The personal and social impacts of both long and short-term child abuse and exploitation are irreversible, widespread, and devastating. These impacts affect all areas of children’s lives, from their health and education to their social and emotional development. This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the children who are affected by abuse and exploitation and the interventions that can be effective in preventing and responding to these issues.

**STUDY RATIONALE**

The personal and social impacts of child abuse and exploitation are irreversible, widespread, and devastating. These impacts affect all areas of children’s lives, from their health and education to their social and emotional development. This study aimed to contribute to the understanding of the children who are affected by abuse and exploitation and the interventions that can be effective in preventing and responding to these issues.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted primarily through qualitative methods using key informant interviews and focus group discussions with government officials, civil society organizations, and community leaders. A total of 10 provinces and 127 communes/Sangkats across 10 provinces and Phnom Penh were included in the study.

**SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

The study found that most CCWCs considered child protection services to be a core function, however, their technical capacity to advocate for children’s rights and ensure the well-being of children was limited. The study also found that CCWCs had limited knowledge about child protection and the interventions that can be effective in preventing and responding to these issues.

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

1. Ensure informed, voluntary consent was given to all participants.
2. Follow the child protection code of conduct in The Rights to be Properly Researched. Knowing Children (2012) and ensure the research was conducted in a child-sensitive manner.
3. Follow guidelines to prevent participant distress.
4. Ensure research was conducted in a gender-sensitive manner.
5. Ensure protection of data collection forms to protect confidentiality and rights of participants.

**ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIORS TOWARDS CHILDREN**

While working with the Community Committees on Women and Children, government actors should ensure that children are at the center of decision-making processes and that their rights are respected and protected. This study suggests that government actors can improve their attitude and behaviors towards children by providing training and support to CCWC members, and by ensuring that they are adequately resourced and supported to carry out their responsibilities.

**FACTORS HINDERING OR PROMOTING EFFECTIVENESS**

Factors hindering effectiveness include:

1. Lack of adequate funding and resources, which limits the ability of CCWCs to carry out their responsibilities.
2. Lack of coordination and communication among different government agencies, which hinders the effective implementation of child protection policies.
3. Insufficient technical capacity among CCWC members, which limits their ability to identify and respond to cases of abuse and exploitation.

Factors promoting effectiveness include:

1. Strong leadership and active involvement of local partners, which ensures that CCWCs are adequately resourced and supported to carry out their responsibilities.
2. Effective communication and collaboration among different government agencies, which promotes the effective implementation of child protection policies.
3. Sufficient technical capacity among CCWC members, which enables them to identify and respond to cases of abuse and exploitation.

**STUDY FINDINGS**

The study explored what CCWCs considered to be their core functions, which included advocacy and prevention. The activities presented in Table 1 are outlined in terms of reporting frequency and are categorized into three themes, namely, prevention, intervention, and response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Evidence-based strategies for early intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Evidence-based strategies for direct intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Evidence-based strategies for follow-up intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CCWC’s reported core responsibilities**

- Prevention
  - Providing health support to pregnant women
  - Collecting information regarding vulnerable women and children
  - Identifying at-risk children and avoiding child marriage
  - Organising school and community awareness programmes
  - Identifying cases of sexual violence and rape

- Intervention
  - Providing nutrition and hygiene information
  - Training youth groups
  - Teaching problems of vulnerable women and children

- Response
  - Identifying cases of sexual violence
  - Providing support to children
  - Providing support to families affected by domestic violence
  - Providing support to families affected by sexual violence

This study revealed the following important perceptions about CCWCs:

1. That they should focus on child protection needs of communities, with clear mechanisms directed to child protection.
2. That they have expanded beyond core functions to community development, social mobilization, and provision of social services.

**CONCLUSION**

This study provides important insights into the functioning of CCWCs in Cambodia and the challenges they face in carrying out their responsibilities. It highlights the need for improved technical capacity, coordination, and resources, as well as increased engagement and support from government actors.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study was made possible through the support of the Cambodian government, civil society organizations, and community leaders. We would like to thank all those who participated in this study and shared their experiences and insights.

**REFERENCES**


**APPENDIX**

This appendix includes a list of references and a set of tables summarizing the study findings.
RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

**Funding & Resources**

**Key findings:**

- Child protection services at the village level are under-funded, with no dedicated funding from MoW & inadequate funds for CCWCs.
- Commune budgets tend to favor infrastructure projects over social services, and the process to use funds for social services is more complex than other sectors and projects. This may reflect a lack of coordination between the Commune and CCWCs.
- NGOs, support planning and budgeting processes, which result in increased allocation of the ODF to social services.

**Recommendations for government:**

- The National Social Fund (NSF) should adopt donor strategies to establish a comprehensive social service delivery system that will increase child protection services at village and commune levels in the long term, and develop a clear funding request to the Royal Government of Cambodia for adequate budget to implement the existing child protection programs.
- As part of this strategy, fund to CCWC through that should be increased with a greater focus on prevention activities, like education, community outreach programs, and support to family and children abuse.
- The Commune process for requesting and receiving funds for social services should be reviewed and simplified.

**Recommendations for NGOs, civil society and and other partners:**

- NGOs should continue to support CCWCs to fulfill their mandated roles according to government policy, including supporting child protection services at the local level, and private inputs into the development of a national system for social services.
- NGOs should continue to provide support for CCWC and Commune Councils in planning and budgeting processes, and advocate for increased allocation of budgets to social services (at Commune, District and Provincial levels).
- NGOs should support citizens participation in reforming and monitoring Commune budgets.

**Activities and responsibilities (Programs)**

**Key findings:**

- Many CCWC had moved beyond their role described in policy, and were providing child protection services. These services were either mandate, which could potentially place children at increased risk.
- CCWC limited technical results in inadequate response to child protection cases. For example, as committees in recognition of cases, people, actions, children or other factors that could be overwhelmed by other issues or not always identified in an over reliance on shelter and residential care institutions as the primary response for children who have been reported.
- The involvement of local civil society groups, specifically parent and children’s groups, can lead to an over-reliance on CCWCs to address child protection issues. This can result in overburdening of CCWCs and limited ability to address child protection issues at the community level.
- NGOs should continue to support initiatives to better understand the needs and responsibilities of CCWCs.

**Recommendations for government:**

- NGOs should assess existing child protection services and programs, and develop recommendations for improving these services.
- NGOs should continue to support initiatives to better understand the needs and responsibilities of CCWCs.
- NGOs should work with local civil society groups to support initiatives to better understand the needs and responsibilities of CCWCs.
- NGOs should support initiatives to improve the effectiveness of CCWCs.
- NGOs should work with local civil society groups to support initiatives to improve the effectiveness of CCWCs.

**Administrative structure and accountability**

**Key findings:**

- CCWC members have confusing reporting lines to different ministries which undermines focus and implementation of mandates from the police, health centers, and to a lesser degree Commune Councils.
- CCWC members lack clear accountability and reporting lines to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Women and the Ministry of Women and Children.
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**Recommendations for government:**

- CCWC members should be provided with clear guidelines and directions for reporting and accountability.
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**PROTECTING CAMBODIA’S CHILDREN?**

The Role of Community Committees for Women and Children and Informal Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Cambodia