

# WORKING PAPER



## The role of gender-responsive pedagogy to tackle violence against and between children in Cambodian schools

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# THE ROLE OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY TO TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST AND BETWEEN CHILDREN IN CAMBODIAN SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness (TIGER) programme aims to tackle gender-based violence (GBV), and more specifically school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), in Cambodia, by creating gender-responsive schools that provide a safe and learner-friendly school environment. This paper presents the results of a mixed-methods baseline study examining the need for such a programme in Cambodia. We find that overall incidence rates of different forms of violence against and between children in the Cambodian school context are high for both sexes. School principals and teachers are not well equipped to respond to (SR)GBV. This is the result of a lack of internal regulations on that matter within schools. Consequently, teachers continue to use corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure. Our findings call for a whole-school and community-based approach to eradicate (SR)GBV and to transform the norms and beliefs that sustain it. These elements are integrated into the TIGER-programme.

**Keywords:** Cambodia; child abuse; gender; TIGER; violence

**JEL:** I21; I28; K83

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# 1 | Introduction

Research shows that child abuse, whether emotional, sexual or physical, can heavily endanger children's wellbeing and long term mental and/or physical health (Glaser, 2002; Gershoff, 2002; Farahati et al., 2003; Currie et al., 2010; Eliot et al., 2010). Child abuse refers to any form of harmful interactions against or between children. It comprises all interactions that are emotionally or physically harmful to children. Abuse is often mentioned within the scope of a carer-child relationship (Glaser, 2002). Carers include parents, guardians and other family members, as well as teachers and community members. However, child abuse can also occur between children of same or different ages - bullying at school or outside school being the most prominent examples (Huang et al., 2019). While some forms of child abuse can be easily perceived by outsiders, often child abuse occurs in a closed environment and is only known to the child and the perpetrator. Sometimes, child abuse is not perceived as such. In many countries, physical punishment of children is not considered abusive (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2016). In Cambodia, violence against boys and girls is often accepted and tolerated (Hillis et al., 2018). UNICEF Cambodia (2016) indicates that female children from poor families are at highest risk of ever experiencing physical violence at home. Saigh et al. (1996) indicate that parents in Cambodia, who were a victim of violence during their childhood, are more likely to perpetrate violence against their own children owing to post-traumatic stress disorders. Violence against and between children is then a reflection of a society suffering from a fairly recent violent history and corresponding trauma (see information on history of Cambodia in section 2). This intergenerational spiral of violence is not easy to break, however schools can take a prominent role in doing so. Schools that reject abuse propagate a strong message to their students regarding the use of violence, threats and/or intimidation.

What is more, the way children perceive and/or experience child abuse heavily depends on gender norms and beliefs, gender stereotypes, and perceived inequality between the sexes (Iossi Silva et al., 2013; Nickerson et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2016; Fredrick and Demaray, 2018). Stinson (2017, p.10) explains that gender roles are "*sets of socio-cultural norms that shape gender identities which are negotiated by both men and women*". Haque (2013) adds that masculinity and femininity refer to sets of traits or patterns of behaviour that in a given society are considered typical of men and women, respectively. Traditional gender roles are still very common among boys and girls in Cambodia. A study by Plan International (2015) shows that a stunning 61 percent of surveyed boys and girls agreed that woman have to tolerate violence for the sake of the family, even though 67 percent did disapprove gender-based violence.

Schools offer rich environments for the construction of gender identities and gender relations (Barth et al., 2004; Lewallen et al., 2015). For example, school curricula often convey the prevailing gender norms and beliefs. In Cambodia, students study verses from the 16th century Khmer poetry that outline the country's traditional gender norms. Among others, these verses advise girls to obey their husbands and normalise violence against girls and women (Anderson & Grace, 2018). What is more, many textbooks depict girls and women in traditional gender roles such as housekeepers (Velasco, 2004). Besides the school curriculum, teachers and school leaders also pass on gender norms and beliefs to their students in the way they interact with them. For example, many Cambodian teachers do not encourage girls to succeed in mathematics.

If gender relations are built on underlying (social) inequalities between the sexes, then gender-based violence (GBV) and school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) may form a serious threat to the

achievement of quality, inclusive and equitable education for girls and boys (UNESCO, 2016). To protect children's rights and to safeguard children's wellbeing and physical health, it is imperative to eliminate all forms of child abuse, and (SB)GBV, in particular. The education system provides opportunities for innovative, effective and sustainable interventions to prevent violence against and between children and for changes of attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles. Teachers, and school leaders in particular, are fundamental in transforming practices, attitudes and values, and instilling in learners the understanding and practice of gender equality and non-violent behaviour (Tharp et al., 2012). Furthermore, empirical studies have shown the long-term effects of interventions or changes in schooling programmes on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes at different stages of the schooling career (e.g. best-evidence can be found in Schweinhart and Weikart, 1980; Hunter et al., 2001; Cho et al., 2011; Chetty et al., 2016; among others).

To tackle (SR)GBV in Cambodia, the programme Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness (TIGER) has been launched in the Battambang province. The TIGER programme aims at tackling (SR)GBV through capacity development of teachers and school leaders and by strengthening processes and practices to promote equality and safety in and around school. An action guide has been developed that supports teachers and school leaders to establish 'gender-responsive' schools free of any kind of child abuse. Teachers and school leaders receive training to become familiar with the guide and to gain the necessary skills and competences to translate the action guide into practice. To raise awareness in the community, among others, a radio broadcast and storytelling app have been launched to discuss gender-related issues.

In this paper, we analyse the incidence and modalities of child abuse and (SR)GBV at baseline. This will allow us, at a later stage, to assess the impact of the TIGER programme. Crucially, findings from the baseline study help us to gain a deep understanding of the topic under study, and to assess the need for the TIGER programme, accordingly.

This paper contributes to the previous discussion on child abuse and (SR)GBV by using advanced data collection techniques that combine quantitative and qualitative research methods and that involved a multi-disciplinary research team. The study has been conducted between September and December 2018, several months before the TIGER programme became effective in 2019. Therefore, results are referred to as baseline findings. In total we could reach and collect information from 60 primary and secondary schools in Cambodia. Doing so, we have the most information ever collected on the Cambodian school context and with regard to GBV and SRGBV (Plan Asia and ICRW, 2015). Further, using a set of 20 'control schools' at fair distance from Battambang province, it is possible to compare incidence and modalities of child abuse and (SR)GBV in two distinct, but comparable provinces. This enhances the external validity of the research, and facilitates impact assessment of the TIGER programme at a later stage.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 briefly discusses the literature on the history of the Cambodian education system, for a better understanding of the current situation on the relationship between traditional gender roles and violence against and between children in a school context. In section 3 we explain the TIGER programme in depth. Data collection methods and definitions are discussed in section 4, and the baseline results in section 5. Section 6 concludes.

## 2 | Cambodia

### 2.1 History

According to Duggan (1996), Dy (2004) and Stinson (2017), Cambodia has a long and rich history in the organisation of education. Already at the end of the French colonial period, basic education became compulsory for children aged 6 to 13. The French colonists modernized the formal educational system, but only a small group of children enrolled in education, and the main targets were to educate the Khmer children as to serve the interest of the colony. Girls had the opportunity for the first time to receive basic education, however, enrolment fees and traditional gender roles limited female participation. In 1953, the French officially recognized Prince Sihanouk's sovereignty, and from this point on, education became an important national interest. About 20% of public expenditure went to education. The number of teacher training colleges and secondary schools in the provincial capitals increased rapidly. In the 1960s, several universities were founded. However, educational institutions were located in urban areas, leaving many Cambodian children who were living in rural areas, illiterate. Girls were still most likely to be excluded from education in the cities. With 45% in 1966, Cambodia had one of the highest literacy rates and most progressive education systems in Southeast Asia.

However, March 1970, marked the beginning of a great civil conflict that would last for several years. General Lon Nol seized control of Cambodia in a coup in 1970. The coup led to the creation of the Khmer Republic. Then, the Khmer Rouge communist regime overthrew the military dictatorship of the Khmer Republic in 1975. Traditional education was cast aside, because it was deemed irrelevant in an agrarian communist society. Existing schools were closed and children were denied their right to education. The Khmer Rouge destroyed 90 percent of all school buildings, emptied libraries, and burned their contents (Clayton, 2016). Before the schools were closed they became sites of political violence, where armed groups attacked students and teachers. As the regime became increasingly paranoid of losing control, the educated community was identified as a threat to the revolution and targeted in the killings. An estimated 75% of teachers, 67% of students, and 96% of university students lost their lives (De Walque, 2006; Klutz, 2015).

In 1979 the Khmer Rouge was overthrown, and only a few hundred teachers were left for the whole country (De Walque, 2006). "After the end of the regime and the subsequent transition periods, a baby boom followed. This baby-boom generation youth had difficulty in finding qualified teachers at schools (Jeong, 2014, p. 1)." A minority of children obtained a secondary education qualification, and many suffered from long-term post-traumatic stress disorders (Saigh et al., 1996).

The Cambodian government worked hard to rebuild the schooling system. Old schools were reopened at a high pace, and new schools were built, not only in the cities, but also in rural areas. However, "*data suggesting a rapid escalation in enrolments must be balanced against the very poor teaching standards, [owing to] unqualified teachers and low quality in the provision of a standardised curriculum, texts and facilities* (Duggan, 1996, p. 367)." So although more children had access to education after the Khmer Rouge period than before, the quality of education did not improve.

In 1991 the Paris Peace Accords were signed. Since then, Cambodian educational development focuses on building again a modern education system. In the current public education system, schooling is offered from the age of 3. Pre-school is not compulsory, but strongly encouraged. Basic compulsory education starts at the age of 6 and consists of 9 years (grades 1 to 9). Upper secondary education (grades 10-12) is not compulsory, but strongly promoted. Adolescents, who complete



upper secondary school, can continue into higher education. Youngsters who do not go to upper secondary school can attend technical and vocational education after grade 9 (Booth, 2014, p. 42).

Since the early 2000s, access to education has been the top priority of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Currently, close to 97.7 percent of children enrol in primary education. Of these children, 78.7 percent complete primary school. Only 41.9 percent of children enrol in lower secondary school, and 26.5 percent in upper secondary school. No more than 14 percent of the population enrol in higher education (VVOB Cambodia, 2016, 2017). Other improvements include: the building of new schools, the abolishment of school fees in public schools, the provision of scholarships, decreased gender gaps in school enrolment rates, increased teacher salaries, and the expansion of early childhood education. Many of these improvements were made thanks to support of NGOs, donor countries and multilateral organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank (Booth, 2014; Stinson, 2017).

To conclude, there remains a strong focus on the improvement of the quality of teachers, for example by increasing the number of years of pre-service teacher training from a two year programme to a four year bachelor study. However, due to the high number of deaths of previous generations of teachers, more than 70 percent of the current population is under the age of 25 (Stinson, 2017).

## **2.2 Traditional gender roles**

In Cambodia, the Chbap Srey (for women) and Chbap Pros (for men) outline “[...] traditional codes of conduct and rules (Chbab) for men and women requiring them to learn and obey to become good members of the Khmer family and society (Dy, 2004, p. 93)”. According to the Chbap Srey and Chbap Pros a ‘good man’ is courageous, responsible, and hardworking, while a ‘good woman’ is caring, reserved, and quiet (Stinson, 2017, p. 4). Further, men are conceptualized as strong, as opposed to women, who are considered weak. In line with these traditional gender norms and values, men should study and should take care of their family, while women should stay at home to take care of the children and to do the household chores. These rules of conduct used to be part of the school curriculum in their entirety. Nowadays, learners only study a subset of verses. Although nowadays the Chbaps are no longer included in the curriculum, some teachers still integrate them into their classes. Stinson (2017, p.30) argues in this respect that “teacher attitudes and beliefs are implicitly connected to goals of gender equality”, and that the hidden curriculum can reinforce traditional gender roles. For example, many people in the Cambodian society still consider strong leadership to be a male trait. This is why most school principals are men.

Further, homosexuality, transgender, and third gender are not supported by gender norms and beliefs of the traditional Cambodian community. Most Cambodians believe that being gay and transgender are one and the same thing, they do not know the difference between the spectra of sexuality and gender identities (Van Horen, 2018). Everybody who behaves slightly different from traditional gender norms is referred to as gay, and often excluded from regular societal life (Stinson, 2017).

All textbooks in Cambodia are created and provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Although the books currently in use are more gender neutral than the previous batch, still many gender stereotypes remain in the official learning materials of public schools. For example, there are pictures in the textbooks with strong gender stereotypes, like a women cooking meals, and a man working hard for money. Because the books are developed by the Ministry, the majority of teachers accepts the books as good (Van Horen, 2018).

## 3 | TIGER

### 3.1 TIGER project

The TIGER programme aims to tackle (SR)GBV through the creation of gender-responsive school climates and by sensitizing communities on the prevention of violence against children and protection of children against all forms of violence – the latter actions are beyond the focus of the current paper. TIGER becomes effective in the course of the year 2019<sup>3</sup>, and the programme is confined to the province of Battambang, involving the local Teacher Education College (TEC) and 40 primary and lower-secondary schools. The aim is to transform the college and schools into centres of excellence for gender responsiveness. In order to reach this objective, the TIGER team developed a practical hands-on tool, an Action Guide, to support teachers and school leaders to create a gender-responsive school environment. The action guide is anchored in the daily school reality of Cambodia, offering relevant ideas, tools, and information to transform teaching practices and/or school leadership in a gender-responsive manner.

Based upon the action guide, a capacity development trajectory has been set up for the Teacher Education College (TEC) school management and lecturers in Battambang. After this trajectory, the TEC lecturers are expected to apply gender-responsive pedagogy in their teaching and teach student-teachers the value and know-how of gender-responsive pedagogy. A second capacity development trajectory has been set up together with the TEC and five local civil society organisations (CSOs) to train school leaders, teachers and school support committee members of 40 primary and lower-secondary schools to create a gender-responsive school environment. Lastly, the TIGER team has set up a sensitisation and communication campaign on the prevention and protection of children against all forms of violence or abuse at large. The multi-faceted campaign aims to reach parents and guardians, communities and other relevant stakeholders, both related to the TIGER-intervention schools and beyond. The purpose of the campaign is to ensure a better understanding of school-related gender-based violence, and to create more support for the prevention of abuse in schools and the society at large. Via an educational digital story telling app, users are engaged in a gender-related story where they interact with how the story evolves. A wider audience in Battambang province is reached via a monthly radio show that discusses various gender-related topics, and invites the listeners to reflect on daily gender-influenced realities. To conclude, various events are organised to sensitise the community, such as a march against violence against girls and women, and 1<sup>st</sup>-day-of-school events.

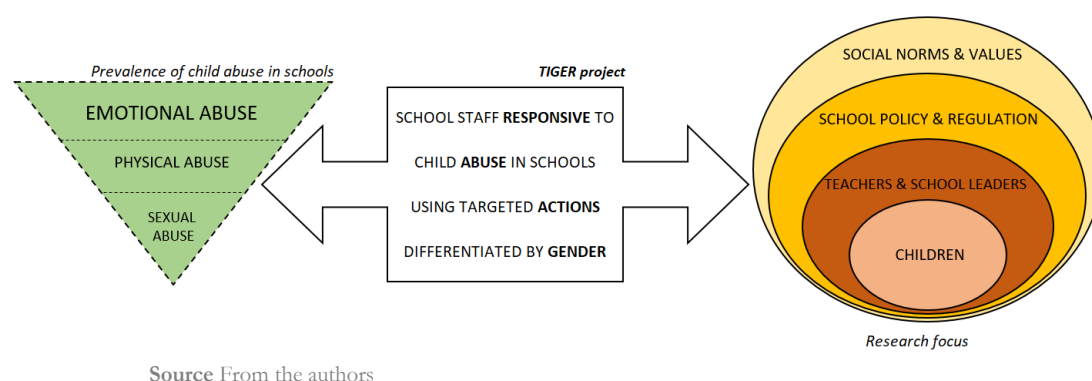
### 3.2 Research Framework

Changing attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles to prevent (SR)GBV through school requires changes at all levels of the education system and the inclusion of the community surrounding school (Espelage and Swearer, 2004; Swearer et al., 2010 Lewallen et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2019). In other words, there is a need to develop the capacity of educators - teachers and school leaders -, as well as to advocate change at grassroots and national level. Figure 3.1 visualises the research framework.

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<sup>3</sup> While TIGER becomes effective in the course of the year 2019, the programme got launched in October 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, the full programme got installed in Cambodia in the relevant schools in Battambang province.

**Figure 3.1 Research framework for impact evaluation of TIGER programme**



Source From the authors

On the right-hand side in figure 3.1, we observe the several layers constituting the school environment. At the core we have the children, whom the TIGER project seeks to protect from (SR)GBV, and their parents. Although, not explicitly captured in the figure, parents have a vital role (SR)GBV. They can influence teaching practices by having discussions with the teachers on appropriate measures of discipline at school. For example, if the parent uses or tolerates (domestic) violence as a measure of discipline, then he/she will urge the teacher to use it at school. And, ultimately, in many cases the teacher is also a parent. If, the teacher uses or tolerates domestic violence, then he/she is more likely to use it or tolerate it at school. Then, we have consecutively teachers and school leaders, school policy and regulation, and finally social norms and values. The way people interact with each other in a society, with the school as a reflection of that society, and wherein children grow up, heavily depends on inherited social norms and values (section 2). It constitutes the school climate, the interactions between the different stakeholders within the school context. Common practice and taboos with regard to child abuse and gender roles are two aspects that belong to those social norms and values. That also determines whether or not victims of bullying will seek support (Nickerson et al., 2014). For example, if negative forms of discipline like kicking or beating children in response to bad behaviour are well-tolerated in society, it is more difficult to bend those negative forms into positive forms of discipline by teachers and school leaders or by imposing new school regulations (Unnever and Cornell, 2004; Elliot et al., 2010). Teachers and school leaders are fundamental in transforming practices, attitudes and values including instilling learners the understanding and practice of gender equality non-violent behaviour and acceptance of differences. Further, teachers and school leaders translate school policy and regulations, if any, on gender responsiveness, into school practice.

On the left-hand side in figure 3.1, we observe incidence rates of emotional, physical and sexual abuse at school, or on the way to school. It is argued that schools that tolerate violence against and between children, have higher prevalence rates of these different forms of child abuse (Barth et al., 2004). Child abuse is then an outcome of school practice and school climate, which, in turn, are a reflection of social norms and values, included in school policy and regulations, and of gender roles and perceived equality between sexes and social groups (Aikman et al., 2005). It harms children's responsiveness to experienced violence (e.g. by not seeking help) and may seriously impact long-term well-being (Eliot et al., 2010). Further, it harms academic performance because of the risk-factors associated with being bullied, like depression (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Fredrick and Demaray, 2018). The effectiveness of TIGER then stems from the fact that different (outer) layers at the right-hand side of figure 3.1 have undergone positive changes. Examples of positive changes include: gender awareness, gender responsiveness, and (implicit) changes in the school curriculum because of changed teaching practices relating to gender roles. As a result, GBV and SRGBV diminish (Russell et al., 2016).

## 4 | Data

Quantitative and qualitative data have been collected by using a multi-disciplinary research team. Survey design and validation happened through a cooperation between the non-profit organisation VVOB Cambodia (Flemish association Education for Development), one Belgian academic partner (KU Leuven HIVA) and one local academic partner (Royal University of Phnom Penh). The three partners recruited data collectors and trained them in the field. By using local trainees, we could conduct the quantitative- and qualitative data collection in the local Khmer language, without the need of a translator. The non-academic partner VVOB Cambodia has established the TIGER programme between 2017-2019. And the Belgian academic partner has provided expertise on research methods and survey design, and supported the local academic partner in the field.

### 4.1 Questionnaires

Quantitative data has been collected in two phases. In the first phase, we validated the questionnaire of the survey in 20 practice schools in Battambang that participated in TIGER in the academic year 2017-18. Practice schools have a close connection with the TEC of Battambang as TEC students do their internship in these schools.

In the second phase we selected 20 participating non-practice schools in Battambang, as well as 20 non-practice schools in Svay Rieng as a control group. Control schools were selected outside Battambang province to avoid influence of the sensitisation campaign and radio shows. Both locations are similar to each other to the extent that both intervention and control schools are located in a border province – Battambang shares a border with Thailand, Svay Rieng is close to Vietnam. Parents living close to the neighbouring country often travel abroad for seasonal work. Thailand and Vietnam have higher economic welfare and better paid job opportunities for Cambodian workers. Children of these migrant workers often grow up without one or both of the parents. They rely on care from the grandparents or other guardians.

The total student sample size ( $N_s=1,194$  children) consists of 602 girls and 592 boys. In total 57.2 percent of the student sample is in primary education (grades 4, 5, 6); and 42.8 percent in secondary education (grades 7,8,9). Students are on average 12 year olds with the minimum age equal to 8 and the maximum age 18. About 19 percent of the students indicate that the household wherein they grow up is poor, and 59 percent respond that the household income suffices their needs.

In all of the intervention and control schools, a number of teachers ( $N_T=151$ ) were surveyed as well in the second phase of the data collection. In total, we reached 58 teachers in Battambang and 93 teachers in Svay Rieng, among whom 66 females and 85 males. About 25 percent of the teacher sample has less than 5 years of teaching experience. The other 75 percent of the teacher sample has on average 17.7 years of teaching experience ( $sd= 8$ ). About 74 percent of the teachers indicate to be poor. However, when looking back at the household wherein they grew up as a child, this share drops to 41 percent.

## 4.2 Interviews

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews with parents and school principals. Parents and school principals could voluntarily choose to participate in the interview. The semi-structured interviews consisted of an open-ended questionnaire. Topics of the interviews include domestic violence and bullying at school. Given the sensitivity of the discussed topics, we encouraged local interviewers to converse freely creating a relaxed atmosphere with their interviewees. All conversations took place in the Khmer language, and have been translated by the Cambodian researcher. Per school, we have interviewed one parent (N=40) and one school principal (N=40).

## 4.3 Operationalization of definitions

### 4.3.1 Child abuse

We follow the literature that distinguishes between emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Isolation, verbal assault, humiliation and intimidation are examples of emotional abuse, while hitting, beating, kicking or pulling hair are examples of physical abuse. A third form of child abuse is sexual abuse. In line with the World Health Organisation (1999) and Norman et al. (2012), sexual child abuse is defined as “*the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society.*” This definition includes touching and non-touching behaviors.

In the first instance we look at the carer-child relationship by calculating incidence rates of emotional and physical abuse done by the teacher. For sexual abuse we do not specify the perpetrator as being the teacher, because this could be considered a very sensitive question to answer during an interview at school. Therefore, the perpetrator can virtually be anyone. Box 4.1 presents the operationalisation of the definitions.

#### Box 4.1 Operationalisation of definitions for emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse within a carer-child relationship and within a school context (at school, or on the way to school)

**Emotional abuse (by teacher):** teacher is shouting or cursing at you; calling you names; deduct marks from tests/homework; making you buy things, pay fine to teacher, stand in the front of the classroom or run rounds on the school ground; making you do chores.

**Physical abuse (by teacher):** teacher is making you hurt yourself (hit your knuckles on the table, make you stand on one leg for a long time); teacher is hurting you (pull your ears, hit you with hand, ruler, stick, rolled up paper).

**Sexual abuse (by anyone):** someone says things to you or show you images that were related to sex that you did not like; someone has tried to touch a part of your body that you do not like to be touched on.

### 4.3.2 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

When it comes to the child-child relationship, we particularly look at the incidence of violence between peers at school. Again we can distinguish between emotional and physical violence. Violence between peers at school is often gender-based because of several reasons. First, gender-based violence often arises owing to (perspectives on) equality between males and females, gender stereotypes and gender roles. Equality, stereotypes and roles are embedded in society wherein a child grows up. Second, boys and girls often cluster together in their play at school. The interaction between peers from the same sex reinforces patterns of play. For example, girls are expected to do rope skipping, while football is for boys. If, for example, a girl wishes to play a boy’s game, or vice versa, and is verbally or physically offended for that, then this is called gender-based violence (GBV). Further, if

gender-based violence occurs at school, it is defined as school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV).

Gender in this respect reflects more than the sexes alone. It also reflects the fact girls (boys) can associate with boys' (girls') interests. However, due to societal values and norms on how girls and boys should behave, they are not allowed, or discouraged, to engage with each other's interests. In the extreme case, GBV can cause exclusion from education or early drop-out from education. For example, in the Cambodian society, girls are expected to engage in family duties, and, as a consequence, girls are more likely to drop out from school at earlier ages than boys.

We measure GBV by looking at emotional and physical violence between children (e.g. boys against girls). SRGBV is measured by looking at gender-based stereotypes on the playground.

## 5 | Baseline results

### 5.1 Child abuse at school

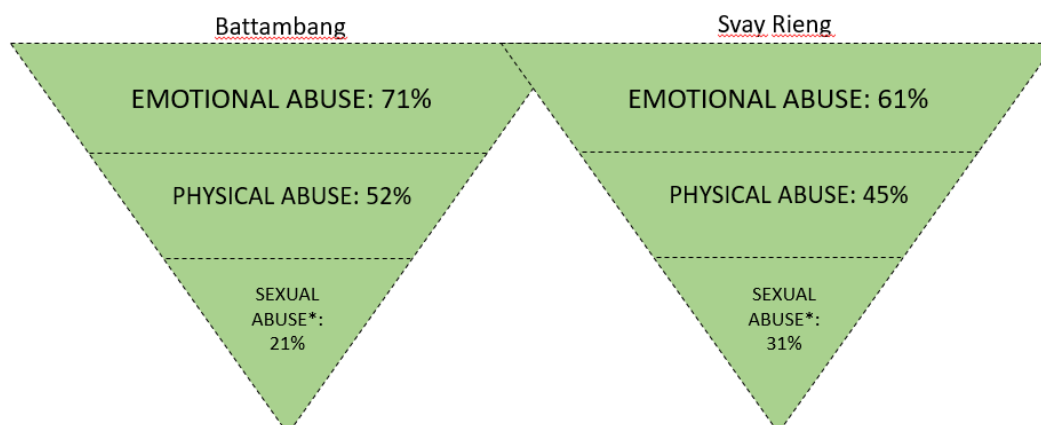
Figure 5.1 visualises the incidence rates of emotional and physical violence within a carer-child relationship and within a school context. With regard to the incidence of sexual abuse, we did not explicitly ask for the perpetrator, because of the sensitivity of the question. As such, these rates should be interpreted as solely within school context. Further, table 5.1 summarizes estimates on the difference between boys and girls (variable ‘female’) between the incidence rates across the different types of violence. This table also accounts for the influence of socioeconomic status on both sexes (variable ‘female#socioeconomic status’). The results have been estimated by using ordinary least squares (OLS) and account for clustered standard errors at the level of the school. Further, the results have been controlled for age; for a dummy variable ‘provinces’ (Battambang equal to 1; and Svay Rieng 0), for the interaction between female#provinces; and for the grade wherein the child attends class. We have controlled for these variables as to increase the comparability between Svay Rieng and Battambang province.

In total 60 to 70 percent of all 1,194 respondents from grade 4 to grade 9 indicate to have experienced emotional abuse by teachers. And one in every two students experienced physical abuse in the last school year. Male respondents are significantly more likely to ever have experienced physical violence than female respondents, while we do not observe significant differences between girls and boys with regard to emotional abuse. With these rates, the incidence of child emotional and physical child abuse in Cambodian schools is high. In figure 5.1, it is also visualised that 20 to 30 percent of students experienced a form of sexual abuse. We do not observe significant differences between incidence rates between male and female respondents. However, when taking socioeconomic status into account, wealthier girls are significantly more likely to ever have experienced a form of sexual abuse. The field work has revealed stories of sexual abuse of female students. Stories that affect female students attract more attention in the Cambodian community, because sexual abuse of a girl has more serious consequences for her future than the abuse of a boy. A girl who faced rape likely will get punished by others in her community. Interviews with school principals revealed four stories of sexual violence against girls, of which two by male teachers, and one by a neighbour and a father. The field work did not reveal stories of sexual abuse of male students.

According to Cambodian traditions, teachers have respect for their students, and many students believe that teachers want to do good for their students. Hence, students accept punishment by their teachers with the idea that teachers discipline children in order for students to perform well. But cases have been reported of serious punishment by the teachers. A school principal from a primary school in Battambang acknowledged that teachers at his school abuse students in various forms because they do not listen to the teachers’ advice and explanation in the class (interview with school principal on 15 November 2018). Physical abuse has also been indicated by a school principal from a lower secondary school in Svay Rieng. He agreed that some teachers still use methods of physical punishment, because they feel that students do not respect them. Teachers, he explained, believe that only physical punishment can make the students work harder (interview with a school principal on 5 December 2018).



**Figure 5.1 Incidence rates of child abuse by teachers\* in schools in Battambang and Svay Rieng (N=1,194)**



\* Sexual abuse within a school context (at school, or on the way to school). The perpetrator can be anyone.

**Table 5.1 Multivariate regression estimates**

	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse
Female (1.Yes)	0.090 (0.098)	-0.246 ** (0.106)	0.063 (0.068)
Age	0.004 (0.011)	-0.024 * (0.014)	-0.003 (0.012)
Socioeconomic status	0.000 (0.012)	0.007 (0.013)	-0.014 (0.011)
Female#Socioeconomic status	-0.014 (0.015)	-0.015 (0.021)	0.050 *** (0.014)
Cl(schools)	40	40	40
Obs.(N)	1,194	1,194	1,194

Notes: Significance of estimates denoted at 1%-level (\*\*\*); 5%-level (\*\*); and 10%-level (\*). The variable 'socio-economic status' is a standardized asset index that contains answers to the question: "In your household, do you have a car; a tv; a house made of bricks; a gas stove; air conditioning; a fridge; separate bathroom for children and parents; three meals every day; electricity; and internet access?" Children could answer to these questions with yes or no. The asset index was constructed using principal components analysis. The variable Female#Socioeconomic status is the interaction effect between female (1.yes) and the asset index.



Parents too, reported cases of abuse. According to a parent from a primary school in Battambang, students were emotionally abused in that school, because they did not memorise the lessons. Some students then get scared of attending class as they are afraid that the teacher would shout at them again. There are also some reports of parents about physical punishment by male teachers. A parent told how a teacher once hit his son because he could not answer the question. Since then, his son does not want to go to school no more (interview with a parent on 26 November 2018). Although he was not happy about it, he and most other parents do not file complaints to the school principal because they do not want to make any trouble with teachers and schools (interview with parent on 12 November 2018). Another parent from a primary school in Battambang further discussed how students were forced to take extra classes. Even if students already stopped going to the class, the teachers would still ask them to pay for tutoring services. There are records of drop-out because students are afraid of going to classes. The teachers blame, curse or even hit them (interview with a parent on 13 November 2018). At Svay Reing, a school principal from a lower secondary school strongly discourages teachers to teach extra classes because it adversely affects students from poorer households with risks of dropout (interview with school principal on 06 December 2018). Qualitative research indicates that in most cases students would not report abusive behaviour by their teachers to anyone. However, we have asked the student respondents whether they would report cases of maltreatment by their teacher. Survey results suggest that among female respondents, 62 percent talk to a family member when a teacher does not treat them well. Another 35 percent would talk to a friend from school. 55 percent of the male respondents also indicate that the first person they would talk to is a family member, and 43 percent would talk to a friend from school. A parent representative at the province of Svay Rieng argues in this respect that students, especially at lower secondary education, are afraid to report abusive behaviour of teachers to their parents, because they may be blamed instead. It is a matter of fact that many parents consider the teacher as the ‘second parent’ after them. Parents believe that teachers care for their children. Moreover, parents believe that teachers are the sources of knowledge and morality. Teachers are considered as a role model for their children. As such, if teachers convict the use of violation between peers, students will follow this advice on good behaviour and attitude (interview with a parent on 28 November 2018).

## **5.2 Dangers on the way to school**

Primary schools are generally located in the communities and nearby residency. Students are then able to walk to school alone or with their friends. Some students are brought to schools by their parents with motor bikes. The way to lower secondary schools is longer, however. Sometimes students need to travel up to 15 kilometres from home to school. Students from poorer households are travelling by bike or on foot from home to school every day. In many cases, roads are muddy, solitary, or unsafe like in the case of the national road, as indicated by a parent representative at Svay Rieng (interview with a parent on 27 November 2018). Parents are concerned about incidents that may happen with their children, like a confrontation with wild animals, traffic accidents and bad road conditions, bad weather, vehicle breakdown, robbery, kidnapping, sexual abuse, and a confrontation with drug addicts or gang violence. These risks are also reported by the student respondents: 30 percent of them indicate that they feel unsafe on the way to school. Girls are significantly more afraid than boys on the way from home to school, especially from ghosts, kidnapping and drug addicts and gang violence. As much as 36 percent of girls indicate that they feel unsafe on the way to school, while 21 percent of them feel unsafe at school. Among boys, these rates are 24 percent (feel unsafe on the way to school) and 16 percent (feel unsafe at school), respectively.

A parent from a lower secondary school in Svay Rieng says in this context that he is afraid to send his daughter to school alone. Therefore, she is always accompanied by her brother for security reasons (interview with parent on 3 December 2018). Another parent at Svay Rieng tells that children who return from school are only allowed by their parents to play around the house. There are many

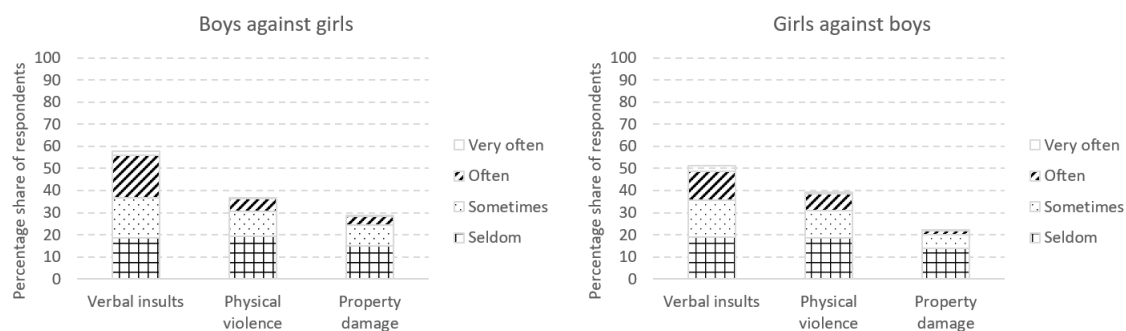
problems in the communities, such as gangs and drugs. As a consequence, parents prohibit their children to make friends with people who have bad intentions (interview with a parent on 4 December 2018).

### 5.3 Gender-based violence (GBV)

The baseline results on GBV are presented in figure 5.2. The question underlying this figure is “How often do boys..., because you are a girl?” We report on forms of emotional abuse (e.g. boys say that girls are weak, call you names, laugh at you) and forms of physical abuse (e.g. boys push, punch, kick, slap you or pull your hair because you are a girl). Further, we include a typical form of bullying between children relating to property damage (e.g. take, hide or destroy your things to annoy you). The same question “How often do girls..., because you are a boy?” has been asked to boys. We have responses on the aforementioned questions from all 602 girls. However, with 590 boys we lose 2 observations.

Verbal insults between children from different sexes appear to be very frequently used among both boys and girls. And one in every three to two children faced physical GBV during her/his school career. Property damage is less frequently reported compared to emotional and physical gender-based violence, but still affects more than one in every five children. The results indicate that female respondents more often indicate verbal insults and property damage than male respondents. Slightly more girls use physical violence against boys than vice versa. The student respondents were also asked about who they talk to in case of GBV. 40 percent of female respondents talk to a friend from school when a child did not treat them well. This compares with only 28 percent among boys. Male respondents more often (32%) indicate that they talk to a family member. Another 13 percent of girls indicate that they talk to a teacher, compared with 19 percent among boys.

**Figure 5.2** Baseline results on gender-based violence between children (590 boys and 602 girls)

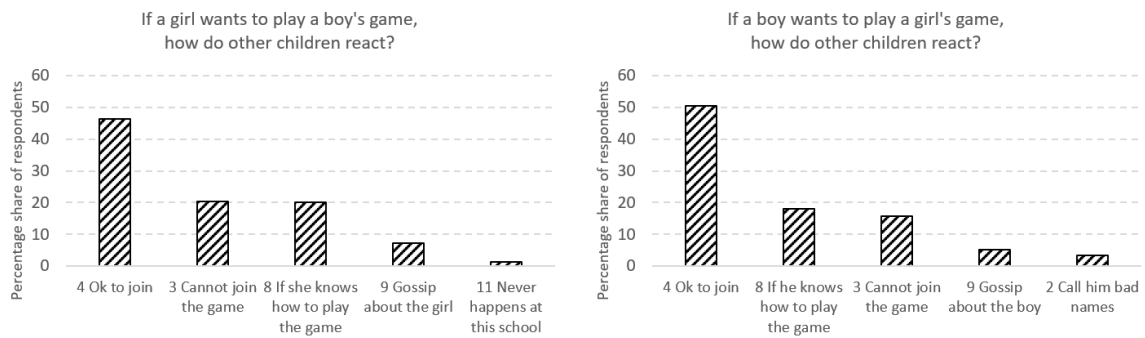


In order to avoid conflicts, many parents advise their children not to make friends with the opposite sex at school, because it is not safe, or because it would affect their study. A parent representative at Svay Rieng claims that his daughter is only making good friends. He advises her to stay away from the boys. The parent daily asks the teachers to provide him with information on inappropriate behaviour (interview with a parent on 27 November 2018). At all times teachers try to make compromises, and ask the students to make good friendship (interview with a school principal on 26 November 2018). Teachers and school principals are generally considered as reliable sources of information in the Cambodian community.

## 5.4 School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)

With regard to SRGBV, we limited our questions to perceived gender stereotypes on the playground. In particular, we focus on the extent to which girls and boys exclude each other from typical girls' or boys' games on the playground. Whereas typical games are embedded in societal norms and values, the results of these questions arguably also reflect inequality between the sexes and differences in how boys or girls should behave according to tradition. Figure 5.3 visualises the results.

**Figure 5.3** Baseline results on gender-based stereotypes at the playground (590 boys and 602 girls)



About 50 percent of girls and boys respond that typical girls' or boys' games are accessible for the other sex. For the other 50 percent arguments are made by the children why she/he cannot join or what they would do in reaction to that. For example, 20 percent of boys respond that a girl cannot join a typical boys' game and an additional 20 percent argue she can only join if she knows how to play the game. Almost 10 percent of boys say they would gossip about the girl, and a small share of respondents even argues that girls never play boys' games at their school. A similar picture can be graphically presented for the answers of the female children, however, the answers given by girls have a different pattern than those of boys. Almost 20 percent of girls say that a boy can join the game if he knows how to play it. 16 percent of the female respondents responds that boys cannot join the game, and another 5 percent indicates that they would gossip about the boy. A small share of girls would call the boy bad names.

To some extent, these high rates of refusal of the opposite sex to enter the game can be explained by parents' education. Parents usually discourage their children to play atypical games at least according to their biological sex. One parent from a primary school in Svay Rieng says that he is not happy to see his son playing girls' games like rope skipping. He wants his son to play volleyball or football to become a "real man". The parent indicates that he is afraid to allow his son to play girls' games, because "then he will become gay". He cannot accept girly behaviour of his son (interview with a parent on 28 November 2018). Another parent representative Svay Rieng argues that the games played by boys at school are strenuous and dangerous. The nature of the games played by boys and girls is different. Any refusal of accepting a boy or girl to play is not about discrimination but about who wins or loses the games (personal communication, 30 November 2018).

A school principal from a lower secondary school in Svay Rieng argues that bullying and violence between peers are mainly driven by jealousy and the inability to understand each other. It is argued that some students do not learn how to tolerate friends and classmates. They are always occupied with very small things (interview with a school principal on 4 December 2018). This is confirmed by another school principal. He tells that at his school, a female student shouted at male students angrily because the students had to change seats in the class. There was a boy sitting at the table at which the angry girl used to sit. In this case the teacher could easily solve the problem. The teacher told to the students that the small students should sit close to the whiteboard (interview with a school principal on 29 November 2018).

But more serious cases of bullying were also reported during the qualitative research. For example, a school principal from a lower secondary school in Battambang told that some male students were shouting, cursing and calling bad names during playing football or volleyball. Then they started bullying each other through Facebook. At school they were angry with each other (interview with a school principal on 6 November 2018). A parent representative at Battambang additionally provided evidence of verbal harassment. Students who made trouble are mainly in grade 7 or 8. When a girl sees a boy who behaves as a girl, he is called a gay person. And if a girl behaves as a boy, she is called a lesbian person (interview with a parent on 15 November 2018). Abusive behaviour between peers is also reported by a school principal in Battambang. A male student once made a lot of trouble with his classmates. He got two warnings from the school director, but he kept on abusing other students, especially girls. For example, when the boy would ask a girl for something to eat, and she would refuse, then he would use violence against that girl (interview on 12 November 2018).

Finally, with respect to SRGBV, 45% of teachers respond that boys and girls should get a different disciplinary measure for the same misbehaviour. A parent representative at Svay Rieng argues that male students make more serious mistakes than female students. Sons and daughters cannot be treated similarly; daughters are more gentle, punctual and hardworking. As such, the parent representative puts more pressure on his son (interview with a parent on 27 November 2018). These views on using disciplinary measures for the sexes is also expressed by a school principal from a lower secondary school in Svay Rieng. He tells that he never advised any teacher to make a female student stand on one leg in the sun, for example, if she could not memorize the lessons. However, he does not mind if this form of punishment is applied on male students. He then argues that it is not about fairness, but about how we treat people based on gender norms. If a female student makes a mistake, the more appropriate punishment would be cleaning the school campus or cleaning the toilets (interview on 6 December 2018).

A school principal at Svay Rieng disagrees by saying that, in some cases, the punishment on boys and girls should be similar, for example, with regard to truancy. If, students are absent for up to 30 times from school, boys and girls will be equally disciplined. But when it comes to morality, there was traditionally more pressure on female students by the Cambodian community. There are many traditional roles for female students to be followed (interview with a school principal on 26 November 2018).

## **5.5 School regulation**

62% of teachers report that there is no internal school regulation on bullying, and 28% say they do not know. Among the 14% of teachers who indicate to have an internal school regulation on bullying, many say that this regulation is moderate to difficult to implement. 93% of teachers respond that there is no internal school regulation on acceptable forms of disciplining.

A school principal from a primary school in Battambang indicates that, indeed, they do not have an internal regulation to deal with sexual abuse. In case a teacher would sexually abuse a student, he explained that he would call him for a meeting and advise him to stop the action (interview on 13 November 2018). According to another school principal, problems between teachers and students and among peers at school are solved in accordance with the Cambodian law (interview with school principal on 3 December 2018).

However, the qualitative research did reveal one example of organised practice at school to deal with different forms of child abuse. In a primary school in Svay Rieng, children have set up a children's committee in each class. A representative for the committee was selected in order to watch out for inappropriate behaviour of students. If SRGBV would happen, then the class representative has the duty to work out a solution with the school principal and local authority to stop the maltreatment (interview with a school principal at 26 November 2018). A school principal from a lower secondary school in Battambang argues for NGO support to raise awareness and build the capacity

of school principals, teachers, local authority, students, and parents to reduce the negative impact from SRGBV (interview with a school principal on 5 November 2018). The call for NGOs to deal with the problem of SRGBV is also made by school principals in Svay Rieng. One principal indicates that NGOs can help the school because they have finances, techniques, and human resources. He calls for NGOs to build a peaceful environment at his school (interview with a school principal on 28 November 2018).

## 6 | Conclusion

Incidence rates of different forms of child abuse in the Cambodian school context are high for both sexes. School principals and teachers are not equipped for tackling (SR)GBV. First and foremost, adults are used to traditional gender roles taught in the school curriculum, and current learning materials in public schools still incorporate gender stereotypes. Additionally, there is no internal regulation on gender roles and GBV at school, so that schools fall back on the Cambodian law and regulations and on Buddhist religion. And school principals', teachers', and parents' ideas on disciplinary measures in class and at school often incorporate the use of (SR)GBV by teachers against children. The results from the teacher and student surveys also revealed that teachers' perceptions of their own behaviour show a discrepancy with the responses given by student respondents. Teachers tend to under-report abusive behaviour.

Another observation is that parents often discourage their children to befriend with the opposite sex. This pedagogic vision indirectly reinforces the incidence of (SR)GBV. Therefore, tackling child abuse at school and beyond requires a 'whole-school approach' or a 'community school approach'. Both approaches imply that in order to introduce valuable changes at school, one should not target an individual teacher or student, but include all stakeholders, i.e. school principals, teachers, students, parents, and the surrounding community (Espelage and Swearer, 2004; Swearer et al., 2010; Lewallen et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2019). In that respect the TIGER programme's ambitions are promising. Further research on this subject includes a post-intervention measurement of child abuse in targeted and non-targeted Cambodian schools in 2020.

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