

ENTERTAINMENT WORKERS ARE BECOMING SMART GIRLS

In an effort to prevent trafficking of women and children, the Cambodian government announced a ban on prostitution in 2008, which resulted in a crack-down on all brothel-based services. Consequently, new establishments for non-brothel-based sex work were formed such as karaoke clubs or bars, beer gardens, snooker clubs and massage parlors.

Cambodia has a large young population now; more than 35% are aged between 10 and 24 years old. Many are migrating from rural to urban areas for better economic and education opportunities. Some young girls, in particular those with little education and no skills, struggle to find a good job when they arrive at their destination. They may end up working in a low-paid job or start as a hostess in entertainment places.

In the past few years, the entertainment industry has grown rapidly and more young women are entering into this work to survive. Some girls are victims of the virginity trade, while some voluntarily engage in entertainment work and provide sexual services in exchange for extra income. The hidden nature of sex work leaves girls more vulnerable to contracting STIs, HIV infection, exposes them to sexual violence, unplanned pregnancies or substance abuse. Some are victims of gang rape.

Sreymom, a 19 year-old girl from Takeo province, southern Cambodia decided to work as a waitress in a local restaurant when she first arrived in Phnom Penh before working in a karaoke bar. Although, she earns little money, she has to share her income with her parents to raise her 3 year-old daughter in her hometown. Accidentally, Sreymom became pregnant but she did not want to keep the baby as she could not afford to have more members joining her tiny rental room. Sreymom discussed with her friend the possibility of aborting the unwanted pregnancy. She was reluctant to go to a health facility, but she was accompanied and referred by her friend, Sokunthea who currently works as an outreach worker for the SMARTgirl programme.



SMARTgirl provides vocational training on hairdressing skills for free to SMARTgirl Club members.
Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

KEY FACTS :

- In 2008 the government banned prostitution and brothel-based services.
- The sex industry has changed rapidly to be more hidden with entertainment workers working in karaoke bars, beer gardens, night-clubs, massage parlors, and snooker clubs.
- Beer garden and karaoke bars have become popular places amongst others for trading sex.
- Since 2008 there has been a two-fold increase in the number of entertainment workers; estimated to be between 36,000 to 40,000 workers.
- Entertainment workers are at risk of contracting STIs and HIV/AIDS and are extremely vulnerable to sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and drug use.
- The Behavioral Sentinel Surveillance 2013 by NCHADS revealed that the abortion rate among entertainment workers is 77% and there is high un-met need for contraception.
- The patterns of condom use with paid sex partners and sweethearts are low and declining.
- The age to enter sex or entertainment work has been decreasing.

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