedience to the elder of the group. When a child aspires to benefit from this protection, he is “trained” in order to be accepted into the group. The use of drugs is a very common feature of such "training". Drugs are entrusted to a child who must sell them and bring back the money. Soon or later, the child becomes addicted. Often drug are offered to children at the beginning of their association with the group. When the child can not earn enough money to handle his addiction, he finds himself in debt and slowly becomes desperate enough that he will accept any offer in exchange for money. Debt, threats and pressure are likely leading him to sex. Many offenders' victims are drug-addicted children who are dependent on gangs because of their drug addiction. They are victims of the rules of street gangs before becoming victims of sex abusers.

✓ *Personal “lover”:* sex in exchange of shelter and/ or living expenses

Among suspects arrested in recent years, an interesting behavior has appeared among long-term pedophiles. They use socially acceptable methods to get close to their victims, bring the victim under their control and avoid suspicion or outside intervention: marriage with a girl, as soon as she is legally available, adoption (officially illegal most of the time but accepted de facto) or pretended orphanage. When providing shelter and living expenses, the victims' families, when they find out what is really hidden behind this generosity, is put in a delicate situation vis-à-vis their child's “protector”. Some suspects even provide support for the entire family of their favorite one. In such cases, children are abused over a long period, even years by their offender; they become “child concubines”, whether they accept it (misled) or not (prisoners).

• Aesthetic/subjective considerations:

In Asia, from a Western point of view, people may look younger than their true age, especially those who are younger. It can be difficult to identify a minor from an adult by site. A woman in her twenties easily looks like a teen and thus attracts men whose sexual tendencies are for juvenile bodies. This simple fact, valid for all South-East Asian countries, not only appears to be one of the main reasons sexual tourists are attracted to this area, but also makes the moral line between young (but adult) and minor very subtle, and the “age of consent” concept very ambiguous in a sector of prostitution where individual under 18 are currently highly represented. In the case of “occasional pedophiles”, it makes pedophilia an easy step to take, a very attractive temptation for men who are unclear about the gap between their own behavior and normality. This should be taken in consideration when it comes to analyzing the apparently-increasing number of pedophiles visiting Cambodia, when differentiating among kinds of perpetrators and given the necessity to relativize –not minimize- the phenomenon.

## **Means: conditions of the interaction between pedophiles and children**

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### **1. Knowledge of the local sites and contacts: the crucial first step**

- Previous journeys to Cambodia (first contacts)

Some perpetrators are occasional pedophiles, men (regular customers of prostitutes) that have been tempted by child sex, but could not cross those boundaries initially. They know the location of the children who proposed to have sex with them (boys and girls). They have observed the street children in their usual locations and realized that these young children are easy targets. They may also have some “local friends” who promised them “anything they’d like”... All these elements allow them to return with an easier conscience and new intentions.

- Internet web-sites/chat/forum

- ✓ “Perpetrators in internet chat rooms boast about the ease of obtaining young children in Cambodia without getting caught – but warn each other to ‘take cash, just in case’” (*ECPAT* article). Previous reports from other pedophiles that have met on the web’s net-work can actually provide many details concerning ongoing sexual activities in Cambodia.
- ✓ Before arriving in Cambodia, these people have obviously already planned their sexual activities (the purpose of the visit), and know where to go, who to contact, how much to pay, the risks involved, information about the local laws, and ways to get round it, etc. They benefit from world wide networks under the forms of forums (forums meant for sex tourist are legal), personal web-sites, blogs, etc. However, sites containing child sex are usually only shared by pedophiles who have the ability to find, exchange, sell information and documents, participate in debates, and write about their experiences and fantasies; they participate under the cover of nick-names. These sites have limited access (paying), easy personal contact with local perpetrators, they provide tips from former visitors, etc. Information that circulates outrageously!

- Resident pedophiles (foreigners)

Through their affiliation with the child sex amateurs community (on the web for instance), some pedophiles can benefit from local contacts which ensure them the ability to find victims as soon as they arrive in Cambodia. Without these facilities, how else can we explain how some suspects upon arrival in Cambodia, with just a guide book in hand, can so easily obtain (trustworthy) children? The prevalent role of moto-dups does not provide the full explanation. Some suspects who live in Cambodia can play an important role as they know the local situation perfectly well, and can give reliable information, while remaining anonymous on the forums for safety reasons, and avoiding the correspondent arriving in Cambodia..

### **2. Personal Approach to potential victims: seduction**

- At the work place

Many cases handled by *APLE* show that, a large percentage of child sex offenders in Cambodia were/still are employed in the education sector (mainly English teachers). A very convenient occupation for easy and constant access to potential victims: the approach appears very natural and appropriate. At the same time, the professor/student relationship is a respectful and an unsuspecting one to direct associates.

- A local friend's child

When they are well established in Cambodia (in terms of a network of relationships) offenders have the perfect opportunity to invite local friends and later their children to their personal place under the pretext of tutoring, helping with homework, offering opportunities to enjoy entertainment via the computer, games, TV, swimming-pool, etc. Types of luxuries they could not afford/enjoy at home. The situation can cause the child to feel conflicted or even a sense of obligation should their “guardian” ask for unusual activities.

- Visits to public places (on irregular/regular basis)

Perpetrators prowl around crowded places that are notorious for street children who gather around touristy locations in order to sell goods, offer services, beg, etc. Places such as children playgrounds, river, parks, swimming pools, schools, libraries, Internet Cafés, and amusement parks. These places provide opportunities for these men to observe the children and participate in their games and activities. Pedophiles need stimulation, and can become excited by watching children in their natural environment, as well as by viewing pornographic photos.

Street children represent an easy target for pedophiles because they interact with foreigners everyday and many of those active in tourist places have a basic knowledge of English. Suspects may use this as an opportunity to get closer and to spend time with them and create a creative dialogue: they teach them more words, and show them new games which allow physical contact with the young bodies.

- Discretion?

Discretion and prudence do not seem to always be the most important in Cambodia when it concerns foreigner sexuality. No doubt that in their own country they wouldn't like to be seen in prostitute company, in brothels or in suspicious behaviors with children as they do in Cambodia. As “everybody does it”, society judgment disappear and give to their activities a sense of normality. When they search for victims and/or negotiate with children a sexual intercourse, they become somehow unaware of their conduct, strengthened by the belief that Khmer society remains very tolerant regarding child sex and policy is too busy with prostitution control to seriously care about street children –who are looked down by the all society anyway.



*Some foreign men walk holding young girls by the waist in public places.*

### 3. A step further: the conditions of sexual abuse:

- Affectionate relationship/grooming:
  - ✓ Once the “friendship” becomes reliable enough, the offender takes a step closer and begins to actively seduce the child (and sometimes his/her family). Taking pictures and compliments him/her on his beauty, his charms, his youth is a strategic approach.
  - ✓ Usually, the perpetrators are aware of the needs of their victims: loneliness, feeling used or abandoned by their family, longing for attention, affection, food, clothes, help, education (English, internet...), etc. Thus, the perpetrator will take this knowledge and opportunity to focus on the victim, using his money/power/authority to manipulate the victim and his/her relatives by offering gifts, benefits in kind, schooling, etc.
  - ✓ They usually shop around with their current/future victim, seducing them by attending to their immediate needs and developing a trust that causes the child to feel appreciative and indebted to comply with any request (even unusual) in order to satisfy their “guardian”.
  - ✓ According to a recent survey conducted by *Friends International Childsafe Program*<sup>9</sup>, Internet Café in Phnom Penh becomes one of the venues where suspects can strengthen their relationship with street children. Surfing on the web is widely popular among the youth and this new activity can represent a real attraction to those who are not familiar with the modern world. Some suspects have understood this and have sometimes offered some Internet cards to their potential victims allowing them to benefit from new entertainment. As the report notice, Internet café have no policy regarding minor protection so far and pornographic sites (among the most visited by Internet Café’s customers) are easily accessed with a little guidance at first. Without any filter, children are exposed to any kind of pornographic materials. Some suspects have taught children to use Internet and surf with them as a grooming activity while introduce them to a new world. As well as they could do it in a private place with personal sexual-oriented material (pictures, movies, objects), they try to raise children curiosity/interest and spoil their innocence by persuading them to believe all kinds of sexual acts are widespread and normal. They benefit from the child’s innocence and lack of sexual awareness/education.
- Post-action complicity:
  - ✓ Prostitute children realize the advantages they could lose from a pedophile’s arrest and therefore act as an accomplice by protecting these customers (including the pimp). They basically assist them with escaping from the sight of the police or other investigators.
  - ✓ The leaders/pimps are familiar with the procedures of investigators and the police, and so advise the pedophiles accordingly to protect them instead of protecting the children. In order to prevent direct interaction between a customer and a child, and because they are legally in age of sexual consent themselves (thus unlikely to be caught), they offer to arrange transactions. They also give them tips on where to go (tolerant guest-house), who to trust among child, places open to speaking freely about sex and, where to enjoy children while avoiding suspicion, etc. To regular customers, these intermediaries’ complicity also represents a guarantee on the victims’ silence.

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<sup>9</sup> These data were provided by the project officer

- Tacit or verbal threats:
- ✓ Promise of silence: the sexual abuses must remain private. Offenders have the power and the money to convince reluctant victims, especially when their family is involved; children quickly become aware of the obligatory discretion of the matter.
- ✓ Perpetrators tend to give their victims false information about the consequences of their acts: culpability with regard to their family and their honor, vis-à-vis the police. Recently, they have also contributed to misleading the street children concerning the intentions of the social workers' and NGO's involvement and actions related to child sex (accusations of denunciation, imprisonment, punishment, penalties for the child).
- ✓ Cultural impact: the elder/youth relationship. Children always respect and fear their elders (older brother, father, uncle, etc.) therefore, children behave in the same manner towards their abuser. Their obedience to such precepts can guarantee the perpetrators' anonymity.

#### 4. Children's approach to the potential perpetrator

- Innocent children

Children tend to give their personal stories, their trust and their time to any person who shows concern for them and is a part of their immediate, everyday environment. For instance, in the case of teachers, children would naturally come to them for ordinary requests: housework, skill teaching, language exchange, help, etc. without being aware of the potential danger involved in their direct/private interaction. In this case, the perpetrator has time to build a relationship of trust that gradually leads his future victim to him. Some suspects mingle around areas notorious for street children and make themselves available for interaction through conversation, and/or play. Here again, children have the active role, while the suspect maintains a passive role with the intention of accomplishing his potential goal.

- Child prostitutes

Under pressure from the pimp, usually older members of their street gang and/or their family (economic issue), some street children become regular prostitutes. Like any other prostitute, these children search for clients and openly propose sex to them, while their main activity remains selling books or food items. Other times they are rather straightforward, using a more seductive approach of touching, following, negotiating, describing details, persuading, etc. These children are already experienced and know precisely what their clients are expecting from them, so therefore have a "professional" approach. They search for a specific profile to focus on: for example, they seek out western men, even though they know that some Asian men are in the market for sex with children. They tend to develop a mindset that Asian men mistreat them and pay less.

#### 5. Local facilitators

A few years ago, interactions between foreign men and children happened openly at restaurants/bars terraces in tourist areas, with impunity and a tacit agreement with business owners. However, it has become a more difficult task nowadays. New circumstances such as: involvement of the local police, concerns from business' staff, social awareness, increased tourism, raising number of pedophiles being arrested and convicted, and advocacy on reducing pedophilia seem to have had a dissuasive effect on perpetrators. As a result of these newer circumstances, it requires a more imaginative means to orchestrate sexual meetings for

pedophiles. Facilitators have now seen their role extended and can be classified into three main groups:

- Older children

These young men were often abused children and now act as intermediates between perpetrators and victims; they may also be gang members. At tourist spots, 15-18 year old individuals approach foreigners and offer them sexual services with children. As mentioned previously, they usually provide details on age, price, and safe locations while helping them elude the police or social workers by facilitating safe interactions with the children. Not only do they endorse the pimp role, but they themselves are prostitutes as well, available for homosexual services.

- Moto-dups

As individuals, these men usually know the current areas of prostitution in Phnom Penh very well; it is a part of their business as well as their private life most of the time. For sex tourist in general, they represent the perfect informative source concerning the “must visit places”. It is now very common that moto-dups not only openly offer to take foreign new-comers (tourist/businessmen) to brothels, but also offer prostitutes to them and/or their associates at their hotel/living place. Like the child prostitutes, they are aware of the preferences of western men, and can easily satisfy any kind of request: young women, adolescent girls and even boys. One can not make the assumption that all of the moto-dups embrace this kind of service in their daily routine, but it is notorious (through observations and experiences) that the moto-dups who specialize in guiding tourists (have a good knowledge of the city, English skills, collaboration with guest-house/restaurants, recommendations...) do so for additional income.



*A suspect bringing a child to his house thanks to the services of a moto-dup*

A common scenario often occurs:

-A Western man (with pedophilic predilection) inquires from a moto-dups as to where to find young boys/girls.

-The moto-dup, in case the request concerns children (too young to be openly/easily available in brothels), proposes to find a child and bring him/her back to a predetermined location. He will then go to brothels that he is familiar with (connections

with the owners) and find a child. These children are provided not as regular prostitutes, just occasionally, as a mandatory aspect of their duties. Moto-dups usually do not go to the obvious places to find victims, but instead have their own private network.

-He brings the victim to the customer, receives payment and then abandons all responsibility for the child, who has to find his own way back “home”. The moto-dup obligation is completed and if the customer is satisfied, he may call on him again, since complicity between the two men has already been established.

It is interesting to note that moto-dups happens to be formerly abused children. However, other men in the business refuse to be personally involved with such risky operations and dealing with sex amateurs, and so only offer to take their customers to brothels, as an ordinary destination.

- Business owners

Advocacy has been effective and quite successful among some businesses, as some owners prefer to call the police rather than being investigated and accused of complicity with pedophilia. However, even with the increase of awareness among tourist oriented business (such as restaurants, bars, guest-houses, and hotels), most owners and personnel from these places still remain reluctant to interfere with a suspect and child whose relationship appears to be suspicious. Corruption enables perpetrators of sexual abuse to keep the eyes, ears, and mouths of witnesses closed. Just a few dollars and private connections between facilitators and owners (who are also afraid of reprisal) can solve the perpetrators’ need for privacy.

# Where in Phnom Penh

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Sex activities involving under-age girls takes place most of the time in brothels. Child abuse involving boys and street children occurs in a various range of indoor locations. Below are a few places where perpetrators have been spotted and sometimes arrested in the company of children, under suspicious circumstances.

## 1. The search for children

- River-side: the notorious easy availability of “street children”, an easy target for new-comers, but gaining in risk as information circulates (among perpetrators and pimps) about the constant observation by NGOs and collaboration with police.
- Tourists center locations: streets where facilities for foreign tourists (hotels, restaurants, bars, supermarkets, travel agencies, etc.) attract some beggars and vendors (flowers, newspapers, snacks, shoe-shine service, etc....) among whom children represent relatively easy targets.
- Play areas: public parks, pools, scenic spots, attraction parks, etc. where interaction with children does not appear suspicious.
- New locations: for those perpetrators familiar with the city, or who have time to discover the city, searches are made for secluded areas where street children live; perpetrators may also interact with the local population (which supposes a knowledge of the Khmer language, unless the perpetrator is accompanied by an English speaking local person).

## 2. Finding a place to engage in sexual interaction

- Hotels/Guesthouses

Hotels are where most child sex abuse occurs. They are frequented by perpetrators who do not live in the city (eg. tourists, arrivals from provincial cities, businessmen, etc...). Still, some local perpetrators sometimes prefer to meet their victims in a guest house even if the perpetrator has his own residence. This attests to an awareness of the risks involved in terms of both social condemnation of such sexual practices and also discredits the argument put forward by perpetrators that there is a Cambodian cultural tolerance toward child sex. Perpetrators obviously prefer to hide within the confines of an anonymous facility (anonymous for both the perpetrator and the victim) where anything can happen. Even if many guest-house owners refuse to accept such clientele (after having been persuaded by awareness and training programs), there are still tolerant owners whose interest in income outweighs moral considerations. Additionally, many such guest-houses are affiliated with brothels or have ties in some way to the police (which ensures they will not face judicial consequences) or are protected by connections with powerful people.

There are hundreds of guest-houses in Phnom Penh and this represent a large range of options for any person searching for a moment of privacy. Finding a secure place is clearly not very difficult. Considering this fact, it is nearly impossible to establish a reliable list of suspected businesses that collaborate with perpetrators. Owners and staff run the range from indifferent (aware of what happens in the room but uncaring), tolerant (when a few dollars helps them to keep silent), or ignorant (when unaware of the sexual abuse occurring).



- Perpetrator's residence

According to APLE sources, at least 1 in 3 suspects lives in Cambodia and has a private residence. Generally speaking, these offenders receive their victims at home where sexual abuse takes place. Sometimes, a house becomes a shelter for several children (private orphanage, private school class, play house,...). This also occurs in provincial cities and allows perpetrators to appear less suspicious.

- Outdoor sites

Although comparatively rare, offenders can be observed engaging in inappropriate behavior and even sexual intercourse with children outdoors. One perpetrator was reported meeting victims near the riverside where shrubbery provides cover, far enough from the crowd as to not arouse suspicion and suitable for brief encounters (such as oral sex by child prostitutes). This suspect has been arrested and imprisoned. Nevertheless, such an extreme attitude suggests such behavior could be occurring in other public spaces, yet to be investigated, and demonstrates the belief - among perpetrators - that sex with children is common in Cambodia, to the extent that it is not even necessary to keep such abuse out of sight.

- Restaurants/Bars

Some suspects have been observed in the company of children and acting in such a way as to arouse suspicion in different restaurants and bars in Phnom Penh.

- Victims' homes

Some offenders who have established a good relationship with their victim's family and who have won the trust of the family can benefit from the use of the victim's home. This includes cases of cohabitation of the suspect with a Khmer family: the proximity and constant availability of the children makes it easier for the perpetrator to act without arousing suspicion. Victims of such cases are naturally too ashamed to reveal abuse to their parents (and as noted above, children are not forthcoming in talking about their experiences) and too aware of the benefits the cohabitation brings the family to create a crisis which could cause irreparable loss.

- Work places (schools, shelters, dispensaries, etc...)

At least, one *APLE&LICADHO* case revealed child abuse in the work place. Although rare, this could happen. Unfortunately, unless the victims themselves give testimony or witnesses reveal incidents, secrets are kept well and no reliable information becomes available. Although, because many offenders recorded in Cambodia happen to be teachers, one can deduce that such abuse is most likely not single isolated case: if abuse itself is not taking place in the work place, grooming could easily be carried out there.

# When

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Street pedophilia is independent of any special calendar or time schedule and specific trends are not easy to define. Some elements, though, do stand out.

## 1. Throughout the year: Western holidays or on a regular basis?

It has been noticed a more active schedule on the part of pedophilia suspects during the months of October, November and December, corresponding to the high tourism season in Cambodia and Southeast Asia in general.

In addition, it has been confirmed in cases of successful prosecution that pedophiles, once familiar with the different conditions under which sexual abuse of children can be arranged in Cambodia, usually return to the country on a regular basis. When perpetrators do happen to be caught by the police, no matter whether they are local residents or ordinary tourists, perpetrators seem to feel there is an obviousness environment of impunity, sufficient so that they opt to target victims in Cambodia.

Given the diversity of people who appear to be involved in suspicious activities and the difficulty in determining their motivations, no other specific trends related to calendar schedules has been noticed.

## 2. During the day, the evening or at night?

The prevalent time for “prospecting” for children seems to be end of afternoon and evening. There are several reasons for this:

- Some suspects who live or work in Phnom Penh are busy during the day.
- This is the perfect time for a stroll, as the day time temperatures are just beginning to drop.
- Bars and restaurants are open and provide space for meeting people and extending invitations to people (including to children).
- From 16h00 onward, the streets of Phnom Penh are much more active; night markets and food-markets become busy and this offers better access to the street children who frequent these areas whether to look for food, beg, or offer simple services (shoe-shines, newspapers, etc...).
- Street children become very active, they gather and for those who have simple businesses, this is a time to look for tourists to whom they can sell their items.

Since some perpetrators who are in the habit of getting updated information regarding the most recent sexual related happenings in Phnom Penh are aware of ongoing investigations carried on in public places, they are becoming more cautious. Some of suspects being investigated have already discovered that they had been monitored. Thus, in order to escape detection and discourage surveillance, they are changing their time habits. They are less active during the day and some focus on the evening, later than before.

## 3. Night schedule

Perpetrators are also active during the night. It seems that their schedule is closely related to the time bars-restaurants stay open. After midnight, they tend to be in areas where entertainment sites and businesses which cater to tourists/expats remain open very late.

One note concerning time schedules as related to the victims: only older children (over the age of 15) are available so late. Usually targeted during the day, young boys are

asleep in shelters at these hours while young adults are still awake. Also, they do not represent a threat to perpetrators as older children may often be thought of as adults and therefore seen as "consenting".

#### **4. During the week-end?**

For foreign perpetrators who live in Phnom Penh, weekends are obviously the most active time for encounters with local residents, and therefore are the most active time for engaging in sexual activities (included as part of "entertainment" activities most of the time). With regard to street children, it is important to remember that some may be following some kind of schooling programs (even perhaps part-time) and are therefore more available during their days not in school. Thus, weekends see more activity by suspects, including long-term suspects (against whom evidence has been gathered, but who have not yet been arrested) as well as new ones.

## How: physical conditions

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In term of sexual abuse, pedophiles' habits do not differ much whether they act at home or abroad. As soon as they get their victims into an intimate space, they basically act the same. We do not intend here to give details of what actually occurs, but a few elements seem relevant in order to understand the reasons abusers come to Cambodia for child sex and to understand the kind of relationship they manage to build with these children. This data is documented from victims' testimonies and police reports.

### 1. Concerning the body

Sexual abuse of children is not only a matter of physical penetration, necessarily linked to violent behavior. It also involves preliminary activities which seem to be considered natural and important to offenders for obtaining the collusion of their victims. This has two major effects. First, it gives the offender a somehow "positive" image (some street children, for instance, share information about different pedophiles and prevent other children from falling victim to violent perpetrators), a reputation which enables him to easily find new victims in the future, especially if he is also generous. Secondly, the apparent (and probably partial) participation of his victim after this grooming may strengthen the feeling the perpetrator has that he is not actually abusing his victims and even that he is pleasing him/her/them and loves him/her/them. He is thus able to gain a clear conscience. Below is some information gathered from offenders (during investigations), victims and by observation.

- Hygiene is first priority

According to statements made after arrest and from victims' testimonies, offenders have somewhat similar specific requests of their victims. Taking a shower is often the first thing children are asked to do before sex. This concern about hygiene could meet a need for cleanliness (because of their living conditions, street children are often dirty and poorly dressed) but also meets psychological needs for the offender: to him, cleanliness could represent innocence, virginity, purity as well as it may lead the victim to be more conscious of their body, perhaps less prudish and more receptive to sexual touching.

- Preliminary Games

Games are part of the sexual interaction between offenders and victims: sexual games such as posing naked for pictures, bathing, mutual touching (children together or child/offender) and watching pornography are all aimed at making the children more comfortable with nudity, more comfortable with promiscuity with an adult and less inhibited. This slowly leads up to actual penetration. This process could take anywhere from a few hours to few days, or more, depending on the context of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victims. Without other benchmarks to judge sexuality, some children understand this process as a form of sex education, seeing it as normal and perhaps even viewing this as a step toward the adult world, interpretations encouraged by offenders.

- Representation

Generally speaking, pedophiles need to record images of their victims' bodies, of sexual acts, of behavior and of feelings expressed. Most suspects arrested in Phnom Penh by Cambodian police were in the possession of pictures or videos on personal computers and/or cameras. It is interesting to note that some perpetrators do not even have sex with

the children but seem only interested in collecting erotic or pornographic pictures of their victims. According to gathered information and to testimonies, pictures during the sexual act or after abuse are very common. But, children are also often asked to show their genitalia, touch themselves, simulate other children partners or simply pose naked. For instance, children's having a shower seems to constitute an image that possesses enough of a stimulating/exciting impact on perpetrators to be worth taking. The same can be said of videos in which children are often (but not only) viewed running and having "fun" together naked in a room, a swimming-pool or a garden (private spaces).

If some perpetrators are content with such representations of their fantasies – which, however, are still regarded as offenses - without crossing physical boundaries, others record images in much greater detail of their acts: they take pictures themselves or ask a third person (usually another child) to do so . Allowing a child to use a representative tool such as a camera also encourages his initiative and curiosity and allows the child to consider what he sees as a mild and amusing thing to picture and thus to do. Sexual abuse is almost laughed at. Children are seeing smiling and laughing in some obviously unusual pictures. This could be disturbing to note without a better understanding of the meaning it has as part of the perpetrator's aim.

Pornographic and crude content are very valuable to perpetrators, who can trade their documents via pedophile networks. Indeed, these documents are not only closely held by offenders as souvenirs but represent exchangeable, negotiable items to share with fellow pedophiles. One must keep in mind that for these offenders, whose sexual preferences require clandestineness and social isolation, pictures of their acts are one of the only ways they can maintain social position and recognition among their specific but competitive circle. This competition also impacts the types of abuse perpetrated: demand is for ever-younger victims, for increasingly more violent, more specific, more unusual, more exotic and ever-newer behavior.

## 2. Behavior and tools

- Rape: use of violence

During sexual interactions, children display two responses. Some children remain passive during the abuse (some are even used to it), while others are the victims of violent rapes. However, both should be regarded as abuse, because a child facing an adult remains passive to defend him/herself; sometimes called "consent," this should instead be regarded as an escape of actual or potential violent abuse in the face of a deadlocked situation.

- Kinds of abuse

All of the cases recorded in Cambodia are characterized by many similarities in terms of sexual practices, which do not differ from pedophilia in Western countries: touching, masturbation, oral sex (victim→offender / offender→victim), penetration and sodomy are regular offenses occurring. There seems to be no clear tendency based on the victim's age, each kind of abuse is present for victims of all ages. Penetration (including anal) is much more common among older victims.

- Perversions

Some offenders are not content with "ordinary" sex with their victims, but prefer to indulge themselves in very specific sexual behaviors that could lead to violence and cruelty. Voyeurism, sadomasochism, scatology, corporal punishment and different kinds of sexual perversions happen and have a strong impact on victims who are confused by these unusual

behaviors. One notorious case established that practices of torture (use of locks and cuffs) were being used on victims and also the offender regularly asked to be bound.

- Victims: one/several child at one time

Preferences generally run to having between one to three victims at once. Offenders seem to enjoy sexual intercourse with several partners. No relevant explanation has been expressed so far, except that this is the result of individual choice on the part of the perpetrator. In addition, a child may not feel less frightened if accompanied by a friend. Being two or three when facing an abuser perhaps strengthens the victims and helps them to deal with an unexpected or dangerous situation.



- Accessories: Condoms, creams, drugs (methamphetamines) and tools

Some victims attested to the use of Vaseline for penetration but no mention of condoms has been made. Offenders often believe sex with children prevents them from contracting sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. Drug addiction among street children also helps offenders to obtain their consent: methamphetamines or any of the other common drugs make victims more accepting of abuse, being sometimes unaware of what is happening to their bodies.

During investigations and following the arrest of suspects, police have often found many sexual "tools" among the personal effects of the perpetrators, sometimes openly displayed for the purpose of sex with their victims: pornographic magazines, dildo, cuffs, etc....

## So?

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As a matter of fact... despite the efforts made, we need to admit that the Cambodian government seems less determined to stamp out child prostitution than NGO's are: as sad as it sounds, the sex industry as a whole, notoriously tightly connected to spheres of power, represents a considerable source of income for the country and as trends show the population of those involved is getting younger every year (face with the increasing demand for young bodies), child prostitution (whether in brothels or on the street) should be considered a sensitive issue for policy makers to handle.

### 1. New trends both positive and negative

- Perpetrators

When a perpetrator has focused on one particular child and is unable to obtain his agreement to accompany him to the chosen location and is unable to establish a relationship of trust, more and more suspects are adopting a long-term strategy which appears more efficient. After obtaining a sufficient amount of information about the victim's family or the street child's situation (eg. when he/she is actually on his/her own) and once the perpetrator is sure the child is in need of greater comfort, he offers to help or "adopt" the victim by providing some place to live, (sometimes also providing a regular income, schooling, and other benefits.) Under this informal agreement, the perpetrator ensures his victim is under his control. Renting an apartment is easy for those with the economic means to do so and this new trend is developing among resident suspects in Phnom Penh. Such "homes" are officially presented as a secondary residence for the perpetrator

Perpetrators are getting increasingly suspicious of the age of the young children who come to them with sexual offers as well as the identity of adults who may propose such services (are these adults pimps, plain clothes civilian policemen on investigation or spies?). Public awareness campaigns seem to be having an impact on pedophiles who are becoming more cautious.

An increasing number of child sexual abuse cases (perpetrated by foreigners) are being reported in provincial cities, mainly tourist spots (eg. Siem Reap, Sihanouk Ville, Battambang, etc.). This is explained by the relatively easier access to children in provincial areas where the public in general and police also are less aware of the dangers children are facing. For suspects informed about the country, smaller cities also offer a relatively lax police and judicial system. This migration of perpetrators is causing the issue to spread to a wider part of the country and thus effective and rapid attention is urgently needed.

- Children

They share information about perpetrators and protect other children from becoming the victims of abuse as they understand it: being physically attacked (use of violence), low pay, being deceived, etc.

At the same time, some street children in Phnom Penh are showing a greater trend toward "professionalization": increasingly, they are taking the initiative to offer sex, despite the work of NGO and social workers among them.

Street children, especially around Phnom Penh's notorious areas, are approached by a wide variety of adults including perpetrators, police, social workers and gangs. This involves them in a confusing adult world where interest, contempt, exploitation, promises and betrayal lead to an obvious distrust of any person who claims to be there to help and to very short-term considerations when dealing with the necessities of daily life. As a direct

result, many avoid investigators, refuse to get involved in any kind of judicial proceeding and choose to “protect” themselves within their immediate group for survival.

- Intermediaries

Some moto-dups become more cautious about accepting deals with perpetrators. As police seem to have strengthened control over moto-dups customers<sup>10</sup>, transportation could become an initial barrier.

In the short term, awareness campaigns implemented by NGOs could have a positive effect on moto-dups. For example *Friends International* recently organized training for moto-dups about the dangers of pedophilia and encouraged them to become “child safe” carriers by wearing an easily identified vest and hat (with the campaign logo).

## 2. Barriers to investigations

All these new observations and tendencies facilitate or complicate the work of observers and investigators, in addition to sometimes adding difficulties.

- The city/social environment

Danger: in some areas, some gangsters have threatened our investigators, accusing them of working for the police and disturbing the gang's activities (legal or illegal) in these areas.

Difficulty recognizing moto-dups involved with providing children to perpetrators. Prevention among moto-dups remains ineffective as the moto-dups who collaborate with us are few. They are still considered the major intermediaries in interaction between perpetrators and victims and are the easiest connection for newly arrived pedophiles looking for children. Some solutions are currently being developed in order to overcome this difficulty.

- Nature of the suspects

With regard to foreign suspects, our investigators, as Cambodian citizens, can not follow suspects into bars/restaurants frequented by foreigners and therefore the investigation is unable to benefit from direct access to potential suspects and encounters that occur in such establishments. The inability to get information from inside these places limits to a considerable extent work done to prevent the actions of pedophiles.

- Complicity

Children understand how much they stand to lose from a pedophile’s arrest so they tend to protect customers from our investigators’ observation and from the police: they (including pimps) act as accomplices. They refuse to cooperate with our investigators or they simply aid the flight of their customers.

- Victims and their families

Lack of cooperation from the victims/children : the children and their families think that there are no "benefits" for them to cooperate with our investigators and denounce suspects. However, our investigators do explain how the children can benefit from protection if they are willing to give up with their street life and be introduced to NGOs that

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<sup>10</sup> A new regulation forbids a moto-taxi to transport together on his vehicle a western man and a (local) child. Though easy to get round such a rule, it indicates a significant effort from the authorities (information still to be confirmed)



can offer them shelter, opportunities for education, medical treatment, meals and the chance to begin a new life away from the dangers of the streets, including sexual harassment.

For some of the “underage prostitutes” involved in sexual intercourse with pedophiles, denouncing a suspect means the loss of a customer.

Children are the victims also of family pressures: they need money to survive and because their sexual activities bring consequential income, they prefer to maintain their activities than to abandon their families who rely on them.

It is nearly impossible to present the issue of a trial in any positive way to families, as the possibility of getting any compensation from the court seems hopeless; and so families prefer to see their child on the street where income is not guaranteed but the payout is faster. They see suspects released and victims returned to the streets after many trials: the lack of faith in the legal system and any procedure involving the police or the justice system is overwhelming.

The children are organized in an efficient network and all information concerning our investigators circulates among them: if abuse occurs, they would prefer to hide it.

Rumors vs. facts: limited knowledge on the part of families regarding our action leaves them easily influenced by unfounded accusations/rumors regarding those related to *APLE* (lawyers, investigators) including that those related to *APLE* would take benefits from compensation given to victims, would take bribes, would help the police punish children for their illegal activity, etc.

### **3. Barriers to further prosecution within the judicial system: the relationship between victims and suspects**

- Psychological profile of the victims: the real difficulty children face in gaining a clear attitude regarding a confusing adult world

#### ✓ *Before the abuse*

-The child's family (when he has one) or his elders (when he lives in a group) put pressure on him to earn money to help the group survive, no matter what this might involve, instead of providing him the protection he deserves as a child.

-The child alternatively is faced with a Western man, who does demonstrate care for him by buying him food, clothing, by providing a more comfortable environment (hotel, house, games, etc.), by giving him money and by giving him, at least apparently, attention and understanding.

#### ✓ *After the abuse*

-The child's family distrusts the judicial system and, due to the need for short term or immediate gain, often refuses to file a complaint or withdraws the complaint and accepts the bribes involved, and in a way minimizes the suffering and trauma the child experiences, even perhaps sending the child back to the street and the disturbing but lucrative sex trade.

-The child alternatively is faced with a Western man who betrayed a relationship which brought the child advantages he can benefit from and affection he may also have cherished.

#### ✓ *Considering this situation...*

... It is obviously difficult for a victim to figure out who is providing assistance, who to turn to, who actually has betrayed his trust and who is providing him with affection? Further, apart for the economic considerations (sex=money whatever it costs physically/psychologically), one may consider the fact that the approach offered by perpetrators to their child victims may be attractive on some level to the victim and may

influence the position they adopt vis-à-vis their abusers: instead of a radical refusal of what happens, the child may “choose” to approach such persons whatever the risk involved and whatever sexual acts such a close relationship may entail.

✓ *A better approach* to the psychological profile of victims should help explain the difficulties encountered by social workers, police and lawyers in gaining the help of victims, even when the victims are obviously suffering from their situation. Perpetrators are used to thinking about the abuse in terms of “The children came to me; I love this child; I would never hurt this child; the child is happy; etc.” Perpetrators have carefully constructed in their own minds the pretence that the victims enjoy what they are forced to do. On the other hand, without any appropriate sexual education, it will be extremely difficult getting victims to consider sexual abuse as an inexcusable offence which should be punished according to laws.

#### 4. Government actions

Facing the tarnishing of the image of the Kingdom due to extensive publicity about the sexual services market, the Cambodian government is currently willing to engage in controlling the extent of this industry and its negative impact on tourism. New laws<sup>11</sup>, new police services and new police units<sup>12</sup> have been implemented in the recent few years. Increased awareness among the population is resulting in an increasing number of reports of child abuse to authorities, as its frequency in the media attests. Thinking is slowly changing. But as long as poverty is a concern for the majority of Cambodians, the exploitation (sexual or otherwise) of children will be an endless issue. If the judicial system does not improve effectiveness as well as its image among the population, it will remain poorly adapted to tackle this issue. Too many cases of child sexual abuse remain unpunished because of the weakness of authorities concerned: offenders released, victims back to the street with their trauma, intermediaries still active and families disappointed are the consequences from such lack of involvement.

#### 5. Cambodian Environment

Despite existing new laws and departments (police, phone service, the collaboration of tourism services, public advocacy on the streets, pamphlets, etc.) focusing on sexual abuse, there are still major obstacles hindering further work: bribery (of hotel staff, of police, within the judicial system) to avoid arrest or conviction, difficulty obtaining the collaboration of families, difficulties in the application of extradition law on the part of perpetrators' home countries, etc.

“In a nation where corruption is rampant, the success of any crackdown depends largely on the willingness of other nations to bring suspects to trial, sidestepping the possibility they will bribe their way out of trouble once they are back home.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Law on Suppression of the Kidnapping, Trafficking, and Exploitation of Human Beings, article 8 (for instance): “Any person who commits acts of debauchery involving a minor, even if there is consent from the concerned minor (...) shall be punished by ten (10) to twenty (20) years in prison.”

<sup>12</sup> The Anti-Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Units

<sup>13</sup> Brooke, James, *Cambodia Battles Pedophiles by Deporting Them*, The New York Times, January 18, 2004

## 6. A few comments concerning *APLE* actions related to the pedophilia issue in Cambodia

Perpetrators have been observed migrating from Phnom Penh to provincial cities, and reports of child sexual abuse (by foreigner offenders) outside the capital have increased these recent months. In order to conduct more effective investigations of suspects, *APLE* should consider and encourage the opening of new offices outside the capital, like it was done in Sihanoukville at the end of October 2005 : this pilote-office will carry out investigations on pedophiles perpetrating in this city.

Along with other NGO workers and in collaboration with local authorities, projects to prevent child sexual abuse and to increase awareness regarding sex-related tourism should be developed. But one must keep in mind that even if pedophiles were increasingly discouraged from coming to Cambodia to abuse children, sexual violence against children and the sex exploitation of children would remain as dramatic among the local population and Asian men as it became if no strong measures are carried out. While Cambodian and Vietnamese men rank first and second among abusers, they are followed by Chinese citizens in Cambodia who are the main foreign group involved in prostitution. Otherwise, tackling western tourists and the expatriate population will be in reality turning away from those who are truly responsible, both perpetrators population and policy makers.

As child sex offenders targeted by *APLE* happen to be mainly Western nationals from countries who have signed extradition agreements<sup>14</sup>, *APLE* can continue to focus its actions on the responsibility of embassies. Indeed, some cases brought to light thanks to *APLE*'s investigations and the involvement of the police and judges have met very poor and slow response from the foreign embassies concerned; these have the duty to handle such cases quickly and efficiently and such weak attitudes should not happen on a regular basis. This is an essential and frustrating issue.

Street children are a moving population, and except for a few individuals who have become somewhat "professional" in terms of offering sexual activities (the minority of the victims), it remains difficult to prevent them from being abused without identifying them and without the concern and collaboration of their elders (either families or street groups). Dialogue remains essential to win their trust. *APLE* investigators have mentioned the difficulty of interacting with street children who distrust any adult aiming to "help" them. Work should be done on adapting methods to the new attitudes and behaviors of potential victims. And, because potential victims are most frequently under the control of their elders, special attention should be brought to these individuals, whose role represents a focal point.

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<sup>14</sup> To learn more about Cambodian laws and these agreements with foreign countries: <http://www.childrights-cambodia.org/child-abuse-laws.htm>

## Conclusion

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This report aimed to identify the pedophilia issue in Cambodia, focusing on APLE's target population (Western suspects) and to analyze the current situation in Phnom Penh, based on investigations results. Below is a quick summary of the analysis results:

### *What has been done*

- ✓ Changes in Cambodian Law and government attitudes
- ✓ Extraterritoriality agreements with Western countries
- ✓ People involved: police, social services, judicial system
- ✓ NGOs action: surveillance and providing evidence, deterrence of perpetrators due to monitoring, increased public awareness, assistance to victims

### *The current situation*

- ✓ Reality: complicity on the part of some hotel owners, moto-dups, corruption
- ✓ Cultural and social barriers when approaching the child abuse issue in Cambodia
- ✓ Major obstacles in dealing with the sexual abuse of street children

### *What needs to be improved*

- ✓ Beside moral considerations, a more appropriate approach of sexual abuse issue in Cambodian society could lead to focus on different key-point (eg. elders influence within street children communities, link between incest, rape and prostitution, family structure and economic considerations...).
- ✓ Although there have been improvements in Cambodian law and government attitudes, more is needed, specifically:
  - clearer rules for sentencing perpetrators
  - tougher sentences for perpetrators
  - strong stance by government officials instead of merely discussions
- ✓ Extraterritoriality agreements with Western countries - foreign governments need to put their condemnation of this situation into actual practice by creating a system for the efficient cooperation of police forces and efficient methods by which expatriates can be repatriated back to their home countries for actual and stringent trials
- ✓ Significant rise of the number of perpetrators arrested /convicted/ condemned/ extradited/ put in jail, etc...
- ✓ Concern and involvement on the issue from tourist-oriented business' owners and staff
- ✓ Defining alternative work and investigation methods
- ✓ Defining new investigation targets

So far, investigators have noticed locations and times for pedophilia activities are changing among suspects in Phnom Penh. Searches for victims are happening later in the day than usual (a safer option for perpetrators) and in new locations where perpetrators do not feel there is danger of being monitored. This applies to suspects who have a good knowledge of changes in Cambodia (in terms of law enforcement for example) and of places that offer a "security" guarantee. Others (regular sex tourists and uninformed people) continue to search for victims in notorious places such as areas of prostitution and areas for tourists (as gathering areas for street children). Street children are not all involved in sexual abuse but still represent an easy target group for anyone who has money to offer. All these children could become victims without protection but their numbers, diversity and mobility make it difficult to monitor each group.

After two years of investigations, the riverside phenomenon and the internal mechanism of this abuse remains more well-known than activities taking place in collaborating venues (such as those children exploited under the “guardianship” of pimps in brothels) and activities taking place in other ways (such as the development of relationships between suspects and victims, and this especially involves ordinary children). New target areas and groups should now be put into focus.

Finally, intermediaries, such as moto-dups -a group that have been clearly identified- represent a focal-point for all steps in the process of street pedophilia in a constantly and inconspicuously evolving environment. This requires more investigation.

This report constitutes the first part of an overall review of street pedophilia that will be conducted in the coming months. Updated reports will be issued regularly. The situation requires constant observation to identify new features after which analysis must be updated and *APLE*'s work methods must adapt.

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