



STREET-BASED CHILD SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION
IN PHNOM PENH AND SIHANOUKVILLE:
A PROFILE OF VICTIMS



Photographs: Juan Diaz/Global Humanitaria

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SPONSORED BY THE BRITISH EMBASSY, PHNOM PENH
OCTOBER 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was commissioned by Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE) with the objective of enhancing existing knowledge of street-based child sexual exploitation in Cambodia by placing focus on the *victims* (rather than the offenders) of this type of abuse. The research aimed to ascertain which children are becoming victims of street-based sexual exploitation and what factors influence their exposure to that exploitation. Research was conducted through interviews in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville with 26 child victims of street-based sexual exploitation and civil society personnel experienced in working with such children; case studies; and a literature review. The majority of children interviewed were male, reflecting APLE's experience that 80% of child victims of street-based sexual exploitation are male.

Victims of street-based child sexual exploitation were found to share certain common backgrounds and experiences:

- stressors in the family environment – alcoholism, domestic violence, single parent families, debts and migration from rural to city areas.
- low level family incomes or no incomes.
- no education or low level education among both parents and victims (enrolment and achievement levels well below the national average for Cambodian children).
- often a street working or street living lifestyle.
- peers engaging in similar high risk behaviour (100% of child victims interviewed had friends who had also been sexually exploited).

Not all child victims possessed an awareness of the concept of money in exchange for sex before they were exploited. A significant number of children (over one-third) were not aware that their relationship with a foreign national would result in sexual exploitation. This was a result of both the naiveté of the child and the use of sophisticated grooming techniques by the offender. Those children who were aware that their relationship with a foreigner would entail an exchange of sexual favours for money showed little regard for personal health issues (condom usage) despite some knowledge of the risks of sexually transmitted diseases.

Over one-third of child victims were using, or had previously used drugs on a regular basis. 70% of those were already using drugs before the time that they were first sexually exploited and subsequently used the money given to them in exchange for sexual favours to buy drugs. For these children, drug use was a significant factor enhancing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Although nearly two-thirds of children stated that they engaged in sexual acts with foreigners to earn money, it was found that this was not always the only income generation option for them. Offers of shelter, food, education and training by civil society organisations had been rejected by many in favour of short-term, high risk income generation activities.

The most significant factor in the reporting of sexual abuse to the Police was found to be the involvement of an NGO who assisted the children in making their complaint. Without this NGO involvement, the vast majority of complaints would not have been made.

Several interesting results specific to the behaviours and methods of travelling sex offenders arose during the research. Offenders were frequently short or long-term residents with privately rented homes. This has implications for child safe tourism projects focussed only on guesthouses and hotels. The offenders often engaged in sophisticated grooming techniques with both victims and their families, who may then protect them in the event of an arrest or investigation. Offenders also regularly produce child abuse images, which could be circulated throughout the country as well as internationally through sex offender rings via electronic means.

1. INTRODUCTION

Activities involving the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Cambodia usually occur within one of two categories: establishment-based sexual exploitation or street-based/opportunistic sexual exploitation. Establishment-based exploitation is facilitated through established sex-houses, and is the means favoured by Cambodian and other Asian nationals for access to children. Street-based or opportunistic exploitation is usually facilitated personally by the sex offender (or an intermediary), who approaches children directly on the streets, beaches, markets and other public areas in order to commence a relationship with them that will lead to sexual abuse. This type of exploitation is perpetrated largely by foreign tourists and residents and the majority of these sex offenders are Westerners.

Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that operates to provide protection to and legal recourse for Cambodian children who have been, or are at risk of being, victims of street-based sexual exploitation. In September 2005, APLE completed a report on street-based child sexual exploitation in Phnom Penh.¹ That report focused primarily on the behaviours and methods of offenders and sought answers to the questions of 'who, what, when, where and how?' APLE has commissioned this current report with the objective of adding to the knowledge of street-based child sexual exploitation obtained from the 2005 report by placing focus on the *victims* of this type of abuse in both Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville and addressing the issues of 'who' and 'why' from the perspective of those victims.

In doing so, APLE recognises that for the Cambodian government, NGOs and other organisations to effectively combat the problem of CSEC, it is necessary that an understanding exists of both the supply and demand elements of the street-based exploitation phenomenon. Although not always operating efficiently, legislation, law enforcement and judicial systems are in place in Cambodia to combat child sex offenders who represent the 'demand' factor. Substantial amounts of information are available which provide explanations of the psychology of child sex offenders and the methods and means they employ. However, little data exists about the motivations and rationales of behaviours from victims on the supply side. The limited data which is available tends to focus on establishment-based exploitation, dealing with children in brothels or children trafficked for the purpose of sexual labour. This report seeks answers to the following issues in an attempt to fill the knowledge void:

- Who are the child victims of street-based sexual exploitation?
- What factors influenced their exposure to sexual abuse?

By understanding the backgrounds, behaviours and circumstances of victims of street-based child sexual exploitation, social services and rehabilitation techniques can be tailored to provide the necessary support and assistance required for either their reintegration into the community or alternative support. Preventative measures can be put in place to protect those children who are vulnerable to the risk of street-based sexual exploitation. This

¹ Caroline Grillot, 'Street Pedophilia in Cambodia – A survey on Phnom Penh's suspects and victims'. September 2005.

understanding can also assist in combating the demand side of child sexual exploitation by providing additional empirical information regarding the targets and techniques of child sex offenders, helping to improve the monitoring and investigation of those offenders.

2. METHODOLOGY

Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville were chosen as the target cities for researching the profile of child victims of street based sexual exploitation as both have APLE offices – and thus a substantial body of case studies from which to draw upon – and high incidences of street-based child sexual exploitation.

In order to obtain the information required for this report, the author conducted interviews, analysed case studies and performed a literature review.

Interviews with child victims

In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-six child victims of street-based sexual exploitation, nineteen boys and seven girls. Twenty were living in Phnom Penh (or outlying areas) and six in Sihanoukville. The majority of children interviewed were male, reflecting APLE's experience that 80% of child victims of street-based sexual exploitation are male. All children interviewed had been victims in a case or cases in which APLE was involved and the offender had been arrested.

Care was taken to interview children from a broad range of circumstances and backgrounds in order to enable the identification of common characteristics among victims.

The interviews were conducted by the expatriate author with a Cambodian social worker known to the children present at all times. Some interviews were conducted with child victims individually, others in groups of two at the request of the children, and one in the presence of a parent. Whenever possible, parental or family permission was obtained for the participation of child victims in the survey. This was not possible or practical in all cases (for example, where street children had lost all contact with their families). The nature of the interview and the intended use of its results was explained in detail to each child (and their family where appropriate). It was made clear to all children that they could refuse to answer any particular question and that at any stage they could stop the interview. One interview with a girl victim was terminated before completion as a result of the distress of the child. Children were provided with a drink or lunch, depending on the time of the interview, and were reimbursed for any travel expenses incurred as a result of attending the interview. The length of conducted interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one and a half hours.

All examples provided in this report are based on information provided from the children interviewed. All victims' names that appear in the examples have been changed in order to protect the identity of those victims.

Interviews with civil society personnel possessing expertise in street-based child sexual exploitation

Interviews were conducted with APLE personnel as well as personnel from other NGOs and civil society organisations who have extensive experience in dealing with child victims of street-based sexual exploitation. These personnel held positions ranging from social workers and child protection officers to investigators and directors. The identities of those persons providing information has been protected where the source has requested anonymity or it has been considered to be in the best interests of a child.

Case Studies

APPLE case histories involving street-based child sexual exploitation were studied in order to clarify, compare and elaborate upon results obtained from interviews. APPLE case studies outlined in this report are taken from those case histories.

Literature Review

An analysis of literature associated with child sexual exploitation in Cambodia was performed. It was discovered that very little literature exists which is specifically focussed on the issue of street-based sexual exploitation or dedicated to presenting the issues of child sexual abuse from the victims' perspectives. The majority of literature tends to focus on establishment-based sexual exploitation or trafficking for sexual purposes.

Limitations

The interviews were conducted by the expatriate author who frequently had to rely on translated answers to questions posed to child victims and NGO personnel. Accuracy of translations regarding complex issues can be difficult to verify. Further, the number of children able to be interviewed (twenty-six) was limited as a result of the sensitive nature of the questions, time constraints and ability to locate victims.

The children interviewed sometimes had difficulty remembering details with respect to specific questions and further may have created answers to questions in situations when they felt uncomfortable speaking the truth. This problem was reduced by the fact that for the majority of child victims interviewed, the case background was well known by APPLE personnel and details could be clarified or confirmed by them.

3. DEFINITIONS

Child

A child is '...every human being below the age of eighteen years'.²

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)

"[C]hildren, both male and female, engaging in sexual activities for money, profit, or any other consideration due to coercion or influence by any adult, syndicate or group."³

Travelling sex offenders

Travelling sex offenders are tourists or foreign residents who engage in illegal sexual activities with children in the country or countries in which they are visiting or living. Some are opportunistic offenders, who do not necessarily have a sexual preference for children but take advantage of opportunities presented to them in countries where children are easily accessible. Others have a sexual preference for children and travel for the purpose of obtaining children for sexual activities. They may repeatedly visit a particular country for such a purpose or even reside there for extended periods of time.

Street children

UNICEF defines a street child as '[a]ny 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'.⁴

A distinction can be made between three categories of street children:

- Street Living Children: children who live and sleep on the streets and have no home to return to or are unable to return to their homes.
- Street Working Children: children who spend most of their time on the streets, fending for themselves, but return home on a regular basis.
- Children from Street Families: children who live on the streets with their families.

Grooming

Grooming is the term which describes the methods and behaviours used by child sex offenders to develop a relationship of trust, control and dependence with their intended victims (and often the victims' families and communities). It is common for travelling child sex offenders in Cambodia to provide their victims with monetary support, food and shelter, gifts, holidays and education. They use the giving or withholding of rewards, in the form of gifts or attention, to create a relationship of power. Some offenders may develop a 'godfather' relationship with victims and their families, establishing the role of caring 'uncle' concerned only with the best interests of the child and his or her family. 'Grooming has the dual purpose of securing the cooperation of the victim... and of reducing the risk of

² Article 1, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns/campaign_sub_pages.asp?page=5.

⁴ Cited in Caroline Grillot, 'Street Pedophilia in Cambodia – A survey on Phnom Penh's suspects and victims'. September 2005, p14.

discovery or disclosure by creating an atmosphere of normality and acceptance.¹⁵ By using grooming techniques, the offender is able to gain the trust of the victims and those close to him/her, ensuring freedom of access to the child and ultimately enabling the offender to sexually abuse the child with impunity.

⁵ NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Subgroup Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children, 'Semantics or Substance: Towards a shared understanding of terminology referring to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children'. January 2005, p42.

4. STREET BASED CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN CAMBODIA: AN OVERVIEW

As the number of tourists and foreign residents in Cambodia has increased over the last several years, so too has the presence of travelling sex offenders who come to the country in order to sexually exploit children. Cambodia has proven an attractive destination to child sex offenders for a variety of reasons. First, a significant percentage of the population lives below the poverty line, and as a result is more vulnerable to offers of financial support and assistance in return for sexual encounters. Second, the explosion in tourism and the number of children working in the industry and coming into close contact with foreigners (for example, selling souvenirs, acting as tour guides, or working in tourist-orientated family businesses) have created an ideal environment for foreign offenders to undertake street-based recruiting and grooming activities. Third, a culture of impunity continues to pervade the provincial divisions of law enforcement and judicial agencies, and as a result the majority of foreigner-perpetrated child sexual-abuse crimes have remained unpunished and the perpetrators free to continue their criminal actions without accountability. Cambodia has acted as a safe-haven for offenders wishing to conduct their activities free from the possibility of arrest and prosecution.

Perpetrators of street-based sexual exploitation in Cambodia use different methods to gain access to children. Some offenders will approach children directly and expressly offer money in exchange for sexual favours. Other offenders will hire an intermediary to procure a child for them from a public place. Still other offenders engage in sophisticated grooming techniques in order to gain access to a child for the purpose of abusing that child over an extended period. These grooming behaviours can extend to the child's family and local community to prevent suspicion and enable continued access. For example, the offender may initially purchase the child food and clothing over a period of time in order to gain the child's trust; he may then offer to pay for the child's education. Eventually he may build the child's family a new home and possibly move in with them, sometimes establishing a romantic relationship with a single mother in order to remove himself from suspicion.

As a result of the secretive and clandestine nature of street-based child sexual exploitation, accurate statistics on the number of victims are not available. While gathering data on establishment-based exploitation of children is difficult, it is even more so for street-based when surveys, investigations and interviews cannot be conducted in brothels or specific areas in order to estimate numbers of victims. The fluid and often transitional character of street-based exploitation means that children are not generally employed full-time as sex workers but rather are victimised on an irregular basis in numerous places. Compiling accurate statistics is difficult when children move from place to place, are abused in different locations and rarely report the abuse when it does occur. Moreover, a report commissioned by APLE in 2006 showed that street-based child sexual exploitation in Cambodia is occurring in provinces where little or no monitoring exists.⁶

⁶ Raphael Renault, 'Street-based Child Sexual Exploitation in Cambodia: An overview of 7 provinces'. Jan-Feb 2006.

For APLE cases alone, there have been 94 children in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville directly involved in those cases in which an arrest has been made (total of thirty-six arrests involving thirty-two sex offenders and four traffickers).⁷ This number represents only the children in those two cities involved in cases in which an arrest has been made. It does not take into account the many children involved in cases monitored by APLE in which an arrest has not been made nor cases which have not come to APLE's attention.

⁷ APLE's Phnom Penh headquarters has been operational since 2003. The Sihanoukville branch opened in November 2005.

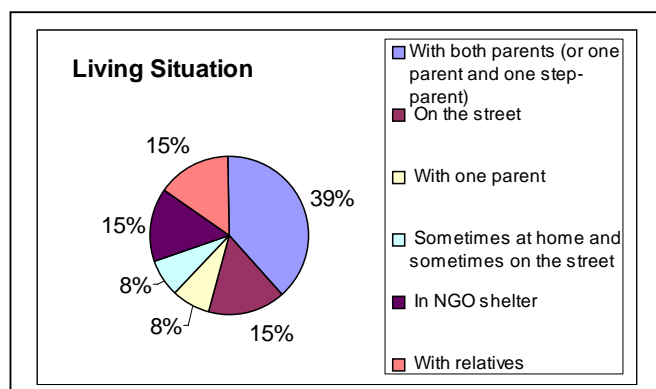
5. RESULTS and ANALYSIS

a) Gender and nationality of victims

A total of twenty-six victims of street-based child sexual exploitation were interviewed, nineteen boys and seven girls.⁸ Boy interviewees ranged in age from ten to nineteen years old (those not now considered minors having been abused in the years before reaching adulthood). Girl interviewees were aged between eleven and fourteen years old. Four of the seven girls were Vietnamese. All boy victims were Khmer. The results from the single interview that was terminated before completion have been used for this report only with respect to those questions for which answers were provided.

b) Family background

Only 50% of child victims had both birth parents still living. 11.5% were orphans. 27% of children had a step-father or step-mother. The living situation of child victims at the time of the interview varied. The largest category of children (38%) was living with both parents (or one parent and one step-parent) in the family home. Only 16% of children were living full-time on the street. This result shows the commonly held view that it is only street children who are vulnerable to street-based child sexual exploitation to be false.



With respect to parental education, 27% of children stated that their mother and their father had never received any formal education. 44% did not know whether their parents had been to school or not. 8% of children said they did not know what level their mother had reached in school but they did know that she was able to read and write. 15.4% said the same about their father.

In 31% of cases child victims had both parents (or one birth parent and one step-parent) working. 42% of children had only one parent working and 27% no parents working at all. Incomes for each parent working ranged from 80US cents to 5.00USD per day. Fathers were employed in a number of occupations, from construction and labouring to fishing, rubbish collection and moto-taxi driving. Mothers were employed selling rice and food, doing laundry or running small drink shops. Only one child out of twenty-six had a parent whose job did not involve menial labour – that child's father worked for the government as a civil

⁸ APLE case histories show that 80% of child victims of street-based sexual exploitation are male, and this influenced the percentage of male victims chosen to be interviewed for this report (73%).

servant but was separated from the mother and provided the family with monetary support only on an irregular basis.

46% of the child victims had 5 or more siblings.

50% of children stated that one or both of their parents were alcoholics. 89% stated that their parent/s were in debt. 58% experienced domestic violence in their home environment.

Of the twenty-six interviewed children, thirteen had moved with their families to Phnom Penh or Sihanoukville from another province (50%). For many children, there was a direct correlation between the time of moving from another province and the time of commencement of living and/or working on the street and drug use. A social worker from a child rights NGO in Phnom Penh⁹ who works with child victims of sexual exploitation on a regular basis stated that many of those children are from the provinces, having moved to Phnom Penh either with their families or alone as a result of factors such as famine, poor agricultural returns, and increasing land prices. He said they come to the city believing it is an easy place to make money. However, 'after time the feeling of heaven in the city turns to hell'. They beg, turn to drugs and eventually some engage in prostitution.

From these results, it can be concluded that significant factors common to many families of the child victims of street-based sexual exploitation were:

- The death of one parent or separation/divorce
- Large families with multiple siblings
- Alcoholism and domestic violence
- Debts
- Parents with no jobs or low-paying menial jobs
- Lack of education among parents
- Migration from countryside to city areas

Similar family backgrounds have been found in research conducted on establishment-based child sexual exploitation. An establishment-based survey of 57 sexually exploited or sexually abused Cambodian children in 2000 found that analogous 'common patterns' were identified in the life experiences of those children surveyed.¹⁰ Those patterns included stressors in the family environment, such as the death of one parent or domestic violence, and famine or poor environmental conditions for those from rural areas.¹¹ Further comparative research would be required to determine the differentiating factors which determine or influence the exposure of children from similar backgrounds to either establishment-based or street-based exploitation.

⁹ Interview conducted 28 August 2006.

¹⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'Sexually abused and sexually exploited youth and children in Cambodia: A qualitative assessment of their health needs and available services in selected provinces'. Publication ST/ESCAP/2073. 2000, p55.

¹¹ See also National Police of Cambodia, 'Understanding and Investigating Child Sexual Exploitation', Investigator's Manual. 2000, p26.

Example

Meng,* aged ten, moved to Sihanoukville from Battambang with his mother and eight siblings when he was eight years old. His father had been killed in a landmine accident and his mother has never worked. Meng has been working as a beggar on the streets to earn money for his mother since moving to Sihanoukville. He started sniffing glue with his street friends shortly after arriving in the town. Some nights Meng sleeps on the streets as his mother does not allow him to come home unless he has earned enough money for her. Meng was first sexually abused by a foreigner at the age of nine, when the foreigner approached him at a local petrol station late at night. Meng was later abused by another foreigner named Hans,* who was a friend of the first foreigner. Hans approached Meng late at night at the same petrol station and showed him a \$20USD note and asked Meng to accompany him to his house. Meng agreed to go with Hans so he would have money to give to his mother. Hans was arrested in April 2006 for abusing Meng and several other children, and is at this time awaiting trial.

* Names have been changed

c) Education

38% of child victims were regularly attending school at the time of the interviews. None of these children were in a Grade higher than 5, despite the fact that many were of high school age. 12% were at the time of the interview past school attendance age. 12% had never received any formal education. Of those children not currently attending school, only 15% had reached Grade 5 before dropping out.

As a whole, 46% of child victims interviewed had either never attended school or only reached a maximum of Grade 2. In comparison, it is estimated that 86.2% of children nationally are enrolled in primary school and 70.4% of them reach Grade 5.¹² The results show that school attendance rates for child victims of street-based exploitation are much lower than the national average. The children interviewed who were not currently attending school or had never attended school were more likely to be working and/or living on the street and also using drugs.

d) Drug use

38% of child victims (all of them male) were using or had previously used drugs¹³ on a regular basis. 72% of these children were street children.¹⁴ This result shows that a significant number (over a quarter) of those using drugs are children with homes. 40% of current and former drug using children had migrated with their families from provincial areas to Sihanoukville or Phnom Penh. The children bought the drugs at stalls in the markets, from drink shops and from motorbike repair shops.

70% were already using drugs before the time that they were first sexually exploited and subsequently used the money given to them in exchange for sexual favours to buy drugs.

¹² Globalis, Country Information, Cambodia. <http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/country.cfm?country=KH>.

¹³ Sniffing glue and/or taking 'yabba' (a methamphetamine substance taken by inhalation).

¹⁴ A substance use survey conducted by Mith Samlanh in 2003 found that 70.4% of Phnom Penh street children are regularly using substances: cited in Gwenaëlle Bordet, 'Street Children Profile'. July-August 2004, p20.

Even an “income” of as little as \$2 per sexual encounter is significant for a drug using child when a single purchase of a bag of glue costs only 10 to 25 US cents. Drug use was thus a significant factor enhancing the vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation and their willingness to engage in sexual conduct with foreigners in exchange for money. Drug using children can be considered ‘high-risk’ prey for sexual predators.

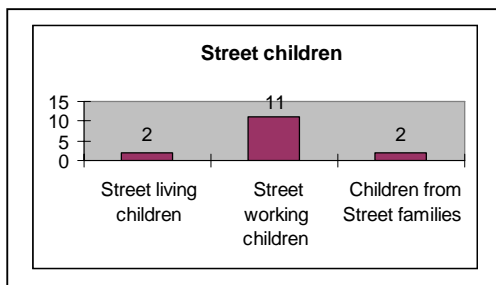
Example

Vichet* is a 16 year old boy who lives with his family (mother and six siblings) on the street in Sihanoukville. Vichet’s father is dead, having been killed by a landmine several years ago. Vichet has never attended school. He has been using drugs (glue) on a regular basis for the last three years. He has been sexually exploited by five or six foreigners, earning 10-20USD per time. He is unsure of the exact number as his memory and health has been affected by his drug use. With the money he is paid for the abuse, as well as the money he earns collecting cans, he buys drugs and food. Vichet intends to continue exchanging sexual favours for money with foreigners and has learnt not to report this abuse as it means the source of his income is taken away.

*Name has been changed

e) Street Children

Street living and street working children are extremely vulnerable to street-based sexual exploitation simply by virtue of the fact that the majority or all of their time is spent on the streets, where they are easily accessible to travelling sex offenders or intermediaries. Add to this vulnerability poverty, drug use and peers engaging in similar behaviour and they become easy prey for sexual predators.



58% of child victims were classified as street-children according to the definition provided above. The classification of street-living children (four children) includes only those who live permanently on the street and not those who occasionally sleep on the street. The four street-living children were also found to work on the street. The street-living and working children engaged in shoe-shining, begging, can collecting and bird-trapping to make money. Of the fifteen children in total working on the street, nine earned less than 1USD per day.

Example

Pich* (16 years old) has been living with his widowed mother and 3 siblings on the street in Phnom Penh since they moved from Pursat 10 years ago. Pich went to school until Grade 5 and then left school to earn money. To make an income, Pich's mother sells rice and Pich traps birds and sells them at the riverside. Pich's first sexual experience was with a foreigner when he was 14 years old and he has been sexually exploited by five or six foreigners since that time. Pich stated that a Cambodian person introduced him to those foreigners and he was paid \$5-\$10 for each encounter. Sometimes other street children and Pich's cousin were abused at the same time as Pich. Pich went with the foreigners in order to earn money and expressed his intention to continue to do so in the future.

*Name has been changed

f) Sexual exploitation**i) First sexual encounter**

The average age of child victims at the time of their first sexual encounter was 12.6 years old for boys and 11.1 years old for girls. Three of the interviewees (two boys and one girl) had their first sexual experience with a Cambodian national: the girl was raped by a family friend at the age of 6; one boy was abused by his brother at the age of 11; and the other boy had sexual relations with his girlfriend at the age of 15. For all other children (88.4%), their first sexual encounter was with a male foreign national.

ii) Access to children and initiation of contact

Access to child victims is almost always first obtained in a public place. In Phnom Penh, the following places were mentioned by child victims as the locations where foreigners and intermediaries frequently approach or gain access to children:

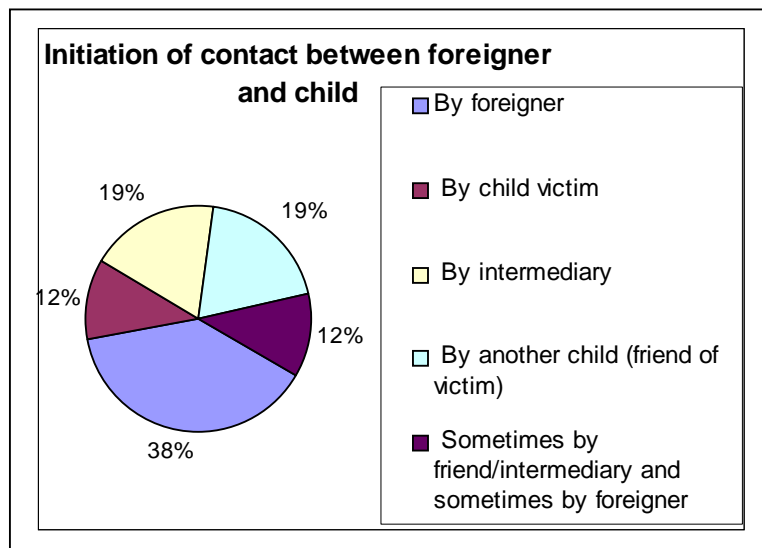
- Riverside
- In front of Royal Palace
- New Garden
- Central Market
- At rice and food stalls near markets
- Near Wat Phnom

In Sihanoukville, the child victims stated that offenders gain access to children at:

- Local petrol stations
- Beaches

In other instances, an intermediary may access children that are already known to them or known through a contact on behalf of the offender, rather than approaching children

randomly. This was found particularly to be the case with the four Vietnamese victims interviewed, who were exploited by members of their own community well known to them.



iii) Grooming

Half of the child victims interviewed were groomed by their abusers. 46% of those groomed, all male, had a godfather ('uncle') relationship with one or more of their abusers. The child sex offenders used grooming techniques such as buying food, providing shelter and taking holidays with the children to develop a relationship of trust and control, ultimately abusing that trust by sexually exploiting them. None of the children who had godfather relationships with their abusers were aware at the time the relationship began that it would ultimately lead to sex. Rather, they saw it as an opportunity to develop a relationship with a friendly foreigner who would provide them with money, gifts and attention. These children were more likely than others to report feeling sadness or pity for the foreigner when he was ultimately arrested.

During an interview with a child rights social worker in Phnom Penh, the social worker stated that children who come from a background of family violence, gambling and alcoholism are more prone to falling victim to a cycle of abuse and more open to grooming techniques. Those children are likely to demonstrate an eagerness to please with a person who shows them love and kindness as they are not receiving that kind of attention at home.¹⁵

Example

Vichet* and Douen,* both 15 years old, were abused by the same foreigner (James*) when they were 12 years old. James approached each of them near Central Market in Phnom Penh and offered to buy them food. This started a relationship during which James bought them food and clothing, allowed them to sleep in his hotel room, and took them on holidays all over the country.

¹⁵ Interview conducted 28 August 2006.

Neither Vichet nor Douen were aware that James was grooming them in order to have a sexual relationship with them. They simply thought he was a good 'godfather'. Vichet was first abused by James approximately 6 months after meeting him. For Douen, the abuse occurred after a relationship of approximately 12 months. Both times, James used the same technique to ensure the children complied with his advances. After taking them on a holiday outside of Phnom Penh to a remote province, James told the boys that if they did not have sex with him, he would leave them in the province without money to return to Phnom Penh and they would remain stranded there. Both boys were frightened and complied with his wishes. They were each paid \$10 per sexual encounter. When James was subsequently arrested for debauchery, three other boys testified alongside Vichet and Douen to similar use of grooming methods by James.

* Names have been changed

iv) Type of Abuse

The types of sexual acts perpetrated against the child victims varied. 77% were required to engage in oral sex and/or penetration with their abusers. 23% masturbated their abuser/s. Of the 77% that engaged in oral and/or penetrative sex, only 15% used condoms every time and 5% used them occasionally. This is despite the fact that 70% of the children stated they understood the notion of safe sex and its implications. A social worker from Phnom Penh explained that the children often want to keep their abuser happy (or not make them angry) and will not insist on using condoms if the offender refuses. Further, they may be paid more money for not using one.¹⁶ As the Director of a child shelter in Phnom Penh stated, 'HIV/AIDS is not important to children who do not have enough to eat'.¹⁷

80% of children had been abused by an offender in the company of other children who were also abused. 15% admitted to arranging for another child to have sex with a travelling sex offender. 100% stated that they had friends who had been sexually exploited by a travelling sex offender and 24% had siblings who had also been abused.¹⁸

v) Pornography and child abuse images

27% of the children interviewed had watched pornographic movies with an offender. Child sex offenders are known to use this technique to 'make their victims more susceptible to abuse'.¹⁹

50% stated that an offender had made child abuse images (pornographic photographs or films) of them.²⁰ They reported feeling afraid or shy while this was occurring. It is not known whether these images were produced solely for use by the offender or whether they were shared amongst sex offender networks within Cambodia and internationally through

¹⁶ Interview conducted 28 August 2006.

¹⁷ Interview conducted 29 August 2006.

¹⁸ Note: 1 of the 26 children interviewed did not answer these two questions – percentages are based on the answers of the 25 children who did.

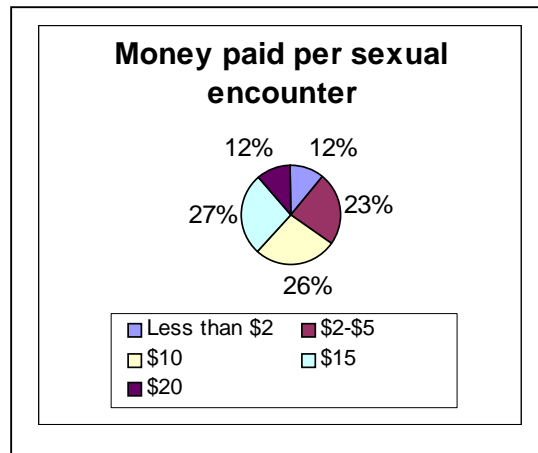
¹⁹ NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Subgroup Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children, 'Semantics or Substance: Towards a shared understanding of terminology referring to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children'. January 2005, p42.

²⁰ The possession of child abuse images is not a crime in Cambodia.

electronic means. The exchange or sale of child abuse images over the internet has increased exponentially in recent years and become a significant problem for law enforcement bodies regulating its use.²¹

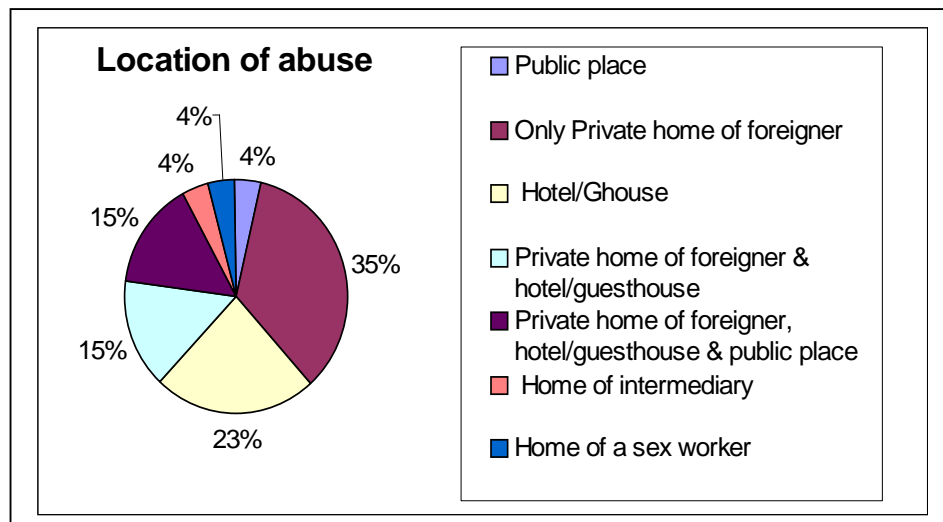
vi) Money paid per sexual encounter

The monetary amounts paid to child victims of sexual exploitation varied greatly, ranging from 50 US cents to 20 USD.



vii) Location of abuse

The results indicate that although access to children for street-based sexual exploitation is first obtained in public places, the majority of physical abuse actually occurs in the privately rented homes of foreigners.



These findings have significant implications for the work of NGOs and law enforcement bodies in combating the problem of street-based child sexual exploitation.

²¹ For example, the Internet Watch Foundation in the UK processed 23,658 reports of child abuse images found on the internet in 2005 alone. 17% of that content was traced to Asian countries: Internet Watch Foundation, 'Significant Trends 2005'. <http://www.iwf.uk.org/media>.

First, it is more convenient for an offender to take a child or multiple children to a private home than it is to a guesthouse or hotel as questions are not asked or the children denied entry. Children are able to stay in private homes for longer periods of time without the offender needing to be concerned about raising the suspicion of guesthouse or hotel staff. For example, if questioned the child might say that he or she is working in the home, performing odd jobs for the foreigner. As a consequence, abuse can be perpetrated over extended timeframes.

Second, the home environment is one in which a child can be made to feel more comfortable than in a guesthouse or hotel. Televisions, books and toys can all be used as grooming devices within the home to create a feeling of privacy, trust and happiness, and many such toys have been found during searches of offenders' private residences by Police officials.²²

Third, the use of private residences for the commission of sexual abuse acts against children allows for networks to become involved in 'sharing' children. Offenders may visit each other's homes to abuse children and manufacture child sex abuse images. The privacy of a rented home allows them the freedom to carry out these acts behind closed doors with their 'tools' (video cameras, digital cameras, sex implements) within easy reach.

Fourth, the fact that abuse is taking place so frequently in private residences indicates that these perpetrators are likely to be short to long-term residents, rather than merely tourists. As a result, they may be more familiar with Cambodian culture and practices, work or have businesses in the country, and have greater knowledge of the areas where children can be preyed upon. Their network of contacts will also be larger than that of a short-term tourist, which has implications for obtaining information on their activities (as those around them may protect them) and ensuring law enforcement action.

APPLE Case Study

Gustav* is a German national who used Vietnamese intermediaries to procure young Vietnamese girls for him and deliver the girls to his privately rented home. Gustav would sexually abuse the girls in his home and use them to create child sex abuse images. Gustav was arrested for debauchery and trafficking in August 2006 after being monitored and investigated by APPLE, who witnessed four victims being taken into his home by intermediaries. Upon his arrest and an examination of the child sex abuse images made by him, it was discovered that a second German national, Henk,* who lived less than 200 metres away from Gustav in another private residence, had also been involved in abusing girls and taking video footage of that abuse. Henk was also arrested and charged with debauchery. The victims who appeared on the child abuse images found in Gustav's apartment were not the same victims as those seen entering the apartment by APPLE investigators – demonstrating that numerous other children were also abused. Both suspects are currently awaiting trial.

*Names have been changed

²² Interview with APPLE Director, conducted 26 September 2006.

viii) Awareness

65.4% of victims stated that they agreed to have sex with the travelling sex offender/s in order to earn money.²³ 34.6% said that they were initially unaware that sex would be involved in their interaction with the offender/s, and that they had been lied to, groomed, or tricked into the situation where the foreigner was able to exploit them. By the time those children were in a position where sex was being propositioned or imposed upon them, they were either too frightened to say no or eventually agreed in exchange for money as they felt it was too late to say no.

Example

Srey Mom* (14 years old) was abused by an American national (Peter*) in Phnom Penh earlier this year. Her friend, Srey Nit (13 years old) introduced her to a 16 year old Cambodian girl, who as intermediary then introduced her to Peter. When Srey Mom was taken to the intermediary's home, she was not aware that it was for the purpose of having sex with the foreigner. Eventually Srey Mom agreed to intercourse with Peter and she, Srey Nit and another friend were sexually abused by Peter at the intermediary's home. Srey Mom was paid \$15 – from that money Srey Nit took \$2 for introducing her to the intermediary and the intermediary took \$2 for facilitating the encounter.

*Names have been changed

ix) Family involvement in, or knowledge of, sexual exploitation

All children involved in the survey denied that their parents or guardians had any knowledge of abuse at the time they were being sexually exploited, or that their parents encouraged them to develop friendships or engage in sex with foreign nationals. They claimed that their parents were unaware of the source of the income that many handed over after the abuse had taken place and money exchanged. This was initially surprising, but upon careful consideration several factors emerged which explained this result. First, it is not surprising that street living children's families would not be aware of the source of the child's income, given that contact with them is generally irregular at best, often non-existent. Second, most parents seemed to accept money from their children on a 'no questions asked' basis – that is, they happily took money from their children without any consideration as to the potential source of the funds. Parents are often simply unaware that such exploitation could actually happen to their child. A senior APLE investigator said it was his experience that when they were questioned by their parents about the source of the money, children rarely admitted the activities they had undertaken to earn it, instead stating that they had found the money or were given it by a friend.²⁴

²³ A World Vision survey of 68 children in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville in 2001 found that 88% of those children had been involved in sexual relations with foreigners and that 96% of them had done so for the money: Nuon Rithy, Yit Viriya and Laurence Gray, 'Children's Work: Adult's Play: Child Sex Tourism – The Problem in Cambodia. 2001, p8-9.

²⁴ Interview conducted 1 September 2006.

Example

Sok* is 19 years old and lives with his mother, stepfather and seven siblings. Sok's family moved from Kampong Cham to Phnom Penh to earn money and were then evicted from the city and resettled nearby in Troapang Kroasang community, just outside of Cambul (a suburb of Phnom Penh). Sok has been a drug user for four years, sniffing glue every day. Sok was abused by a foreigner at the age of 16. One day he walked past the foreigner's house in Phnom Penh and the foreigner invited him into his house to shine his shoes. For one month Sok ate, watched television and slept at the foreigner's house. After one month, the foreigner asked Sok for sex and Sok agreed in exchange for \$5USD. Sok spent this money on drugs. Sok's mother had given him permission to sleep and eat at the foreigner's house, but was not aware of the sexual exploitation until the foreigner was arrested.

*Name has been changed

Third, children may lie to protect their parents. Even when the parents are aware of or encourage the abuse, the child will deny any parental knowledge whatsoever in order to protect the family. The parents will often pretend that they don't know, or lie about their knowledge, in order to continue receiving the money. A former Director of APLE²⁵ stated that he had experienced many cases where parents who alleged they had no idea about the sexual exploitation of their children tried to protect the offender and refused to cooperate with the NGO. They also encouraged their children to defend the offender and retract allegations of abuse. This attitude is reflected in the findings of a survey conducted in Sihanoukville in 2003, when 46% of 100 adult Cambodians surveyed stated that it was ok for an adult to have sex with a child aged between 10-14 years old as long as that adult paid money to the child and/or the family of the child.²⁶ Some parents may believe that the Asian notion of reciprocal obligation between child and parent 'can extend to being sold or working in exploitative ways if necessary to assist the family'.²⁷ In other words, it is acceptable for their children to be sexually exploited as long as money is exchanged.

Example

Nga*, aged 14 and Lin*, aged 12, are sisters of Vietnamese origin who have lived in Phnom Penh for four years. In August 2006 they were removed from their home and placed in a child shelter after it was discovered that their mother had been trafficking them for sexual exploitation. The mother was arrested and confessed to providing the girls to foreigners for sex. Even after their mother's confession, both girls admitted to being abused by foreigners but denied their mother had been aware this was happening.

²⁵ Interview conducted 26 August 2006.

²⁶ Sihanoukville Response Network, 'Final Report for Project PKP/KH/7/03. April 2005.

²⁷ Glenn Miles, 'Stop Violence Against Us: A Preliminary National Research Study into the Prevalence and Perceptions of Cambodian Children to Violence Against Children in Cambodia'. Summary Report No. 2. 2005, p16.

They claimed that the information obtained by the Police was incorrect. APLE investigators had personally witnessed the mother taking the girls into the foreigner's apartment. Throughout the interview for this survey, the girls continued to deny their mother's involvement and became distressed when any mention of her role was made.

Case Study – Reported by a social worker for a child rights NGO in Phnom Penh

Three siblings (two boys aged 14 and 12 and one girl aged 9) were being sexually exploited by foreigners on a regular basis. The parents were aware this was happening and encouraged the children to participate in the exploitation as they knew it was a good source of income for the family. If the children failed to bring home enough money to the parents they were scolded, beaten and often refused entry to the family home.

An NGO intervened several times and took the children away from their parents. However, each time the siblings returned to the family home. The parents made the children feel guilty for leaving and told them that Buddhism required a child to be good to its parents. For these parents, this meant selling their children's bodies in exchange for money. The children also saw the exploitation as an opportunity to make money quickly, whereas being placed in an NGO vocational training and education centre was a long process with few short-term monetary rewards.

Despite the efforts of the NGO, the children today continue to engage in high-risk behaviour to earn money.

*Names have been changed

x) Reporting abuse

All of the children interviewed had at least once reported an instance of sexual exploitation to an NGO and/or the Police. A small number of children had taken the initiative in reporting the abuse to an NGO, who then assisted them in making a complaint to the Police. However, the majority had admitted to the abuse only after an NGO or the Police had become aware of the situation through other means. Various reasons were given for reporting the abuse:

Example One: My friend decided to complain to the Police, so I followed my friend and also complained.

Example Two: I reported the abuse to the Police because the NGO helped me to complain. If the NGO was not involved I would never have complained to the Police.

Example Three: My parents wanted me to complain so we could get civil compensation.

Example Four: I made a complaint about the foreigner because I was angry with him as he did not give me enough money.

Example Five: I complained to the Police because the foreigner had forced me to have sex with him and had done bad things to me. The NGO helped me to complain.

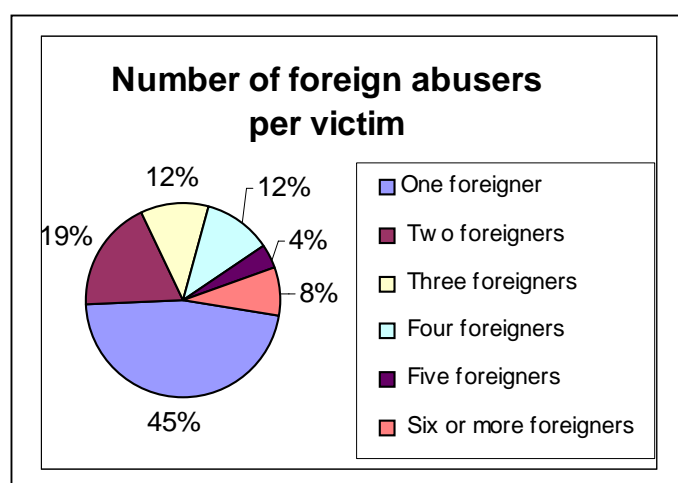
Example Six: My mother contacted the NGO to make the complaint. If she had not done this, I would not have complained.

Example Seven: Although I told the NGO about the abuse, my parents did not allow me to report this to the Police as they are afraid of the foreigner, who is a powerful man.

Example Eight: The NGO and my parents pressured me to make the complaint to the Police. If they had not done this, I would not have complained.

When asked how they felt when an offender was arrested for abusing them, 72% of the children stated that they felt happy.²⁸ 4% said they did not care. 8% said they felt sorry for the offender when he was arrested and 16% stated they were upset as the foreigner's arrest meant lost income for them. 20% said they were frightened of the Police at the time of the arrest, and were worried that they too would be arrested. An APLE Investigator explained that children are often aware that what has occurred between them and the foreigner is wrong, but are not aware that they are actually the victim. The children believe that they too will be in trouble with the authorities.²⁹ This may further help explain why children lie to protect their parents, as they may be unsure whether parental knowledge amounts to criminal responsibility.

xi) Recurring victims



16% of the child victims stated that they would continue in the future to go with foreigners for sex in exchange for money.³⁰ 1 child said she was unsure whether she would do this in the future. The Director of the child shelter in Phnom Penh believes that for recurring victims, making their own money and living a modern lifestyle in the short term is more appealing than living in a shelter and studying for a better long term future. They regard sexual exploitation as the means through which that lifestyle can be obtained.

²⁸ Note: 1 of the 26 children interviewed did not answer this question. Percentages are based on the 25 who did.

²⁹ Interview conducted 13 September 2006.

³⁰ Note: 1 of the 26 children interviewed did not answer this question. The percentage is based on the 25 who did.

Example

Ratha* is a 14 year old boy who has been sexually exploited by four or five foreigners. He was first abused when he was nine years old. Each time, either a foreigner or a Khmer 'uncle' initiated contact at the riverside in Phnom Penh. Ratha finished school in Grade One and now works helping his mother sell rice and food at her small stall near the Royal Palace. He uses drugs on a regular basis. Ratha stated that he was upset when a foreigner was arrested for abusing him as this meant he had lost valuable income (20USD per sexual encounter). Ratha stated that he intended in the future to engage in sexual intercourse with foreigners in exchange for money. He would never again report sexual exploitation by a foreigner to an NGO or the Police as this means he would not be able to obtain money from that foreigner.

*Name has been changed.

6. CONCLUSION

The results show that child victims of street-based sexual exploitation share certain common backgrounds and experiences:

- stressors in the family environment – alcoholism, domestic violence, single parent families, debts, migration from rural to city areas.
- low level family incomes or no incomes.
- no education or low level education among both parents and victims (enrolment and achievement levels well below the national average for Cambodian children).
- often a street working or street living lifestyle.
- peers engaging in similar high risk behaviour (100% of child victims interviewed had friends who had also been sexually exploited).

Not all child victims possessed an awareness of the concept of money in exchange for sex before they were exploited. A significant number of children (over one-third) were not aware that their relationship with a foreign national would result in sexual exploitation. This was a result of both the naiveté of the child and the use of sophisticated grooming techniques by the offender. Awareness of the problem of sexual exploitation by foreign nationals amongst high risk children and their families must be increased so that they are better informed of the potential dangers associated with placing unquestioning trust in the hands of an unknown foreigner.

Those children who were aware that their relationship with a foreigner would entail an exchange of sexual favours for money showed little regard for personal health issues (condom usage) despite some knowledge of the risks.

Although nearly two-thirds of children stated that they engaged in sexual acts with foreigners to earn money, this was not always the only income-generation option for them. Stories were repeatedly told by civil society personnel of child victims being given opportunities of shelter, food, education and training by civil society organisations, and then rejecting those offers in favour of short-term, high risk income generation activities. Factors such as pressure from family and friends to engage in high-risk income generation behaviour can influence this choice. For many children, particularly those using drugs and recurring victims, a sense of hopelessness regarding their future means that they do not possess a long-term outlook. They are particularly unresponsive to reintegration services as a result. This conclusion has implications for social rehabilitation and preventative services, which will have to address this problem creatively when attempting to assist children and families to develop long-term goals and healthy, safe attitudes towards earning money.

Despite the facts that many children were aware that their relationship with the foreigner was one that would be based on an exchange of money for sex, they were still willing to complain to the Police after the abuse had taken place. The most significant factor in the reporting of the abuse was the involvement of an NGO who assisted the children in making their complaint. Without this NGO involvement, the vast majority of complaints would not have been made.

The results specific to the behaviours and methods of travelling sex offenders are of interest to those law enforcement and civil society organisations working to address the 'demand' side of the exploitation phenomenon. Offenders are frequently short or long-term residents with privately rented homes. As a consequence, the focus of child-safe tourism procedures on hotels and guesthouses (considered to be the primary locations for abuse), while undoubtedly worthwhile, may need to be reassessed. Travelling sex offenders also often engage in sophisticated grooming techniques with both victims and their families, who may protect them in the event of an arrest or investigation; and they regularly produce child abuse images, which could be circulated throughout the country as well as internationally through sex offender rings via electronic means.

It can be concluded that child victims of street-based sexual exploitation are 'those that have become separated from or have been failed by the primary units of society that normally provide protection: their families and community.'³¹ They share high-risk characteristics and attitudes that can be identified, and must be considered, in order to assist in the development and implementation of preventative and post-abuse measures for their protection.

³¹ Laurence Gray, 'Children at Risk. Practical Approaches to addressing child protection issues in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam'. 2003, p13, citing: UNICEF. 'Towards Monitoring Child Protection in East Asia and the Pacific'. May 2001.

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