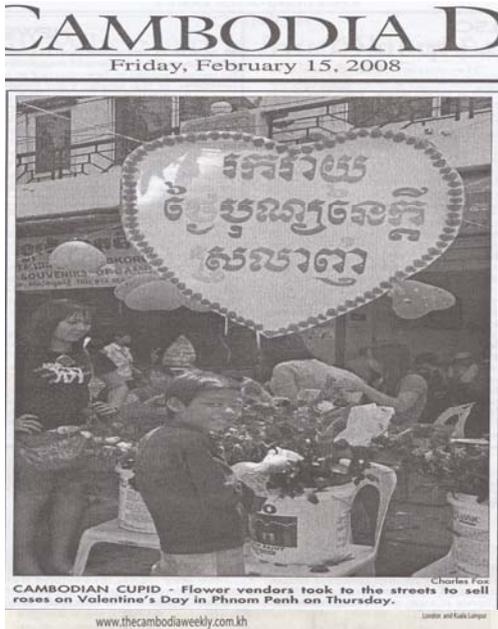


YOUNG PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT VALENTINE'S DAY IN PHNOM PENH IN 2008 (A Qualitative Study)



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Phnom Penh, January 2009**

Abstract

This study explores a new phenomenon related to love and sexual relationships among young couples on Valentine's Day, and aims to understand their perspectives about their parents' attitudes toward Valentine's Day. 16 young people in Phnom Penh aged 15-24 years old, 11 males and 5 females, completed in-depth interviews with peer interviewers about what they did with their sweethearts on the recent Valentine's Day. The transcripts were analyzed in relation to the objectives.

The findings reveal that young couples did not understand clearly the origins of Valentine's Day, now popular among wealthier young people in urban areas of Cambodia, but they recognized that it comes from foreign cultures via the media. The results show that more than half of the interviewees in the study were happy to engage in sex on that day and at least a few of them lost their virginity. Although most reported using condoms, reflecting increased awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues, several instances of coercion were also reported. There seems to be a general lack of parental understanding about their children's sexual activity and a corresponding lack of open communication.

Behavior change with regard to condom use is complicated by the delicacies around expectations of trust between sweethearts. Understanding about sexual rights is less clear however, with several of the interviewees reporting they pressured or felt pressure to engage in sex on that day.

Attention should be given to issues around sexual consent, and SRH and HIV programs among young people should target interventions before and on Valentine's Day in accordance with this study's findings.

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List of Abbreviations and Glossary of Khmer Terms

List of Abbreviations:

AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BSS:	Behavioral Sentinel Survey
CDHS:	Cambodian Demographic Health Survey
EU:	European Unions
FHI:	Family Health International
FSW:	Female Sex Worker
GAD/C:	Gender and Development for Cambodia
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSS:	HIV Sero-surveillance Survey
KYA:	Khmer Youth Association
MOEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
NCHADS:	National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology, and STDs.
NGO:	Non-Government Organization
PE:	Peer Ethnographic
PER:	Peer Ethnographic Researcher
PS:	Playing Safe Project
PSI:	Population Services International
RHAC:	Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia
RHIYA:	Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia.
SRH:	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STD:	Sexually transmitted disease
STI:	Sexually transmitted infection
SW:	Sex Worker
TASK:	Trotrug Ning Akpiwat Sokhapeap Neak Kre Kror (Support and develop the poor's health)
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA:	United Nation Population Fund
UNICEF:	United Nation Children's Fund
WAC:	Womyn's Agenda for Change
WHO:	World Health Organization
YCC:	Youth Council of Cambodia

Glossary of Khmer Terms:

Bak Khaeng: Around 10 km from Phnom Penh on the No. 6A road.

Bauk/bowk/baowk (Gang rape) – known colloquially as *bauk* (Khmer for ‘plus’).

Bauk in a slang terms:

1. *Bauk* generally occurs after one (or two) youth(s) negotiate a price with a sex worker, or solicit a woman’s affection and arrange a proposed destination for sexual intercourse.
2. Then the woman is taken to a hotel or guest-house, where numerous other young men are waiting (or will soon arrive).
3. The youths coerce the woman into having sex with them all without permission, often accompanied by violence.
4. Almost all of the young men say that it is not rape because they have already paid for sex.¹

Kean Svay: Around 15 km from Phnom Penh on road No. 1

Khmer: Cambodian people and language

Ktey: Man whose character is feminine coquettish.

Mahop-del-ker: Similar to food that has already been eaten. Refers to a young man mocking a woman who has lost her virginity and was abandoned and teased by his friend.

Nhy: [female word for animal] a man whose is his character is feminine, coquettish.

Preak Leap: Around 5 Km from Phnom Penh on the No. 6A road.

Tea Kouch shop: Chinese bubble tea shop.

Psar Thmei: “New market” but often referred to as the Central Market in Phnom Penh.

Wat Phnom: The name of a hill in Phnom Penh.

¹ Wilkinson, D.J., and Fletcher, G. (2002). *Sweetheart Relationship in Cambodia: Love, Sex & Condoms in the time of HIV*, Phnom Penh: PSI.

Bearup, L.S. (2003). *Paupers and Princlings : Youth Attitudes Toward Gangs, Violence, Rape, Drugs, and Theft*. Phnom Penh: GAD/C.

Soprach, T. (2004). *GANG RAPE: The Perspective of Moto-Taxi Drivers across Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Playing Safe Project, CARE Cambodia, EU/UNFPA.

Acknowledgements

This research has been undertaken by Tong Soprach, a Cambodian freelance consultant, who graduated from the University of Cambodia in 2008 with a Master Degree in Public Health. He has 10 years experience, including 5 years working with youth on gender and other relevant issues. This comprised 2 years with GAD/C and 3 years with CARE in sexual and reproductive health among young people. He has completed studies on the behavior of young people both independently and while working for these organizations.

- **Primary researcher (2003):** *Paupers and Princlings: Youth Attitudes Toward Gangs, Violence, Rape, Drugs, and Theft*. Phnom Penh: GAD/C.
- **Author (2004):** *GANG RAPE: The Perspective of Moto-Taxi Drivers across Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Playing Safe Project, CARE Cambodia, EU/UNFPA.
- **Paper Co-author (2005):** *Youth Gang Rape in Phnom Penh*. SEX WITHOUT CONSENT: Young People in Developing countries. London/New York: Zed Book. pp. 158-168.
- **Coordination and Analysis (2006):** *Experiences and Changes in Sex, Relationships and RH Among Young Urban Men*, Phnom Penh: PS/CARE/KYA/EU/UNFPA.
- **Author (2008):** *The Impact of Premarital Sex Among Young People in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: University of Cambodia.

The researcher designed this Valentine's Day study with advice from David Wilkinson. Previously, the researcher thought that this study would be a part of his Masters thesis however due to time constraints, this was not possible. The researcher talked to several academics who gave some comments and advice.

Ultimately, the researcher decided to finalize the study report with contributions from youth research volunteers who were former peer educators in the 2003-2006 Playing Safe Project/CARE/KYA/EU/UNFPA in Phnom Penh. The peer ethnographic researchers for this study received technical assistance from the researcher. While, the researcher received from academics and friends in the form of comments and feedback and English editing of the report.

For this Valentine's Day study the researcher used his own resources such as funds, materials and time.

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No.	Name	Sex	Age	Position	University/Organization
1.	Sary Rottana	F	20	Student	Phnom Penh International University
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3.	Ngeth Puthik	M	22	Student	Panhasastra University of Cambodia
4.	Phork Phirom	M	24	Student	National Institute of Education
5.	Long Marine	M	23	Student	Institute of Foreign Languages

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I would be grateful for any feedback from you.

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Phnom Penh, Cambodia

I. Introduction

1.1. Background of the research

Cambodia's socio-economy changed from being a socialist regime to being capitalist in the 1990s.² Over the last one-and-a-half decades, Cambodia has achieved high rates of economic growth and a rise in national living standards between the first national household survey in 1993/4 and the most recent survey in 2004.³ Annual GDP growth averaged 8.4 percent per annum over 1994-2006.⁴ The Inter-census 2004 reports people then in the largest cohort aged 10-19 (26.4 per cent)⁵ and this is the group the researcher chose for this study, now they are 14-23 years of age. This population is experiencing rapid change both emotionally and physically, and many individuals in this age group get involved in high risk activities such as sexual relationships. In certain respects, some legal standards do draw a line between a child and an adult but legal marriage is allowed at the age 18 for women and 20 for men.⁶ A recent national study indicated that men marry at a median age of 22.1 and initiate sex just before marriage, at a median age of 21.5; women generally begin having sexual intercourse at about the same time as their first marriage, at a median age of 20.4.⁷

There are varying opinions as to the origin of Valentine's Day. Some experts state that it originated from St. Valentine, a Roman who was martyred for refusing to give up Christianity. He died on February 14, 269 A.D., the same day that has been devoted to love. Gradually, February 14 has become a date to exchange love messages and St. Valentine has become the patron saint of lovers. The date was marked by sending poems and simple gifts such as flowers.⁸ St. Valentine's Day is now a day for sweethearts. It is the day that you show your friend or loved one that you care.⁹

²Tarr, C.M. (1996b). *People in Cambodia don't talk about sex, they simply do it:*

A study of the Social and Contextual Factors Affecting Risk-Related Sexual Behavior among Young Cambodians. Phnom Penh: University of Fine Arts. p. 68.

³ World Bank. (2007). *Cambodian Sharing Growth: Equity and Development Report 2007.* Phnom Penh. p. ii

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1.

⁵ NIS. (2004). *Cambodian Inter-censal Population Survey 2004, General Report,* Phnom Penh: MOP. p. 13

⁶ ក្រឹត្យក្រមប្រឹក្សារដ្ឋនៃរដ្ឋកម្ពុជា (ឆ្នាំ១៩៨៩) ច្បាប់ស្តីពីអាពាហ៍ពិពាហ៍ មាត្រាទី៥ ជំពូក២ ត្រូវបានដកស្រង់ចេញពីសៀវភៅកម្រង

ឯកសារច្បាប់ បោះពុម្ពលើកទី ៣ (ឆ្នាំ២០០១) នៃការិយាល័យឧត្តមស្នងការ អង្គការសហប្រជាជាតិ ទទួលបន្ទុកសិទ្ធិមនុស្សប្រចាំកម្ពុជា ធ្វើនៅភ្នំពេញ។ ទំព័រទី ៦៤៤ ។

Degree of State Councils of Cambodian State (1989). *Marital Law, Article 5, Chapter 2.* Cited by 3rd edition Legal Document Braid. (2001), United Nations Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Phnom Penh. p. 644.

⁷ National Institute of Public Health and National Institute of Statistics. (2006). *Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) 2005.* Phnom Penh, Cambodia. p. 101.

⁸ Retrieved February 12, 2008 from http://www.pictureframes.co.uk/pages/saint_valentine.htm

⁹ Retrieved February 12, 2008 from <http://www.history.com/content/valentine/history-of-valentine-s-day>

Valentine's Day is acknowledged throughout in the world. Valentine's Day in Cambodia has only recently taken off especially among young teenagers who buy and give flowers, gifts and cards to each others, and hang out with their sweethearts or friends in the towns.¹⁰ Generally young men in Cambodia have more of an opportunity to hang out in groups and to socialize than young women who stay at home to do house work. Young women have a chance to hang out during the Khmer New Year and Water Festivals etc.¹¹ Young Cambodians are being introduced to notions of individuality and materialism, and are experiencing a greater level of urban wealth and sexual freedom than ever before.¹²

1.2. Statement of Problem

Cambodia is recognized for its success in combating HIV and AIDS. It is estimated that the prevalence rate among adults, aged 15 to 49 years, declined from 1.2% in 2003 to 0.9% in 2006.¹³ The 100% condom use program is playing an important role in the reduction of HIV prevalence. More men in the sentinel groups reported sex with sweethearts than in the previous years of Behavioral Sentinel Survey and condom use with sweethearts is on the rise. However, condom use with sweethearts remained low.¹⁴ STI prevalence is the same as in 2001 despite national and multilateral efforts to increase female sex workers' access to STI prevention and care services.¹⁵ Tarr's study strongly suggested that we ignore other contexts where young people, including young, unmarried females, are involved in risk-related sexual behavior.¹⁶ New opportunities and greater freedoms for young people appear to have resulted in changing social norms as well, with young men turning to sweethearts rather than paid partners for sexual relationships.¹⁷ Unsafe abortion in Cambodia remains one of the most

¹⁰ "...Meeting with a few young men, in the front of Preah Monivong high school in town of Battambang province, who are buying flowers for their girl who are classmates to express their love. At the evening, there were a traffic jams along the Sankae river because young people bought flowers on the streets." Kranhong. (2008, Feb. 15). This Valentine's Day There Were Not A Group of Students Who Sold Flower To Support Orphanages. *Reak Smey Kampchea*, p. 2b.

¹¹ Wallquist, L. (2002). *Youth in Cambodia: Organizations, Activities and Policies*. Phnom Penh: Forum Syd. p. 10.

¹² Fordham, G. (2003). *Adolescent Reproductive Health in Cambodia: Status Policies, Programmes and Issues*. Phnom Penh: POLICY Project. p. 3. Retrived December 23, 2008 from http://www.policyproject.com/pubs/countryreports/ARH_Cambodia.pdf

¹³ NCHADS. (2007, June 28). *Press release: Government announces official HIV prevalence rate*. Retrieved November 2, 2007 from <http://www.nchads.org/pressrelease/28-06-07%20en.pdf>

¹⁴ NCHADS. (2003). *Behavioral Sentinel Survey (BSS) V:SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG URBAN SENTINEL GROUPS, CAMBODIA 2001*. Phnom Penh: MOH. p. 45. Retrieved February 12, 2008 from <http://www.nchads.org/Publication/BSS/BSS2001.PDF>

¹⁵ NCHADS. (2008). *2005 Cambodian STI Prevalence Survey: Integrated Biological and Behavioral Survey*. Phnom Penh: MoH. p. 44. Retrieved February 12, 2008 from <http://www.nchads.org/Publication/SSS/SSS%202005.pdf>

¹⁶ Tarr, C.M. (1996b). *Op. cit.*, p. 2

¹⁷ Wilkinson, D.J. and Fletcher, G. (2002). *Sweetheart Relationship in Cambodia: Love, Sex & Condoms in the time of HIV*, Phnom Penh: PSI. p.1

common causes of maternal death (20-29%).¹⁸ A quantitative study, conducted by Assumption University in Bangkok, stated that one fifth of teenagers surveyed will have sex on Valentine's Day.¹⁹ A panel discussion on sexuality among young people on Valentine's Day in Phnom Penh organized by the NGO, People Health Development Association, raised questions about risky sexual activity of young people on Valentine's Day, and possible negative impacts.²⁰ However there was no research available about this. This current study was therefore designed to seek to answer the research question:

Were young people involved in sexual relationships on Valentine's Day in Phnom Penh?

1.3. The Objective of the Study

Key objectives of the Study are:

- To explore a new phenomenon which relates to love and sexual relationships among young couples on Valentine's Day;
- To understand young people's perspectives about their parents' attitudes toward Valentine's Day.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This qualitative study was completed with a small sample of young people, who spoke very openly about their sexual relationships on Valentine's Day 2008. These findings and recommendations are given to stakeholders such as local authorities, media, parents, and sexual and reproductive health programmers who can design interventions targeting Valentine's Day, and young people more widely. It is also a guide for researchers to design quantitative studies in more detail about the sexual behavior of young people. These findings will inform young people and help them to understand their sexual behavior in relation to this event.

1.5. Scope and Limitation of the Study

Time Constraint:

This research was inspired by an article published on February 11, 2008 of a quantitative

¹⁸ WHO. (2004). *Unsafe abortion: Global and Regional Estimated of the Incidence of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2000*. Geneva. Cited by MoH. (2006). National Strategic for Reproductive and Sexual Health in Cambodia (2006-2010). Phnom Penh. p. 7-8

¹⁹ Ann. (2008, Feb. 11). One fifth of teenagers will have sex on Saint Valentine's day in Bang Kok. *Nation*, Retrieved February 12, 2008 from <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20080211-49118.html>

²⁰ Chansy, C. (2008, Feb. 15). Panel Tells Youths To Use Valentine's Day Caution. *Cambodia Daily*, p. 20.

study on teenagers' sexual behavior conducted by Assumption University in Bangkok on Valentine's Day. This research is related to the current researcher's interest and topics explored in his previous studies. The researcher reviewed previous studies and methodologies, and designed questionnaires, and due to time constraints recruited Peer Ethnographic Researchers as research volunteers who were also ex-peer educators of the Playing Safe Project. This report has taken time to produce as it has depended on the researcher's ability to dedicate time to its production around work demands. However he has attempted to finish it before Valentine's Day.

Financial Constraint:

This study was supported by the researcher's own budget derived from private consultancies. Hence, the budget was limited and the researcher was not able to hire professionals or highly qualified researchers as PERs for this study.

Semi-structured questions were designed including informed consent

In the semi-structured questionnaire, the researcher explored broad ideas and explained the objective of the study. Informed consent was obtained verbally, and the participant was reassured that all identifying information would be kept confidential.

PERs Training:

No PER training was necessary, the researcher assumed that all PERs were well versed in Peer Ethnographic Research as all had been peer trainers and peer educators on sexual and reproductive health in the Playing Safe Project; a partnership between CARE International and KYA. They were trained on how to collect information from their peers and report to the project, and almost all of them were trained in PE Research and Most Significant Change methodologies.

PERs Shared Lessons Learnt After Collecting Data:

During observation on Valentine's Day, the researcher was at Casa club and met a young man who was with his girl friend. He happily gave his phone number, and two days later, the researcher called and was able to conduct an in-depth interview with the young man by telephone. This was the only telephone interview conducted.

Two of the 18 observations were discarded as a PER allowed her sister to assist in conducting in-depth interviews with two respondents. Hence, the total number of interviews is 16.

PERs confirmed a few interviews by telephone. One male PER said that it was a bit difficult to make an appointment with an interviewee. A female PER said that it was very hard to ask a young female about sexual relationships and experiences because it took time to build enough trust if they didn't previously know each other. The female PER thought that it was much easier for males because it explored a common behavior. Two interviewees complained that it took a long time to gather the information needed.

Translation:

As English is a second language for the researcher, he tried to translate all the data collected from Khmer into English. Translation between Khmer and English is always problematic and it's easy to lose the meaning. In order to avoid this problem, the researcher tried to spend time with native English speakers to clarify statements.

1.6. Definitions of key terms

Songsar: A term, according to Khmer culture, used for a woman who has already been engaged. Generally speaking, it is a woman who has been in a relationship. Nowadays, this term is used to refer to a sexual relationship and [only] 25% lead to marriage. [*Male student*]²¹

Songsar: This is the term used to address the man with whom we have mutual love. Generally speaking, when the term *songsar* is used, marriage is sometimes possible and not. [*Female student*]²²

Songsar for sweetheart/*Mith Pros* for boyfriend/*Mith Srey* for girlfriend.²³

The concept of “trust” or “trustworthiness”: ... describes a quality of relationship with their partner. “This includes: faithfulness, meeting through family or friends, passing informal assessments, social status, employment, financial support, avoiding bars, appearance, and virginity. It is important to note that youth appear to evaluate partners on a combination of traits in order to deem partners trustworthy. Although youth use criteria to judge trust, they seem to overlook other criteria that could further decrease their risk for STIs/HIV.”²⁴

Non-consensual sex concept: includes activities such as attempted rape, unwanted touching or fondling/molestation, non-contact forms of abuse such as verbal harassment, forced viewing of pornography, flashing, assault, forced sex...etc.²⁵

²¹ Wilkinson, D.J. and Fletcher, *Op cit.*, p. 9.

²² *Ibid.* p. 10

²³ The researcher decides to use all these words are the same meaning for this study.

²⁴ Longfield, K., Klein, M. and Berman, J. (2002). *Working Paper No. 51: Criteria for trust and how trust affects sexual decision-making among youth*, Washington, DC: PSI Research Division, p. 5. Retrieved December 24, 2008 from <http://www.psi.org/research/wp/WP51.pdf>

²⁵ Jejeebhoy, J.S. and Bott, S. (2003). *South & East Asia: Non-consensual sexual experiences of young people: A review of the evidence from developing countries*, No.16. New Delhi: Population Council. pp. v-3.

II. Literature Review of Previous Studies of Sexual Behavior in Cambodia

Western culture assumes equity between the sexes and an equal right to choose his or her partner for premarital sex. Western culture is perceived as individualized and independent, and so men and women are thought to have equal opportunity to do what they want. Meanwhile, some practicing Christians will wait until they get married and are virgins when they are married and remain faithful to their spouse.²⁶ In the United States, teen pregnancy rates have declined sharply since 1991 but remain high compared to other industrialized nations. Nearly 1 million girls aged 15 to 19 years old become pregnant yearly, or about 20 percent of sexually active females in that age group. Most of the pregnancies were unplanned and young mothers are more likely to quit school, require public assistance and live in poverty.²⁷

While the Assumption University teenage sexual behavior survey covered 2,384 teenagers in Bangkok in 2008, it showed that one fifth of teenagers would likely end up having sex and about 15.4 per cent had previous sexual experiences. Some 58.8 per cent of others said that they practiced safe sex sometimes while up to 21.1 per cent had never used condoms before.²⁸

The WHO released new findings of an estimated 42 million induced abortions among women aged 15-44 years old in 2003, 48% of all abortions worldwide were unsafe, and more than 97% of all unsafe abortions were in developing countries.²⁹ Unsafe abortions were associated with increasing maternal mortality rates among women aged 15-49 years in Cambodia 472 deaths per 100,000 live births.³⁰ Meanwhile, the WHO estimated the abortion mortality rate in Cambodia as 130/100,000 per live births. 45% of abortions took place at home.³¹ This issue was personalized by the experience of a couple of young people who had sex before marriage, the young woman became pregnant and had an unsafe abortion as a result “My wedding day ... the day my fiancée died.” demonstrates the danger of unsafe abortions.³²

²⁶ Soprach, T. (2008). *The Impact of Premarital Sex Among Young People in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: University of Cambodia. p. 8.

²⁷ Stern, A. (2008, November 3). Study Links Teen Pregnancy To Sexy TV Shows in US. *Reuters*. Retrieved December 10, 2008 from <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSTRE4A20HL20081103>

²⁸ Ann. (2008, Feb. 11). *Op cit.*

²⁹ Sedgh, G. et al (2007, October 13). Induced Abortion: Estimated Rates and Trends Worldwide. *Lancet*, Vol. 370, p. 1338

³⁰ CDHS 2005, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 76.

³² Cambodian Midwives' Association. (1999). Cited by Gender Watch No. 4 (2001). “My wedding day ... the day my fiancée died”. Phnom Penh: GAD/C. p. 2

One case deals with a girl who tried to speak out about an experience in which she was subject to non-consensual sex by her *sangsar* because she trusted him and then her '*sangsar*' abandoned her. The 17 year old first had sex with her boyfriend at 15 years old, this is what she described:

*'I found out that my boyfriend was not honest with me, he only wanted to sleep with me for pleasure...at first I refused his sexual advances and he became quite violent. Actually he raped me... however, he persisted, taking off my shirt completely. He was trying to penetrate me...we made love, there was a trace of blood and I was very sore afterwards. Not long after this he abandoned me.'*³³

According to the Cambodian socio-cultural factors, if her '*sangsar*' speaks openly about this to his friends or other people about breaking up after having sex, she would be judged as '*mahop-del-ker*'. This euphemism refers to foods which have been eaten to describe women who have already had sex and that no one then wants to marry. While conducting research for her PhD, Heidi Hoefinger (2008) shared with me an article she wrote entitled, 'Self-Harming Among the Broken-Hearted in Cambodia,' in which she found that some young women who had been involved in intimate sexual relations with both their Cambodian and/or foreign boyfriends had either self-harmed themselves, or even attempted suicide, by cutting their wrists or overdosing on medicine after the boyfriends cheated on them or left them for another woman. She explained that this self-harming behavior was related to various factors such as depression over a 'broken-heart', pain of rejection, fear over lack of future security, complete desperation, a desire to 'hurt him back', or in some cases, depression over losing virginity to that particular partner.³⁴

Another youth study related to *bauk* found that it is not only occurring amongst sex workers but also with students. A 20 year old high school student stated:

*'For me and my friends we also use bauk with students. I just have sex with that girl like a sweetheart, two or three times. After that I call my friends to bauk her and then I break up with her.'*³⁵

³³ Tarr, C.M. (1996d). *Study of Contextual Factor Affecting Risk-Related to sexual Behavior among Young Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: University of Phnom Penh. p. 185.

³⁴ Hoefinger, H. (2008). *Self-Harming Among the Broken-Hearted in Cambodia*. Unpublished manuscript. Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Correspondence: h.hoefinger@gold.ac.uk

³⁵ Bearup, L. S. (2003). *Paupers and Princelings: Youth Attitudes Toward Gangs, Violence, Rape, Drugs, and Theft*. Phnom Penh: GAD/C. p. 91.

The 'bauk' phenomenon has also become popular and common among the young male generation. This was first described in 2002 in peer ethnographic research and focus group discussions among university male students. They stated that 'bauk was common among their peers.'³⁶ In addition, many sex workers have suffered sexual abuse and gang rape (*bauk*). As Serei Mon, a 17 year old sex worker who was a shy country girl described:

*'I have been gang-raped more times than I can remember, around 20 times... Those boys swore, slapped kicked me. They told me that they had paid the full price and they could do whatever they wanted.'*³⁷

Recently, PSI and FHI study on 'let's go for a walk' stated that many men view sweethearts, including sweethearts who are non-brothel-based entertainment workers, as safe (or at least safer). Other men, who have begun to perceive sweethearts that are beer promoters or karaoke workers to be unsafe, but perceive virgins, students, and women from the countryside as safe. So long as men's sex-seeking focus is on finding safer partners with whom they believe they do not need to use condoms, the search will go on.³⁸

Previous quantitative studies related to premarital sex among young people aged between 15 and 24 years (1846 respondents agreed to answer questions related to sexual behavior). This showed 34.3% of them had had sexual intercourse, while 28.5% of single men reported that they have had sex compared to only 1.0% of unmarried women. This study also reported that 12.2% of respondents knew that *bowk* (= *bauk*) meant gang rape, with urban youth more likely to say that *bowk* was gang rape (30.0%) than young rural people were (5.7%).³⁹ A Cambodian National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (11-18 years & n = 9,388) indicated that 148 young people had had sex and 32.4% of them never used condoms, and a third personally knew young men involved in gang rape *baowk* (*bauk*).⁴⁰ Males can seek sexual pleasure without being subject to a wide range of social sanctions. Females are also thought of being able to seek sexual pleasure, but they do not have the opportunity to hang out and they cannot find sexual services. In a survey of moto-taxi drivers,⁴¹ 72.6% had heard of *bauk* incidents,

³⁶ Wilkinson, D. J and Fletcher, G, Op. cit., p. 30.

³⁷ Doyle, K. and Samean, Y. (2003, April 19-20). Youth of Today: Gang Rape Has Become the Sport of the Young Generation. *Cambodia Daily*, p. 1.

³⁸ Smith, R. (2007). *Let's Go for a Walk: Sexual Decision-Making among Clients of Female Entertainment Service Workers in Phnom Penh*. Phnom Penh: PSI and FHI, p. 26.

³⁹ Ramage, I. (2004). *Cambodia Baseline Survey*. Phnom Penh: RHIYA Project, EU/UNFPA. pp. 70-78.

⁴⁰ Sunran, K. (2004). *Cambodia National: Youth Risk (11-18 years) Behaviour Survey*. Phnom Penh: MoEYS, UNICEF & UNESCO. pp. 5-7.

⁴¹ Soprach, T. (2004). *GANG RAPE: The Perspective of Moto-Taxi Drivers across Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Playing Safe Project, CARE Cambodia, EU/UNFPA. p. 19.

and knew of *steav* who were involved in *bauk*. This study interviewed 192 moto-taxi drivers who worked at night time in the front of bars, karaoke clubs and brothels, and early morning in the front of hotels and hotels and guest houses in each of 20 provinces and 4 cities other than Phnom Penh. In addition, another youth study in Phnom Penh stated that a massive 60% of male university student knew others who have been involved in *bauk*.⁴²

Conservative parents of young Cambodians who wish to preserve Khmer Culture feel that most young Cambodians are out of control and ignore all cultural conditions. A 67 year old rural peasant male expresses his sentiments:

*'Today children have no respect for the teacher or the monks ... but as for sexual knowledge, particularly associated with sexual activity, young people learn from one another. If one of my sons were to get an unmarried girl pregnant, I would disown him if he refused to get married or paid some form of monetary compensation to her family ... it is better to disown such a child.'*⁴³

RHIYA project recently completed a qualitative study which included new generation parent's opinions on premarital sex. A 48 year old married man in Phnom Penh stated:

*'Parents will not allow their daughter to date before marriage. However, in terms of equal rights this is not correct. Girls need to have sex as well. In Khmer tradition, this may not be correct, but in terms of equal rights, men and women should be given the same treatment. We can provide the girls with training and some knowledge on how to protect themselves if they wanted to have sex, like using condoms and contraceptives.'*⁴⁴

III. Methodology

3.1. Peer Ethnographic Research Qualitative Method

This qualitative study focused on young premarital couples aged 15-24 who hung out in Phnom Penh on Valentine's Day. This PE Research followed the two successful methods of

⁴² Bearup, L. S., *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴³ Tarr, C. M. (1996b), *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁴⁴ Vuthy, B. (2006). *RHIYA Cambodia Endline Qualitative Survey*. Phnom Penh: EU/UNFPA. p. 47

the PSI Peer Ethnographic Research on sexual behavior among university male students and sex workers,⁴⁵ and young male middle-class in Phnom Penh.⁴⁶

Observational work that attempts to describe a whole people is referred to as ethnography. Ethnographic studies of specific cultural groups have been collected together to form an extensive collection of ethnographies started in the late 1930s titled the Human Relations Areas Files.⁴⁷ The Peer Ethnographic approach involves training members of a particular social group or social network to become peer ethnographic researchers (PERs) (Hawkins & Price 2000a, 2000b). The term 'peer', as used in this tool, refers to people who are members of the same social group and share the same social networks, such as friends, work-mates, school-mates, people of a similar age, or members of a kin group or neighborhood group. They thus already have established relationships with the individuals they select to interview. The method is based upon an anthropological approach to research, in which a relationship of trust is built up between the community and the PERs.⁴⁸ PERs carry out a series of in-depth interviews individually with a small sample of key informants identified from their peer network.

3.2. Peer Ethnographic Research Training

The PERs were volunteers who were formerly peer trainers and peer educators for the Playing Safe Project, a partnership between CARE International and KYA. They were provided training on sexual and reproductive health, and technical assistance on how to collect data effectively and have had experience in these issues with their peer group. However, the researcher tried to spend at least three hours with each PER to explain the objectives of the study, to answer questions and to building an understanding of the interviewee and pre-test research questions (*See appendix 1*).

3.3. Data collection

This PE Research technique was divided into two steps: observation and field interviews including the recording of interviewees' behavior.

⁴⁵ Wilkinson, D. J and Fletcher, G, *Op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁶ Hayden, R. (2006). *Young Men Like Us: Experiences and Changes in Sex, Relationships and Reproductive Health among Young, Urban Cambodian Men*. Phnom Penh: Peer Ethnographic Research on Urban Male Sexual Behaviour. Playing Safe Project, CARE Cambodia, KYA, EU/UNFPA. p. 16.

⁴⁷ Baker, L.T. (1994). *Doing Social Research*. California State University, San Marcos: McGraw-Hill, Inc. p. 237

⁴⁸ Wilkinson, D. J and Fletcher, G, *Op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

- Observation:

All PERs and the researcher were allowed to observe how their peers got along with their sweetheart and other young people's activities in Phnom Penh on Valentine's Day, 14th February 2008. Subsequently, participants were asked for their telephone numbers or made an appointment for an interview a week after the event.

- Field Interview:

A week after the Valentine's Day observation, all PERs made appointments with their peers and their sweethearts to attend meet for an in-depth interview about what they did during Valentine's Day with regard to their relationship. Each first observation of PE Researcher was interviewed by the researcher to give some comments on the data, meanwhile the researcher provided additional coaching by telephone to the PERs. Interviewers and interviewees were of the same sex.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data of the 16 observations (11 males and 5 females) were analyzed and documented. The researcher translated and analyzed all of the selected data in reference to the objectives of the study.

3.5. Report

The results of this report are focused on young couple's activities, and love and sexual relationships on Valentine's Day. The name of the participants are pseudonyms and the names of the locations where PER met or saw the interviewees a have been changed. The research authorized the use of pseudonym names and locations to avoid confusing when they were quoted.

IV. Results

4.1. Young people's activity, and love and sexual relationships on Valentine's Day

4.1.1. About Valentine's Day

In the past several years, Valentine's Day has been celebrated among young people in towns especially Phnom Penh through various activities. They do not know much about the history of Valentine's Day, however many of them were aware of the importance of this day as a day to celebrate love:

“The word Valentine’s Day always means a boy/girl friend loving day or it signifies a day of love. Other young people like me don’t know much about the day. That day is not a national day; so, everyone doesn’t care about it. But I thought that it was fun and expressed our love as well.” [Nak, a 22 year old male university student, Tea Kuch “Kiss” Shop]

“My friends and others youths think that Valentine’s Day is a loving celebration and we just know that it is a happy day and a popular day also.” [Tour, a 21 year old male university student, Riverfront Park]

“I think that Valentine’s Day is a day which was created for the people you love like your father, mother, sibling and grandparents, but they don’t know and care about that day, because they don’t think that the day is essential. It is only for young people who are interested in Valentine’s Day for boy or girl friend.” [Ali, a 23 year old female university student, a friend’s renting house near Toul Toun Pong]

And a few of respondents stated that they do know a very little bit about the day and just follow their friends for fun as described:

“Recently, on Valentine’s Day, my girlfriend and I have not been different from other young people. I think that day young people follow each other.” [Pros, a 24 year old male private company staff, Soriya shopping center]

Meanwhile, many young people follow Valentine’s Day and have learnt about it through foreign cultures, video, media, news, internet and sexy clothes. As young males and females recognized:

“According to my awareness of Valentine’s Day, it is a special day for us to express our love like other young people. I saw everyone celebrating yearly since 2000, because I watched Thai movies and Hong Kong movies that were in Cambodia. This activity made the flower sellers able to sell a lot of flowers at a high price; an example is that a rose costs USD\$3.” [Sam, a 24 year old male business man, Wat Phnom]

“I think young people learnt through foreign cultures such as videos, clothes, magazines and newspapers and so on.” [Rasy, a 19 year old female high school student, Riverfront Park]

“For me, I am not sure about Valentine’s Day, I just know that young people give a brunch of flowers to their girlfriends and I follow them.” [Nhanh, a 23 year old male job looking young man, Riverfront Park]

4.1.2. In the morning of Valentine's Day

In the morning of that day, it is more common for young men to buy flowers or gifts for their girlfriends than other times. Young females spoke of their activities in the morning:

“For going out, we always go together. On the recent Valentine's Day, my current boyfriend gave me a red rose and kissed me.” [Ali, a 23 year old female university student, friend's renting house near Toul Toum Poung]

A young male attempted to have sex with his girlfriend by giving his girlfriend a gift and flowers and he stressed:

“On Valentine's Day, my current girlfriend and I went to the Soriya cinema at Soriya market, ate a pizza and I bought her a wallet. But she bought me a shirt. I bought her flowers in the morning. Because that day I really wanted to sleep with her, but her gestures showed me that she would not, although I touched her when we went to the Karaoke club because it was in the room. We were not worried about anyone hearing and seeing. I joined in the event because it is fun and romantic like foreigners.” [Metrey, a 22 year old male student & company staff, Soriya cinema]

Giving flowers or gifts is more likely to start building a loving and sexual relationship among young couples on that day.

4.1.3. At the afternoon of Valentine's Day

In the afternoon young couples did a variety of different activities, however during the hot day they prefer to find locations to stay inside such as clubs, Tea Kouch shops, cinemas, karaoke clubs, guest houses, and so on. Some describe their relationship:

“Around 1pm I picked her (my current girlfriend) up again to continue our travel, before picking her up I bought a bunch of roses that costs USD\$12. When she received them, she seemed very happy. I looked at other young couples that are the same as me. My girlfriend and I went to Tea Kouch “Kiss” (behind the Royal Palace) we ate there until 6pm.” [Nak, a 22 year old male university student, Tea Kuch “Kiss” Shop]

“My current girlfriend picked me up at 1pm to hang around and then we went to the CASA Club to dance until 4pm and then we went to Mando restaurant near the Hong Kong Center.” [Toch, a 23 year old male casino staff, Casa club at the afternoon]

“On the recent Valentine’s Day, my current boyfriend and I stayed from noon until evening at my friend’s house.” [Ali, a 23 year old female university student, friend’s renting house near Toul Toun Poung]

Sexual intercourse, however, can happen any time. At least half of the young couples among sexual relationships in this study engaged in sex in the afternoon of Valentine’s Day. A young male explains:

“For Valentine’s Day or Loving Day, in the morning I bought a beautiful bunch of flowers and gave it to her and I told her you are the only girl in my heart. And then we went to Kean Svay to relax in a hut near a lake and had lunch with delicious food. We also had sex there. She agreed because we used to make love since 2006 and every time we have sex I use a condom to prevent her from getting pregnant and from transmitting diseases which can happen. I am aware of this information from training on reproductive health and used to be a peer educator at RHAC at a high school. At 3pm we returned to town and then we went to sing at a Karaoke club near Phsa Kandal until 6pm.” [Tha, a 21 year old male university student, In the front of Kirirom cinema]

Another young male also describes his travels outside of town, his first sexual experience and having sex with his girlfriend at the afternoon of that day:

“On this Valentine’s Day, we went to Kampong Cham province. We left at 7am It was beautiful countryside and other young couples also went out. If I did not invite her out that day, it meant I did not love her. I gave her a bunch of flowers as a souvenir and we had dinner there and had some beers and then we went back to town. We went to a Karaoke club to sing for an hour and after that I requested sex from her, she smiled and nodded in agreement. My girlfriend and I went to a guest house which cost USD\$5. It was my first time that I had sex and I used a condom. I felt very passionate because now I know she loves me. I never searched for sex outside because I fear diseases such as AIDS, and pregnancy. This I have learnt from TV, Radio 103FM, PSI, PS and RHAC.” [James, a 19 year old male university student, In the front of a high school]

A young female also shared her sexual experience in her own words:

“Since then my boy friend and I seemed to hesitate to make love. However, my boy friend still cares and loves me. On the recent Valentine’s Day, I saw that he still loves me, he prepared a bunch of flowers. After school (in the morning), he gave me the flowers and then took me to eat out. After that we hung out near the River (in the front of Royal Palace) and next we went to Bak Khaeng; there we rented a guest-house for 2 hours. We slept and had sex together again. After the abortion we did not make love for nearly 3 months, just on this Valentine’s Day. The difference from the past was that we used a condom because we were concerned about pregnancy although it seemed uncomfortable. I thought I knew that Valentine’s Day was meaningful for us

such as understanding each other's hearts, love and taking care of each other. On the other hand, that day is for our special sexual pleasure. It seemed like having sex for the first time.” [Sandy, a 24 year old female student and company staff, Riverfront Park]

Bak Khaeng is an area where young people like to go to relax, have fun and also have sex inside a hut or a guest house. As a young female said:

“On Valentine’s Day, I and other young people went out because I think that it is an important day for me to express our love. We had sexual intercourse as we have had since 2005 at Bak Khaeng, but we use a condom all the time, if we don’t use one, I can get pregnant, STDs, AIDS and other transmitted diseases.” [Din, a 24 year old female job starter, Hun Sen Park]

A young girl Ransy shared her sexual experience with her boyfriend:

“Generally, my boyfriend and I like to go to Bak Khaeng and Tea Kouch when we have free time from studying. Well, it was very special this Valentine’s Day, I wanted to know if he still loves me and will give me a gift like last year. Of course he did the same as last year. By the way, in Phnom Penh young people go out with a person they like; that’s why we did the same. We also have sex on that day. I think it is common because we did not make love for nearly a year, since Women’s Day, March 8, 2007 as we did not fell well. However, I let my boyfriend use a condom every time we have sex because we are worried about getting pregnant and everything else.” [Rasy, a 19 year old female high school student, Riverfront Park]

4.1.4. In the evening of Valentine’s Day

Young people more likely to hang out their partners in the evening, to show off each other rather than have sex. Some went back home early but some still stayed out. A young female and two young males stayed with their partners at parks and ate:

“On Valentine’s Day this year, we hung out at the Riverfront park, then had diner together and went back home. I think that day is when all couples show their love with each other.” [Ka, a 23 year old female job starter, Riverfront Park]

“That day, I made an appointment with my girlfriend near Soriya market at 6pm and I gave her a bunch of 5 flowers that cost US\$3 and then we went up to the 4th floor to a restaurant for an hour after that we went to talk at Wat Phnom until 9pm. Next we went to the riverfront of the Royal Palace to see other young couples.” [Sam, a 24 year old male business man, Wat Phnom]

“...At 3pm we returned to town and then we went to sing at a Karaoke club near Phsa Kandal until 6pm. After that we went to eat dessert and went back

home because my girlfriend's family are very strict with her and she must be home by 7pm." [Tha, a 21 year old male university student, In the front of Kirirom cinema]

A few people were still at work and after work they hung out with their sweethearts. Young working men describe their liking for shopping centers and dinners with their partners and walking around the riverfront:

"Although we were busy at work, it was a special day for us to hang out in the afternoon after work; we wanted to express our love with a rose. We went to Soriya shopping center to have dinner and then we went to sit on the Riverfront to talk, until 8pm, then we went back home." [Pros, a 24 year old male private company staff, Soriya shopping center]

"On that day I was work until 6pm. After work I made an appointment with her at Soriya Shopping Center to buy cloths and flowers for her to express my love and then we went to the second floor to eat food. After we hung out on the riverfront. At 8pm we went back home because her family is so strict with her even though they are not interested in that day. We did not make love." [Vuth, a 20 year old male university student, In the front of an institution]

4.1.5. During the night of Valentine's Day

Many folks go back home but some stayed out. After hanging out those young couples were more likely to go to a guest house or a hotel to have sex. As a young male said laughing:

"After we hung around until 9pm, we went to a guest house. It was unbelievable when we searched for a guest house, after the third guest house, the owners said it was full. Finally we found one. It was the first time my girl friend said that there was no need to use a condom. I followed her request; I made love with her 2 times that night because I orgasmed quickly, which was took only 2 minutes. The second time was really special." [Nak, a 22 year old male university student, Tea Kuch "Kiss" Shop]

Another young male also described the first time he had sex with his girlfriend:

"On this Valentine's Day, it is important for me and I called many friends to eat at a restaurant and we also gave flowers and chocolates to each other. After eating we scattered, but my girlfriend and I went to Spark Entertainment Center to dance and then we went to a hotel. I just spent USD\$ 10 for the hotel and it was the first time I made love to my girlfriend, but we decided to use a condom to prevent diseases such as STDs, AIDS and pregnancy. What made me happy was that it was my girlfriend's first time too." [Tony, a 21 year old male university student, Near NAGA corp]

This young male the time with his girlfriend over the whole night:

“...Next we went to the riverfront of the Royal Palace to see other young couples. Until 11pm, I told her that I was a little bit tired and wanted to leave. Suddenly, I could not go back home at this time because it was mid-night. I didn't know where we should go to sleep? After that I said for her to follow me and then we went to a guest house near Psa Thmey. First, we slept back to back for about 30mins and then I caught her hand and turned to face her and then I embraced her, but she took my hands away. I told her that I love you very much and embraced her again. I kissed her neck which tickled her and she did not say anything and yawned. I touched her body and her breasts and aroused her a lot. I asked her for sex by saying that I want to have sex with you. When she heard these words she refused and said I was crazy. I tried to coax her for nearly an hour; by touching her body and asked why she doesn't agree with me? I told her I loved her and told her that she would have sex with me if she loved me. I told her that I would not betray her and if she did not agree, it means that she does not like me. Meanwhile, I spoke to her and I took off her cloths and she didn't say anything to me. I thought that probably she was okay with me and after that I started to cover her, kissed her and sucked her breasts. That made her aroused again because I heard a low moan. After that, I started taking my penis and putting into her vagina suddenly she asked me to use a condom? I told her I don't have one, she shook her head and refused; I went down to buy a few condoms and we made love 2 times.

The first time was around 1:30am and the second time was at 3:00am. After having sex the first time, I made her bleed, but not much. I asked her if she had a boyfriend in the past. She said that she didn't and I continued to ask her, why did she make me use a condom? She told me she was worried about pregnancy and transmitted diseases from me. And after having sex for the second time, she sobbed. I asked her again why she's sobbing. She said she was concerned that I would abandon her. I said to her I love you.

Early in the morning, she told me that had a sore hip, I told her that it did not matter. We left the guest house at 6:30am but I did not take her home because she was scared her aunt would see us. She took a moto-dop home. We went home different ways. [\[Sam, a 24 year old male business man, Wat Phnom\]](#)

This young male used his own words to persuade his girlfriend to have sex:

“After that I took her around the town to see other people and couples in the front of the Royal Palace and then we went to the Parkway club to play games for half an hour and then I tried to persuade her until 11pm. I took her to a guest house near Suon Reatrey beer garden on street 63. Seeing that, she asked me why did you come here? I said it was nearly mid-night and I did not have a key to open my house door. She continued to ask me why didn't we go to a hotel with an air-conditioner, it is better there. I said that we would sleep here because I know the owner. In my mind, I thought that maybe she has had many partners. When we got into the room she went to the bath room and I went downstairs to buy a small box of condoms. And then I went upstairs and switched on the TV to search for a pornographic movie from the guest house

when she got out of the bathroom she saw me watching a porn movie. At that time, she asked me why I watched these kinds of movies. I told her that I was watching it to increase my passion and said that if you ask me this it seems like you pretend to know nothing. After that we watched the porn movie together; meanwhile, my hands touched her whole body and I stripped her, and she did not say any thing to me, just looked at me. Around 15 minutes later, we made love with a condom; simultaneously, we heard the moan both on TV and outside TV. During sex, why did you moan loud? She said that because it was comfortable and painful because I have a big penis. At mid night, we had sex one more time and totally, the whole night we made love 4 times. Early next morning I dropped her off near the Chinese embassy and she said she would call me at night time.” [Nhanh, a 23 year old male job seeking young man, Riverfront Park]

This young man said that he and his girlfriend were so tired after the club that they fell asleep, but in the morning, a day later they had sex:

“After that we went back to the town along the riverfront and then we went to drink until mid-night and went to the Rock club. After that we went to sleep at a guest house near Soriya market, but we didn’t have sex because we were too tired. At 9am the next day, we just started having sex, but I used a condom because I was worried about transmitted diseases. It was different in the past when I had had sex with her, I never used a condom...Especially, for fun and it didn’t cost too much money for us as males. I also heard from my friend who spent only USD\$15 to go to paradise including USD\$10 for a ring and flowers, and USD\$5 for a guest house.” [Tour, a 21 year old male university student, Riverfront Park]

On Valentine’s Day, young people shared the time they spent with their sweethearts. They talked deeply of their love. As a result, more than half of the respondents of this study said that they had sex with their sweetheart on this day. Almost all couples who had sex used a condom even though it may have been the first time that they had sex. At least one of the respondents, Nak, stated that he made love with his girlfriend without a condom on that day as it was the first time for his girlfriend. Nak was involved in sex by ‘trust’; assuming that his partner was virgin and not feeling the need to use any condom; especially as this was their first sexual intercourse. This finding is similar to international studies where the majority of male participants thought that many young men seek female partners who are virgins because they believe that they can be trusted as disease-free. Male youths are generally impatient when it comes to gratifying their sexual urges, so they may engage in high-risk activities before accurately gauging the likelihood of contracting STIs or HIV.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Longfield, K., et al. (2002). *Op cit.*, pp. 10-11.

4.1.6. No sex and sex with condom with their Sweethearts on the Valentine's Day

Parents and sweethearts are still a big influence on whether young people decide to have sex or not. As these young people stated:

"...After we hang out at the riverfront. At 8pm we went back home because her family is very strict with her even though they are not interested in that day. We did not make love." [Vuth, a 20 year old male university student, In the front of an institution]

"...After that we went to eat dessert and went back home because my girlfriend's family is so strict with her and make sure she is home before 7pm. Her family did not say anything because they don't know about our relationship and on the other hand, they are not interested in Valentine's Day." [Tha, a male 21 year old university student, In the front of Kirirom cinema]

"...At 8pm we went back home. Obviously, I have never made love with my girlfriend, I am worried if I do, she would give up loving me." [Pros, a 24 year old male private company staff, Soriya shopping center]

Awareness-raising about sexual and reproductive health issues among young people through training and print and broadcast media can contribute to behavior change which can deter them from having sex and are able to protect them from unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS/STIs. For example, a young female explained that what she had learnt prevented her from making love with her boyfriend in her own words:

"The Valentine's Day this year, we hung out on the riverfront park, then had dinner together and went back home., We didn't think about sex because we were aware of reproductive health; so, my boyfriend did not care about having sex with me. He learned a lot about the issue with NGOs like SMD and YCC." [Ka, a 23 year old female job starter, Riverfront Park]

Ali described what she felt was a bad experience with her ex-boyfriend. Her behavior has since changed due to receiving sexual health messages:

"On the recent Valentine's Day... We did not do anything against our tradition because we have the same mentality and higher education. I had a bad experience in the past, nearly having sexual intercourse with my ex-boyfriend. We are young and still pursuing our studies. We have an Asian culture and are not like Europeans. We are not yet married. We just embraced and kissed to express our love. We receive sexual health awareness from NGOs, TV and radio. This makes us understand what is good and bad. I also love and respect the Khmer tradition. That day, because we loved each other we just discussed

but didn't have sex.” [Ali, a 23 year old female university student, friend's renting house near Toul Toum Pong]

In the afternoon Tha, Jame, Sandy, Din and Rasy and in the evening Tony, Sam, Nhanh and Tour shared their sexual experiences with their sweetheart and used condom on that day. They understand the importance of condoms as they received information from media, peer educators and training on sexual and reproductive health. Some of them changed their behaviors as Tours stated clearly: “*We just started having sex, but I used a condom because I was worried about transmitted diseases. It was different in the past when I had had sex with her, I never used a condom.*”

Rasy could ask her boyfriend to use a condom and Sam's girlfriend was able to challenge him to use condom due to her concern about pregnancy. Finally, he followed her suggestion.

In addition, Sandy, shared her sexual experiences and said that she changed her behavior to use a condom on Valentine's Day. She felt uncomfortable as she had had an abortion and her act is associated with being faithful to her boyfriend which she felt meant she didn't need to use condoms. She also was at high risk for HIV/AIDS/STIs because she was the second girlfriend of her current boyfriend who told her after making love with her and he had sex with his ex-girlfriend. After that she recognized her boyfriend lied to her. Likewise, such emotional investments can 'blind' youth to their risk of STIs/HIV and render them unwilling to explore partners' sexual histories for fear of jeopardizing relationships.⁵⁰

4.1.7. Young people's perspectives about their parents' attitudes toward Valentine's Day

Almost all of the respondents said that Valentine's day is for young people. Most parents know little about that day or don't like what the youth get up to on that day:

“I think that Valentine's Day is a day which was created for the people you love like your father, mother, sibling and grandparents, but they don't know and care about that day, because they don't think that the day is essential. It is only for young people who are interested in Valentine's Day- for boy or girl friend.” [Ali, a 23 year old female university student, friend's renting house near Toul Toum Pong]

“On this day, almost all young people were happy, but old people did not like that day. As for my parents, they dislike this day and always said that this day makes teenagers show off.” [Sandy, a 24 year old female student and company staff, Riverfront Park]

⁵⁰ Longfield, K., et al. (2002), *Op. cit.*, p. 17

“That day is not a national day; so, not everyone cares about it. But I thought that it was fun and expressed our love as well.” [Nak, a 22 year old male university student, Tea Kuch “Kiss” Shop]

“My parents don’t know about the activities on this day because I come from the provinces to study in Phnom Penh. It is a marvelous time because there are many celebrations and we always join in for fun.” [Tour, a 21 year old male university student, Riverfront Park]

Communication about sexual and reproductive health issues between parents and children is still a problem especially when they became adolescences. As the RHIYA endline qualitative survey stated, the barriers to good communication between parents and youths are: parents do not have enough knowledge on SRH, parents avoid SRH issues by claiming that are busy and in traditional societies, talking about sex is not allowed.⁵¹ These factors lead parents to be careless about monitoring their children and provide guidance to their children that may be at high risk. In this study, parents seem to be unaware of what their children do and did not provide any advice to their children on Valentine’s Day. There were only two respondents who received good advice on HIV and culture from their parents on Valentine’s Day:

“...Whereas my father, he knew that I hung out on that day, but he admonished me if you go out, you have to protect yourself ‘be careful of AIDS!’ I know how to be careful, do not worry!.” [Nhanh, a 23 year old male job seeking young man, Riverfront Park]

“My parents think that teenagers now are very modern and follow each other, but she said when I am happy, do not forget I am a Khmer girl.” [Din, a 24 years old female job starter, Hun Sen Park]

V. Discussion

In recent years, Cambodian socio-economic development and globalization have affected Khmer culture and people’s behavior. Youths are especially quick to absorb new things or festivals and celebrations. As Valentine’s Day comes from Western Christian history, young couples recognize that they have learnt about it through Asian countries such as Hong Kong, South Korea and Thailand through movies, magazines and news. Some said that they followed other young people. In recent years, the day has become popular among young

⁵¹ Vuthy, B. (2006). *Op cit.*, p. 51

people and they have become involved in many activities including sexual relationships with their sweethearts. Some used this as an opportunity to experience sex. As a Phnom Penh young female RHIYA endline study stated: *“Most teenagers want to experience sex at an early age. Being their peers, we can not prevent them since most of them have been influenced by European culture.”*⁵² However, young couples’ behavior change on Valentine’s Day study supported the effort of SRH program activity in Phnom Penh which impacted young male middle class behavior change in condom use with sweethearts. Second round of the Playing safe study stated that a significant numbers of respondents reported an increase in the use of condoms by their peers. A few young couples changed their behavior with their sweethearts, primarily as a result of increased concern for contracting HIV/AIDS or other diseases and to a lesser degree, an increased desire to prevent pregnancy.⁵³

Parents in this study are more likely to miscommunicate with their children or ignore what they are doing on the Valentine’s Day rather than give advice to their children. This reflects similar trends and perspectives of urban modern parents toward youths’ sexual experience. A Phnom Penh married man believed that by providing SRH training, youths will know how to protect their health and stated: *“Nowadays, youth have more freedom to choose their future partners. Parents allow their children to go out on dates. Although girls might get into a trap of having sex with their partners while on dates...”*⁵⁴ and another Phnom Penh married man pointed out: *“Parents will not allow their daughter to date before marriage. However, in terms of equal rights this is not correct. A girl needs to have sex as well...”*⁵⁵

On the other hand, it is still questionable how Western Christian history on Valentine’s Day influences premarital sex and Khmer Buddhist culture. In fact, many Christian people do not have sex before marriage. As one Christian western woman stated: *“...Except in religious circles, where there is still an expectation that people will wait until they get married and be virgins when they are married and remain faithful to their spouse. For Christians of my background, this is expected for women and men equally...”*⁵⁶ In addition to foreign culture, there are several factors which might also lead young people to engage in sex on Valentine’s Day. From a scientific, ‘biological’ perspective, males and females have an equal need for sex as part of their human nature.⁵⁷ There is an ‘opportunity’ for both young males and females to

⁵²Vuthy, B. (2006). *Op cit.*, p. 51

⁵³ Hayden, R. (2006)., *Op cit.*, p. 38.

⁵⁴Vuthy, B. (2006). *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Soprach, T. (2008). *Op cit.*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

hang out during holidays or festivals.⁵⁸ 'Economic growth', 'modernization' and 'showing off' also make it 'fashionable' amongst young people to go on 'hot dates' and then engage in sex. In addition, the 'environments' of massage shops, clubs, Entertainment Centers and 'hot dates' in the small huts along the rivers on the outskirts of Phnom Penh play an important role in society which young people 'exposed'.⁵⁹ Access to 'Pornography' also contributed to this study causing a premature sexualizing and is the link between pornography, sexual violence and rape.⁶⁰ In support of this point, Ali shared her experience with her ex-boyfriend who forced her to watch pornography in his computer:

“One day, I went to his house to borrow a Windows CD-Rom to practice at school. Meanwhile, his aunt was not there, just only him and me. He went to take the Disc for me and I teased him to not confuse with another disc, referring to pornography Disc. At the same time, he took my hand to see the porn movie in his computer. I felt scared of what I never watched before. Some scenes were ugly and I was afraid. Some parts were too bad, so I did not watch. Nothing happened to us I was already determined that it no problem in just watching. He told me that men always have a disc [porn]. It was normal.”
[Ali, a 23 year old female university student, Friend's renting house near Toul Toun Poug]

Another factor, for the school year 2002-2003, an official in the MoEYS estimated that only one out of nine university graduates find employment.⁶¹ Young people feel 'stressful' while they are looking for a job and they think of their future when they are students. It is easier to ease their stress with activities such as sex.⁶²

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

These Valentine's Day findings reveal that young people do not clearly understand the background of the day but recognize that it comes from foreign cultures through recent media. They followed the growing trend as Valentine's Day became more fashionable each year, and in recent years it has become very popular among wealthier young people in urban areas. The results show that more than half of the participants in the study were happy to engage in sex on that day, and at least a few of them lost their virginity. Additionally, one couple did not

⁵⁸ Wallquist, L, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Soprach, T. (2008). *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-22.

⁶⁰ Fordham, G. (2005). "WISE" BEFORE THEIR TIME: *Young People, Gender-based Violence and Pornography in Kandal Stung District*. Phnom Penh: World Vision. pp. 94-95.

⁶¹ Mysliwicz, E. (2005). *Youth, Volunteering and Social Capital in Cambodia: Results of a Feasibility Study Conducted for a Cambodian Youth Service Program*. Youth Star. p. 25. Phnom Penh. Retrieved November 14, 2007 from <http://www.youthstarcambodia.org/documents/Feas%20Study.pdf>

⁶² Soprach, T. (2008). *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

use a condom as he believed she was a virgin. In another case, Sandy shared her sexual behavior change story by using a condom on Valentine's Day after having an abortion three months ago. In addition, one young man pressured his girlfriend to watch pornography on TV in the guest house.

For this study, young people are more likely to increase their understanding of SRH, but to be slow to change their behavior because of the delicate issue of trust between sweethearts. It is clear there are high numbers of young people involved in sex on Valentine's Day. As Nak said, the guest houses were full, he could only find a room at the third one. In addition, afternoon and night times were identified as popular times for sex on Valentine's Day. Even though a few parents enforced strict curfews, according to the participants, there is generally a lack of parental understanding about the event and the fact that their children may be sexually active and at risk of HIV/AIDS/STIs, unwanted pregnancy and sexual violence. Only two participants mentioned that their parents gave them advice about sexual relationships.

- Further directions for research:

- Need to undertake more study on the influences of Western culture on Khmer culture.
- Need quantitative study on Valentine's Day among wealthier young people who are at high risk of unsafe sexual relationships.
- Need more general survey of the SRH behavior and beliefs of young people.

- Programmer:

- Make opportunities for awareness raising on the issues surrounding Valentine's Day, and SRH in general, such as consent; safer sex.
- SRH and HIV programs among young people should target interventions before and on Valentine's Day in accordance with this study's findings.

- Media:

- Provide information from the findings of this study before and on that day.

- Local Authorities and Police:

- Strengthen security on that day through the target area of the finding.
- Monitor pornography in guest houses.

- Parents and Teachers:

- Provide advice on Sexual Reproductive Health and HIV and AIDS to their children and students. At least, speak out: "Don't bring AIDS home!", "Be careful of getting pregnant!" and "Don't trust your partner!" before and on Valentine's Day.
- Try to build open communication with your children every day about SRH.

- Be aware what your children and students are doing on Valentine's Day.

- Young people:

- Have to be aware of SRH and HIV, condom use if you are choosing to be sexually active.
- Behave in a way that protects your life.
- Be aware you have a choice to have sex or not.

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Appendices

- Appendix 1: Informed Consent and Talking with Semi-structured Questions

I, am, a volunteer who is assisting in a research study for Mr Tong Soprach, who is studying for his thesis of Master Degree in Public Health at the University of Cambodia.

This is a small qualitative study on love and relationships among young people in Phnom Penh on Valentine's Day, February 14, 2008. The objective of this study is to explore sexual relationships to confirm his previous research paper on love, relationships, sex among young people and its impact. Our interview is to explore what experiences you have had on Valentine's Day with your boy friend/girl friend and where they occurred.

On behalf of the candidate, I would like to say thank you for the time taken in speaking with us. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Please give me your pseudonym name beside your real name.....
Sex..... Age..... Occupation.....
Interview place.....
Interview Date.....Time.....Appointment or meeting place where the interviewer saw/met and made an appointment on Valentine's Day or a few days later with a couple.....
.....

Prompted questions:

Q1. Can you describe your relationship with your boy/girl friend? When did it start? What made you fall in love? How do you express your love for each other or how do you know you love each other?

Q2. Generally, where do you and your boy/girl friend go? Why?

Q3. Which influences you and other young people to hang out with their boy/girl friend on Valentine's Day? Can you describe what you did on that day?

Q4. In your opinion, what influences have made youths consider Valentine's Day an important day? What your parents think about Valentine's Day?

- Appendix 2: Case Studies

CASE 1: Toch, a 23 year old male casino staff, the Casa club in the afternoon

My relationship with my current girl friend started at P'Chum Ben (Festival of the Dead) in October 2007 when we met through a mutual (girl) friend. At first, we watched each other; she was showing off her trendy clothes and expressed herself to get me interested in her. Then we talked. First she invited me to go the cinema. I also felt interested and that I loved her; and after that we started to understand our feelings for each other. Now I am with my third girlfriend, who is 17 years old.

Generally, my girlfriend and I go to Tae Kouch, a tea shop where young people always go, which is behind the Royal Palace. If we don't go there, we go to a guest house during the day from 1pm until 6pm, which costs US\$4 and is located around Srae Ambel (near Wat Koh School on the street Tror Soak Phaem or St. 63). Sometimes, after leaving the guest house, we have dinner at a restaurant, and then we go to clubs at night time until 11pm and then we go home; telling our parents we went to join our friends' birthday party. The clubs we usually go to include Black Eagle Club, Gold Club, The Rock, and Spark; and on weekend afternoons, Casa Club and Spark. We like hanging around here, in town, because we don't want to travel far. Firstly, it's hot and we would be tired and secondly, we would spend a lot of money for gasoline and the places are the same and nothing changes.

During five hours from 1 to 6pm in the guest house, we can have sex 3 or 4 times. When I first had sexual intercourse with my current girlfriend, I didn't use any condom, because we both felt sexually aroused, we weren't thinking anything and, on the other hand, I thought that because she was young and a virgin I didn't need to think about any sexually transmitted disease. Meanwhile, I penetrated her vagina, she winced, with a low moan and said it was painful! painful! Then she put up her hands to obstruct, like she was a virgin. In fact, after penetrating her, her body stretched and made me remember when I made love with my ex-girl friend who was not a virgin, it felt the same. When I had sex once before, I had used the withdrawal method but I almost orgasmed and then I was worried she would get pregnant. The times after that, she requested I use a condom and I agreed with her. It would be very hard if she got pregnant and needed to have an abortion. Both she and I were aware of condom use through explanations in magazines and TV. However, I just didn't care about

sexual transmitted diseases because she was young, pretty and a rich kid. When I had sex with her the blood never came out.

But I doubted that she was not a virgin. I tried to ask her if she had a previous boyfriend, but she did not want to tell me. When she did tell me, whenever we talked about it she always cried, and told me that she had had an ex-boyfriend who was a rich kid, and they had had sexual intercourse as well. After a few months her ex-boyfriend had left her. Meanwhile, I also agreed with her and I thought that love was not only about virginity. Suddenly, her story made me remember when I had fallen in love with my previous girlfriend who was only 14 years old. We [my previous girl friend and I] had known and love each other when we had studied English. She lived with her aunt near my house, but no one knew about us. When I had sex with her first time, she did the same action and cried that she was impure [not a virgin] as well. That first time, I didn't use a condom and I used the withdrawal method, also thinking she was too young and pretty. And after that I used a condom because I worried she would get pregnant and face difficulties. In fact, she had had a boy friend before me. She always got angry with me when I asked her; and in the meantime I also supported her studies. Unfortunately, we just had love for only 4 months and then we broke up. But recently, I heard that she has left home to follow another young man.

The day before the Valentine's Day, February 14, 2008, I gave my [present] girlfriend US\$15 to buy a shirt that she loved, to wear on the morning of Valentine's Day. Because we felt this day [Valentine's Day] was a special day, and we felt excited, we just followed the ideas of other young people of our generation. She picked me up at 1pm to hang around and then we went to the CASA Club to dance until 4pm and then we went to Mando restaurant nearby the Hong Kong Center, after that we went to have some beers at Mak Khnow Reatrey near Deum Thkov market. Then we all went to our homes. That day we did not have sex but we wanted to hang out which is more fun than having sex.

For our love, my parents know that we love each other but her parents, who are nasty, don't know yet. Her siblings know about us. In a few days, her parents will know about our love and I will go to meet them.

In addition, I want to share my other sexual experience more. Before I had sex with all my girlfriends, I also used to have sex with sex workers a long time ago, when I was 13 years old and I was in primary school. For my first sexual experience, my friend invited me and they

paid for me. We went to make love with a Vietnamese prostitute at a brothel near Stung Mean Chey, but she gave me a condom to use. Usually, when we used to hang out the whole night, we [my 3 or 4 friends and I] always slept with a woman [prostitute] but we used condoms and sometime we used 2 condoms during each sexual intercourse. Meanwhile, we had sex 2 times each that night and she agreed to sleep with us. First reason, we didn't have enough money, just US\$ 10 each and we started thinking US\$ 15 for a women, US\$ 6 for a room at a guest-house and other money for eating and drinking. And the second reason, we wanted to show our friends who did not have any sexual experience. I stopped being involved in this team for around a half year already. Before, my ex-girlfriend only spent a short time with me, around one or two hours per day. But now, I have this girlfriend; so, I am already bored of sexual intercourse with the team although my friends invite me I will not go along with them any more, because I have a good girlfriend now.

Whereas my first girlfriend, she was an English teacher and her age is the same as my age. Our love started in 2004, but it was just for only half a year. But she was really a virgin, when we had sex she bled on the floor, she said: "it's painful!" and I was also in pain. We did not find a condom at that time, as we stayed in her house and we both were feeling passionate and didn't care about anything. But the times after that, we used condoms because we were worried about pregnancy. Several months later her parents took her back to her province and she telephoned me and told me that her parents forced her to marry, so, we broke up then.

CASE 2: Sandy, a female 24 year old student and company staff, Riverfront Park

I have a lovely boy friend. He is very handsome and I have known him for nearly 4 years. I am 24 years old, and a 4th year student of a university in Phnom Penh. We [my boy friend and me] are classmates and fell in love when we had a study tour on March 8, 2005. Firstly, I was not interested him. I only made friends with him. He is a very bright person in the class and he doesn't speak much. In school, we were in a program and had an opportunity to observe each other, to express what's in our hearts. He told me that he had loved me for a long time, but did not have a chance to tell me. After that he asked for my phone number and he always called me many times. From day to day, we are friendly and took care of me including my health, getting me food and helping me in my studies. He also prepared for my birthday. We always go for a walk on the weekend to increase our intimacy and memories of our love. Generally we [only two of us] went to the house on the water at Kean Svay because there is calmness and warmth. I know in calm places, where there are only 2 persons many things can happen, but I never worried about all the problems. He doesn't have bad intentions towards me. While, I am trusted and love him the most, it is like the proverb "if I fall in love, everything I can do".

In Kean Svay, after having lunch we shared many stories and then we started kissing and embracing tightly and he told me that he loves me very much. Everything was different, I interrupted the embrace and he asked me directly to sleep with me because he loves me very much and can not stop his feeling. I disagreed with him and I felt a little bit of fear and was angry with him. I received information from other organizations, who train on health through radio and TV related to the consequences of premarital sex. Premarital sex faces many problems such as transmitted diseases or pregnancy. At that time, he implored and kissed me. My feelings were confused, I didn't know how to deal with him, I worried about many problems which may occur. I had pity towards him, it was very difficult. At the end, I agreed with his request, I really didn't want to do it. I fell in love and I didn't want him to be disappointed in me because, he did everything for me. That's why I thought it was a good time. I should provide something to the person I love and I didn't want to loose him. I didn't want our relationship to be in trouble. Meanwhile, there was not any obstacles to our sexual intercourse at Kean Svay. There were many small rooms for sleeping. I felt hesitation to do it, but I wanted to try. Suddenly, I asked him to use condom. It did not mean that I did not trust him, but I was afraid of pregnancy. However, he persuaded me not to use it and told me not to worry. That it was his first time too. I believed and agreed with him. Obviously, he lied to me.

After that I knew he used to have an ex-girl friend and used to have sex with her. They broke up because she left him to study abroad. I think that the day was a special day between him and me although sexual intercourse did not go well because I was feeling pain and I was bleeding. I tried to stop him, because the pain was unbearable, but he said it was not a problem. After a long time I would become more familiar with it. He let me be patient. The first time was like that. Sometimes, I felt comfortable but sometimes it hurt as it was almost unable to bear. It was my first time and it seemed to cut my skin; meanwhile, I tried to follow the person I love. After that day, I had to stay at home for 3 days. I was tired and in pain. I was worried that my older sister and my mother who would know what was wrong. My boy friend was also scared and missed me very much.

After this, we always got along together in the same places and had sex without using a condom. We did not care about anything, because we trusted each other. In the meantime, I rented a house for the company because I operated a tourist company with my sister and my friend. My sister did not always come to the company, so I was responsible. This was a good chance for my boy friend and me to be together. When we came back from school, my boy friend came to help with some work in the company. We have lunch everyday there. After lunch, we frequently had sex in the company on the top floor. We gave up going to Kean Svay. I felt very satisfied with the sexual intercourse even though we were not using condoms. We didn't care about anything because before ejaculating, he always used the withdrawal method, but sometimes he did not withdraw because he told me that he didn't reach orgasm.

After school, we sometimes went to the Veal Mean field to sit and flirt in a dark place. Meanwhile, he touched me in almost all parts of my body until we felt aroused together. He took me back to the company to replace my friend who had to go home. During that time we closed the door and then made love inside. Sometimes, I felt that I was doing something wrong, but the truth was I wanted satisfaction and happiness for my life. I got pregnant and we were so concerned. We didn't what to do and then he had an idea to abort. We thought that our parents did not know, we are studying and we need the time to find more income. I decided to abort because the fetus was around three months. We were ashamed to go to a clinic. I followed my friend to buy Chinese medicine to abort. And another friend stopped me taking the medicine because it could harm my health. She encouraged me to go to a safe place rather than use medicine, but I absolutely disagreed. I begged my friend to help. She was angry with me and didn't talk to me, but later on she apologized to me and agreed with me.

She assisted me to boil the herbs. At that time, I told my parents and accompanied my tourist guests to travel for 5 days. I took the medicine to induce an abortion at the company, as for my boy friend, he felt pity for me when I drank the medicine and was hemorrhaging. Three days after I tested my urine to confirm my pregnancy. Even with the hemorrhage, my fetus did come out. My friend worried about me and suggested for me to go to a place near Kandal Market where she knew a woman who provided a renting service. Finally, I decided to go to the place with my boy friend because I feared harm to my health. There, they [obstetricians] checked on my pregnancy and they asked me for US\$ 50, they said that the fetus was a bit bigger and also took medicines, so they did not want to abort. My boy friend tried to persuade them and then they agreed. In the room, their equipment was modern and hygienic. They pumped my fetus out, I felt a bit sick because of the anesthetic injection.

Since then my boy friend and I seemed to hesitate to make love. However, my boy friend still takes care and loves me. On the recent Valentine's Day, he showed me that he still loves me, he prepared a bunch of flowers. After school, he gave me the flowers and then took me to eat out. After that we were hung out near the river front [in the front of Royal Palace] and next we went to Bak Khaeng; there we rented a guest-house for 2 hours. We slept and had sex together again. After the abortion we did not make love for nearly 3 months, just on this past Valentine's Day. The difference from the past was that we used a condom because we were concerned about getting pregnant although it seemed uncomfortable. I thought I knew that the Valentine's Day was meaningful for us such as understanding each other's hearts, love and taking care of each other. On the other hand, that day is for our special sexual pleasure. It seemed like having sex for the first time. That day, almost all young people were happy, but old people did not like that day. As for my parents, they dislike this day and always said that day makes teenagers show off. This was one more reason to hide our past because they would blame us and break us up. But we did not care about the future and take it as it happens.

CASE 3: Nak, a 22 year old male university student, Tea Kuch “Kiss” Shop

My girl friend and I love each other very much, we hang out together almost everyday. First, I met her through a mutual (girl) friend who introduced me. She is really pretty and I have tried to love her. I do everything for her. I bought her a wallet, a watch, a toy and a ring for her. In the end she agreed to hang out. We made an appointment at a Tea Kouch, tea shop. Then we took my motorbike to travel along the river front. At 7pm, I took her back home. I did not do anything with her, because I love her very much and I was afraid that she would be angry with me. We hang out every evening. We understand each other’s heart and I know that she loves me too.

She agreed to follow me and we always go to Bak Khaeng, Kean Svay every Saturday. After eating we sit inside a hut with the walls. I always start caressing her. At first she felt very shy, but after awhile she allowed me to do everything. I asked her to make love, she did not say anything to me. I first thought she was angry with me. We returned back home.

Every evening, my girl friend and I go to a restaurant, and then to the park along the river, there is a place where couples sit. Sometimes we go to the cinema. I always kiss and touch her all the time.

At the end, I had her body [already had sex] I did not forget. One day on Saturday, when her parents joined their nephew in the province, there was just only her sister and my girlfriend at home. That evening I picked her up and took her to the other side of the river [to Preak Leap] to eat at Banh Chaev. We did everything like we did before. I touched her breasts and kissed her. I made gestures to follow me. We agreed to go to a guest house which costs USD\$5. It was located near Central market. Before entering the place she bought a mask because she was afraid that someone who knows her would tell her parents. That night, before having sex with her she requested me to use a condom because she worried about pregnancy and I also wanted to use it. I did not know if I have a disease or not from before I met her. I had sex with many prostitutes. My first sexual encounter was with a sex worker, when I was 19 – 20 years old. I always use a condom. I was aware through TV, magazines and old people. But once last year, I made a mistake during the Water Festival [in Oct 2008] I joined my friend’s sister wedding party and my friends and I continued to drink outside. My friends and I hired a sex worker at a park near Independence Monument. The costs was USD\$15. We took her to a guest house and after that we [4 persons] had sex all together. At that time we got so drunk and didn’t know if we were using condoms or not. I did ask my friends, if they used condoms? Some said no, they didn’t use it.

Until now, my girl friend and I have fallen in love for nearly two years, since 2006. At the moment, we don't hang out too much at the previous places, but sex is frequent. I think she loves me very much. When I invite her [to have sex] she agrees immediately, but we use a condom all the time. We understand in our hearts, especially to prevent pregnancy and it would be difficult if it were to happen when we are still studying.

On the Valentine's Day, we hung out and we already had a plan. My girlfriend and I bought two red shirts and we wore them for that day. On that day, we went out for pleasure for the whole day. In the morning, I picked her up to go to a restaurant and then we went to the cinema Soriya at Soriya market and after that I took her back home. Around 1pm I picked her up again to continue our travel, before taking her out I bought her a bunch of roses that costs USD\$12. When she received it, she seemed very happy. I looked at other young couples that are the same as me. My girlfriend and I went to Tea Kouch "Kiss" shop [Known behind the Royal Palace] we ate there until 6pm and we hung around until 9pm, we went to a guest house. It was unbelievable when we searched for a guest house, after the third guest house, the owners said it was full. Finally we found one. It was the first time my girl friend said that there was no need to use a condom. I followed her request; I made love with her 2 times that night because I felt aroused and orgasmed quickly, which was just only 2 minutes. The second time was really special.

Besides my current girl friend, I have had several girl friends, but I never thought and did anything with them because at that time I was too young and afraid. As for my current girl friend, I did not know how many boyfriends she has had, she just told me she used to have boyfriends. I was interested in her virginity, but I observed when I first had sex with her, she was probably a virgin, because she was bleeding from her vagina. Her virginity is not important for me, it matter that she just loves me from her heart.

In my opinion, I thought that other youths and I joined in the Valentine's Day. I learned through TV, movies and, newspapers. However, the word Valentine's Day always means a boy/girl friend loving day or it signifies a day of love. Other young people like me don't know a lot about the day. That day is not a national day; so, everyone doesn't care about it. But I thought that it was fun and expressed our love as well. Our parents do not yet know about our love, since I fell in love with her I never look for another girl. I have plans to marry her, but am hesitating now because we have not yet finished our studies.

CASE 4: Metrey, a 22 year old male student & company staff, Soriya cinema

I have a girlfriend aged 21. We used to study in the same class at the same time. We have been in love since 2007, we were introduced to each other and I fell in love with her the first time. I tried to talk to her with other friends. We understood our hearts, but I expressed my gestures to let her know such as asking for her phone number, date of birth and giving her a gift on a special day. However, I never gave her money because I was afraid that she would judge me and think that I look down on her. Because of the gift I told her the truth, that I love her. She is okay but did not tell everyone, she was embarrassed.

In the past, we always went out with friends in groups to Preak Leap. We went there many times, we felt bored and I also persuaded her to hang out with just us and we don't want to go far as it was hot and dusty. My girlfriend and I always drive my motorbike to go shopping and eating at Tea Kouch near Sisovath high school where other young people like to go and is not expensive. Every evening I always take her to hang around the riverfront and eat corn at a small restaurant. I see other couples doing something to each other and we are not different from those people when we had a good chance and are isolated from people. I always kiss and touch her but we don't have sex. Every time I ask her to make love, she refuses and argues that she is a Khmer girl and her father is strict. Even though I try very hard, nothing and we nearly broke up due to this problem.

I always think that she is pretty good and now we love each other much more. For sex, when I need it, I always go to a brothel with my friends frequently and all the time we use condoms because we worry about transmitted diseases, we were aware of this through friends, TV, and magazines. I started to have sex since I was in high school and when I had an ex-girlfriend who was young like me and we always argued and then broke up because she found a new boyfriend. I was broken hearted, I invited my peers to drink until we were drunk and then we went to a brothel. But I never take the sex worker to *Bauk* because it felt ugly and I was worried about transmitted diseases and felt sorry for her. As for my friends, I know that my friends used to be involved in *Bauk* frequently by saying that they have spent a small amount of money but had a lot of sex. I remember one time last year, the day of the Best of the Best concert at Olympic stadium, but I did not join the event because I brought my current girlfriend to another place and they didn't have girlfriends. They got drunk and got involved in *bauk* and I don't know about their condom use.

As for me, I have had 4 girlfriends, including this current girlfriend, makes 5. Among the 5 girlfriends I used to make love with when I was at high school during Women's Day in 2002. All my friends went to Kampong Saom [Sihanouk Ville] for the night, but my ex-girlfriend and I did not go there, we were in Phnom Penh and we went to the CASA club. We got drunk and danced until 5:30pm and after that I hung around the town but I don't remember well and then we went to a guest house. She was around 16 years old and grade 9, she was really a virgin 100 percent because when I didn't have deep sex that night, she was in a lot of pain and bled. After that her parents stopped her studies and we did not meet up any more. I did not use any condom at that time and I also didn't think anything of it. Whereas she who said that it was her first time because her parents was so strict but now she is full grown.

On Valentine's Day, my current girl friend and I went to the Soriya cinema at Soriyia market, ate a pizza and I bought her a wallet. But she bought me a shirt. I bought her flowers in the morning. Because that day I really wanted to sleep with her any time, but her gesture showed me that she would not, although I touched her when we went to the Karaoke club because it was in the room. We were not worried about anyone hearing and seeing. I joined in the event because it is fun and romantic like foreigners. Generally, parents and friends don't know a lot about that day. We are just aware of foreign movies like Korea and Chinese and also magazines. Other young people say that it is an influence from foreign culture and modernization especially the internet and we followed each other in society. All my activities, my parents do not know. For my current girlfriend, I don't know about her for this day, she has not yet told me

CASE 5: Rasy, a 19 year old female high school student, Riverfront Park

When I was in grade 6 of a primary school in 2003, I met my boyfriend through a mutual [girl] friend who I studied with. He is a good person and he does not care about rich kids; especially, he recognized that I am from a poor family and he loves me more when I and my family need some financial support, he always assisted.

Generally, my boyfriend and I like to go to Bak Khaeng and Tea Kouch when we are free from studying. Well, it was very special for this Valentine's Day, I wanted to know his heart if he still loved me and would give me a gift like last year. Of course he did the same like last year. By the way, in Phnom Penh young people went out with a person that they like; that's why we did the same. We also had sex on that day. I think it is common because we did not make love for nearly a year, since Women's Day, March 8, 2007 since we did not feel well. However, I did make my boyfriend use a condom every time we have sex because we are worried about getting pregnant and everything else.

I think that day young people follow each other through foreign culture such as videos, clothes, magazines and newspapers and so on. Young people have sex and can change their behavior. For my parents, they don't know I make love. They just know I have a boyfriend. If they know that I have sex, I couldn't face them.

CASE 6: Pros, a male 24 year old private company staff, Soriya shopping center

I met my girlfriend by coincidence near Reusey Keo high school last year. She is 21 years old, with white skin, long hair and sexy. These points made me love her. It looks like she and I love simultaneously. I try to show her off all the time. It was the first time I have fallen in love. I called her and wanted to see her all the time. A few months later, we both start going out together often on weekends because we are working from Monday to Friday. We always hang out at the riverfront and Hun Sen park where there are many young couples.

Recently, on Valentine's Day, my girlfriend and I have not been different from other young people. Although we were busy at work, it was a special day for us to hang out in the afternoon after work; we wanted to express our love with a rose. We went to Soriya shopping center to have dinner and then we went to sit on riverfront to talk until 8pm then we went back home. Our parents are not interested in this event because they are busy with their business. Obviously, I never make love with my girlfriend, I am worried if I did she would give up loving me.

But I used to look for sexual services to fulfill my desires and I just pay for USD\$6 for a guest house and USD\$10 for prostitute for the night. I was also involved in *Bauk* because at that time I was young and at high school and I did not have enough money. I wanted to know and to try, and my peers pressured me, but I used a condom for sex to prevent STDs and other transmitted diseases. I knew about sexual health through RHAC staff who trained me and I also received this information via leaflets from the Play Safe project and TASK.

CASE 7: Vuth, a 20 year old male university student, In the front of an institution

The relationship between my girlfriend and I is friendly. We understand each others' hearts. I started loving her in 1996. Now she is 16 years old and living in Phnom Penh. I recognize that I love her because I always care for her and am jealous when she talked to other men. I often buy her some gifts such as clothes, flowers, bear toys and cell phones when there are ceremonies or parties such as Women's Day, Christmas, her birthday and especially this Valentine's Day.

When we are free, we always go to Bak Khaeng, where it is popular for young couple to eat corn. After that we went to sing karaoke near the Kandal market and then we went to the U2 discotheque. The most important thing was when I went to a guest house to make love with my girlfriend. I always use a condom with her to prevent any diseases and pregnancy. Beside's my girlfriend, I used to have a sexual relationship with prostitutes in brothels because I was young and desired sex. I started having sex with prostitutes when I was 14 years old.

Especially this Valentine's Day, all couples enjoyed it very much because they showed their love for each other. As for me, I told my girlfriend I love her very much and nothing has changed. On that day I was at work until 6pm. After work I made an appointment with her at Soriya Shopping Center to buy clothes and flowers for her to express my love for her and then we went up to the second floor to eat food. After we hung out at the riverfront. At 8pm we went back home because her family is very strict with her even though they were not interested in that day. We did not make love. I don't get involved in *Bauk* because I hate this act so much. I used to receive reproductive health information through peer educators at RHAC and health centers.