

CHILDREN of the Wood of the Stone

The Journeys of Faith for Survivors of Trafficking

The Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project

A Chab Dai study on Re/integration:

Researching the lifecycle of sexual exploitation
& trafficking in Cambodia

2020
Thematic Paper



Children of the Wood Children of the Stone

Journeys of Faith for Survivors of Sex Trafficking

**Butterfly Longitudinal Re/integration
Research Project
2020**

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**In honor of Siobhan Miles,
Founder of the Butterfly
Longitudinal Re/integration
Research Project. All of this
would not have been possible
without her compassion and
care for the children of
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	6
Connect With Us	7
Executive Summary	8
About the Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project	11
Project's Ethical Protocols	12
Children of the Wood Children of the Stone Objectives	13
Methodology	13
Limitations	14
Reflexivity - Dr. Glenn Miles, PhD	15
Literature Review	16
Making sense of Life for the Participants	16
Spirituality and Development	16
Context of religious rights in Cambodia	18
Estimated Breakdown of Religious Belief in Cambodia	19
Buddhism	20
<i>The Four Sublime States</i>	20
<i>The Four Noble Truths</i>	20
<i>The Eightfold Path</i>	21
<i>Buddhist Views of Childhood</i>	21
<i>Buddhism in Cambodia</i>	22
<i>Link between Christianity and Buddhism</i>	27
Christianity in Cambodia	28
<i>Christian Faith Based Organisations in Cambodia</i>	30
<i>Christian Discrimination against Sex Workers</i>	31
<i>Christianity and Human/Child Rights</i>	32
<i>Christian Evangelism</i>	32
<i>Christian Values on dignity, respect and love</i>	32
Resilience	33
Child Abuse & Religious Institutions	35
<i>Cambodian churches and orphanages</i>	35

<i>Cambodian Buddhist Temples</i>	35
Findings	36
Cohort's Connection with Experience of Beliefs	36
<i>Table 1: Participants confession of Faith</i>	36
Quotes from Participants	37
Cohort's understanding of Buddhism	37
Cohort's Fluidity of belief	39
Cohort's Reflections on Teachings of Buddhism	41
Cohort's reflections on Teachings of Christianity	43
Comparing Christianity and Buddhism	45
Cohort's understanding of Religious Practice	46
Impact of Faith on Personal Life	47
<i>Buddhism</i>	47
<i>Christianity</i>	48
Impact of Faith on others - Connection between personal beliefs and family	53
<i>Buddhism</i>	53
<i>Christianity</i>	53
Connection between personal beliefs and others	55
<i>Serving others</i>	55
<i>Interceding for others</i>	56
Attitudes Towards People of Other Religions	56
<i>Christian Attitudes towards Buddhists</i>	56
<i>Attitudes towards Christian Believers</i>	59
Barriers to Faith & Practice	60
<i>Family Barriers</i>	60
<i>NGO Staff</i>	62
<i>Community Members</i>	63
<i>Physical and Emotional Barriers</i>	64
<i>Other Barriers to Christianity</i>	66
<i>The Right to believe</i>	66
<i>Barriers to Buddhism</i>	66
<i>Christians Feeling Persecuted</i>	68
<i>Freedom to Choose One's Religion</i>	69
<i>Feeling Forced to Practice Buddhism</i>	71
Participants' Anticipation of Faith in the Future	71

<i>Christianity</i>	71
<i>Buddhism</i>	72
Discussion	74
Spiritual Practices	74
Impact of Faith on Cohort’s Healing and Restoration	75
<i>Figure 1: Spiritual Wellbeing as a result of connections leading to resilience and empathy.</i>	76
<i>Figure 2: Resilience and its connection to spirituality</i>	77
Recommendations	79
Aftercare Centres and Community Programmes	79
Buddhist monks and teachers	81
Christian Leadership in Cambodia	81
Researchers	82

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Cover Photo: Sreang Phaly
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Connect With Us

Beginning in 2010, Chab Dai Coalition's Butterfly Longitudinal Re/integration Research Project (BLR) has been following the lives of 128 child & adult survivors of human trafficking, exploitation, and/or abuse. Since its inception, this study has sought to find out, 'what happens to survivors of human trafficking after they were assisted by an NGO and (in most cases) subsequently re/integrated back into the community? Is freedom truly *free*?' Through the BLR team's dedication to providing a safe platform for survivors to consistently share their voices and understandings, the team has been enlightened to the realities each individual of our cohort faces on a regular basis. It is our passion to, in turn, relay this to you—our ever-learning readers.

Thus, we recommend that stakeholders dive deeper through our many reports. To date, the BLR has produced *ten* reports, on: resilience, stigma, boys & men, and filial piety, to name a few. Please find all our previous and future publications at Chab Dai's Siobhan Miles Memorial Library & Resource Centre, or on our website for more information, videos, news updates from Butterfly! www.chabdai.org/butterfly.

We thank you in advance for taking the time to listen & learn with us. As always, please feel free to reach out to us with any questions, comments, and/or feedback you may have

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Executive Summary

Introduction

'Children of the Wood, Children of the Stone'¹ is the technical report on the faith journey of survivors of sex trafficking from the Chab Dai Coalition's Butterfly longitudinal research project. The participants were asked a range of questions both qualitative and quantitative 2-3 times a year. One of the major benefits of the longitudinal approach has been evolving trust and disclosure over the 10 years. Frequent contact by caring researchers has led to deep friendships with the participants. As a result researcher effect cannot be denied. However, the deep trust developed between participants and the researchers has meant that the information is rich and reflections thoughtful. In one sense, it also means that the research is more ethical because it becomes something that is about a relationship rather than about being used as a tool to get information.

The objectives of this paper was to understand:

1. What is the participants understanding of faith/spirituality?
2. How has their faith/spirituality impacted their life and personal restoration?
3. How has their faith/spirituality impacted their relationships/impact on others/society?

Methodology

The data in this paper was gleaned from working through interviews gathered over the years and especially 85 from 2017 where questions were asked about their current beliefs and the impact on their lives. The information was sorted into different categories for patterns and similarities in the data analysis. The quotes used were then cited in a carefully structured way and often longer and more complete than usual. I am aware that this research will likely be scrutinised by those to whom faith is important but also to others who may be critical of faith based organisations, concerned that they are harmfully pushing their faith agenda onto vulnerable people. The results section allows the reader to directly hear the voices of survivors without comment so they can determine whether or not they feel this has happened.

Limitations

The Spiritual journey of all of us changes all the time as we interact with others and with our understanding of a greater power beyond the everyday. It is not easy to articulate things about spirituality and especially for participants who are not professional religious people with only a limited vocabulary. For Christians, learning about their beliefs through Bible teaching classes and in church is more common

¹ The title 'Children of the Wood, Children of the Stone' is explained by one of the participants when she was caught up in a play fight with another person in which she said they were praying to a stone (Buddha statue) and they said she was praying to a piece of wood (the Cross of Christ). When we discussed using it some of the research team were concerned that it was too negative but we kept it because it symbolises some of the prejudice experienced on both sides.

than learning of young Buddhists so they appear to be better at explaining what they believe.

If this was a one off survey and if the responses received were shortly after leaving the after care program we might be more cautious about positive comments about their experiences but most of the responses here are some time after they have left programs and the relationship that they have with the research staff is stronger so the research team believe that the responses are likely to be more honest. The participants are also not concerned that someone is going to lose face as they understand that over many years their responses are kept confidential.

Spirituality and Development

Despite its importance, development literature and development practices have systematically avoided the topic of spirituality. This avoidance results in inferior research and less effective programmes, and ultimately fails to provide participants with opportunities to reflect on how their development and their spirituality will and should shape each other”.²

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 14 (**Freedom** of thought, conscience and **religion**): “Children have the **right** to think and believe what they want and to practice their **religion**, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should help guide their children in these matters. The Convention respects these rights”.³

Constitution of Cambodia, State Religion and Freedom of Belief

Article 43⁴

Khmer citizens of either sex shall have the right to **freedom of belief**. Freedom of religious belief and worship shall be guaranteed by the State on the condition that such freedom

Judith Ennew (2015) suggests, “Spiritual nurture rather than conversion must be the core of faith based activities...One human right is not to have the existence of a spiritual dimension, ...Spiritual lives of children must be neither abused nor distorted through power relationships”

Results

The results indicate that the participants have benefitted from their spiritual journeys both whether they consider they are primarily Christian or Buddhist. Although there are some distortions of belief most of the beliefs are consistent with cultural understandings of Buddhism and Biblical understandings of Christianity. There is

² Kurt Alan Ver Beek (1990) “*Spirituality A Development Taboo*” in Deborah Eade (ed.) *Development & Culture* (London, Oxfam 2002) [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=E01iQgAACAAJ&dq=Deborah+Eade+\(ed.\)+Development+%26+Culture+\(London,+Oxfam+2002\)&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjQmcWf_ILIAhXFfWwKHU7IDLcQ6AEIWTAI](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=E01iQgAACAAJ&dq=Deborah+Eade+(ed.)+Development+%26+Culture+(London,+Oxfam+2002)&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjQmcWf_ILIAhXFfWwKHU7IDLcQ6AEIWTAI)

³ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_summary-1.pdf

⁴ <https://www.constitution.org/cons/cambodia.htm>

little evidence that children were forced to believe anything in the aftercare centres but there is some evidence that some participants experienced prejudice when they returned to their home environment if their religion had changed from traditional family beliefs. Positive aspects of spirituality certainly appeared to aid in their healing and rehabilitation and build their resilience. Four children described how faith prevented them from suicide. Several participants described how when they prayed to Jesus or the Buddha they personified them so they felt they could express their fears and anxieties in a relationship.

Some described specific ways in which their attitudes were changed, where they were less ashamed, less concerned about what others thought of them, where they were able to control their feelings more, where they could be more patient with others, less aggressive and violent. Some described how they didn't feel the need to lie, where they were willing to accept that they had made a mistake, where they were more confident of themselves and more trusting of others. Some described they were no longer afraid of death.

For Buddhists they described how their faith led to praying for their family and giving alms. For Christians they described how their faith led to loving and respecting others and not discriminating against them.

In 2017 the number of participants who identified themselves as Christians were considerably less than 2011 (80 to 47). Many had gone back to their traditional beliefs in their home environment often because it appeared to be easier to conform or there were no available churches close by. Some felt that they had little time for faith in their busy lives. However many recognised the benefit of the Christian input on their journey and some continued to pray to Jesus/God. Some saw the links between the two faiths and drew on the benefits of both. However there were some participants who were deeply impacted by their Christian faith and felt that nothing would shake their faith in the future.

Recommendations:

- Aftercare and community programs seeking to provide 'holistic care' need to include aspects in their programming that recognizes the spirituality of their clients.
- Safeguarding policies needs to address spiritual abuse and all aftercare staff must be aware of it and sign it.
- Aftercare staff must not develop nor display a culture of intolerance against other faiths.
- Aftercare staff must encourage survivors to freely choose and practice their faith and spirituality.
- Survivors should feel free to ask challenging theological questions about the suffering of: themselves, others and the Khmer Rouge genocide for example.

About the Butterfly Longitudinal Research Project

The Butterfly Longitudinal Research (BLR) project is currently in its 10th year. It started in 2010.

Chab Dai coalition members and practitioners working in anti-human trafficking in Cambodia desired to understand the long-term impact of their programs on survivors leaving their program so this longitudinal research project was suggested. Chab Dai currently has 51 members in their coalition. Of these, 14 members were/are involved in aftercare; and the work of members has dramatically changed over the past ten years in their programming but the programs are now as follows:

- 8 Aftercare Programmes
- 1 short-term shelter & community based program
- 2 Vocational trainings Programmes
- 1 Community-based Programme
- 1 Community Development program

Each of these agreed through a rigorous process of terms of agreement over the first year in Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) to allow access to their clients.

The longitudinal design of the research is exploratory broad and descriptive that is mixed method in approach. Of these original 128 participants 80% of female and 20% male. The original age at the beginning was between 6 and 30 years old. 72% for ethnic Cambodians and 13% Vietnamese. One of the biggest challenges to this project was the potential for wide attrition as participants return to an often chaotic environments and frequently move and where addresses are hard to find. However in 2019, the research team have been able to maintain contact with over 90 out of 128 original participants in spite of the distance and time it takes to do so. For 52 participants they had managed to meet them each and every time.

Over the duration of the programme different organisations have evolved and changed and the participants have needed to prepare for re/integration. This research has sought to listen to the voices of participants and understand both positive and negative aspects of the re-integration process to look at both vulnerabilities and resilience of the participants.

The long-term nature of the research enables reflections of their experiences to be better understood. The hope has been that this can inform programs, policy and wider debates, locally, regionally and globally. Over the years there has been dialogue with Partners and stakeholders through round table discussions, annual reports as well as confidential feedback on issues that are of concern to individual organisations.

One of the major benefits of this approach has been evolving trust and disclosure over the ten years. Frequent contact by caring researchers has led to deep friendships with the participants. As a result researcher effect cannot be denied.⁵ However, the deep trust developed between participants and the researchers has meant that the information is rich and reflections thoughtful. In one sense, it also means that the research is more ethical, because it becomes something that is about a relationship rather than about being used as a tool to get information.

Project's Ethical Protocols

The Butterfly Longitudinal research project is approved annually by the National Ethics Committee situated in the Royal Government of Cambodia Ministry of Health. It also adheres to the UNIAP ethical standards for research with trafficking victims.⁶

Abiding by the Research Ethical and Confidentiality, the research project team have always mindful about the participants' and data confidentiality; no personal identification information was revealed, both during the time of meeting the participant for interview and through any report and paper publications. The research project team carefully considered participants' well-being during the time of conducting interviews so as not to cause distress. This impacts the way the researchers designed survey questions and how participants are treated throughout the time of participating in this research study. The research team often spent more time, after interviewing, to have informal chat/conversation over their emotional wellbeing as well as hanging-out with them before and after to help participants feel relaxed and provide debriefing and/or lay counseling if needed. All participation is voluntary and the researchers have never received, or given money as compensation.

⁵ <http://www.journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/428>

⁶ <http://un-act.org/publication/guide-ethics-human-rights-counter-trafficking/>

Children of the Wood Children of the Stone⁷ Objectives

The paper presents the perspective and experiences of the Chab Dai Butterfly project cohort of survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation regarding their spirituality/faith journey. The research questions are;

1. What is the participants understanding of faith/spirituality?
2. How has their faith/spirituality impacted their life and personal restoration?
3. How has their faith/spirituality impacted their relationships/impact on others// society?

Methodology

The data in this paper was gleaned from interviews gathered over the years of 2011-2017 and especially 85 from 2017 where questions were asked about their current beliefs and the impact on their lives. The information was sorted into different categories for patterns and similarities in the data analysis. The quotes used are then cited in a structured way and often longer and more complete than is usual. This is because talking about faith and beliefs is not something that can easily be summarized in sound=bites so more space is needed.

This research will likely be scrutinised by those to whom faith is important but also to others who may be critical of faith based organisations, concerned that they are harmfully pushing their faith agenda onto vulnerable people. The results section allows the reader to directly listen to the voices of survivors without much comment so they can determine whether or not they feel this has happened. We have not excluded negative comments.

One of the huge advantages of this longitudinal study is the way the research team have developed close relationships with the participants over ten years. Although this level of relationship will likely have affected the results⁸, the depth of responses reflect a degree of honesty that is impressive. Some of the participants have told the researchers that they are able to be open to them more than anyone else. The footnotes sometimes provide explanation of what was said based on the in-depth

⁷ The title 'Children of the Wood, Children of the Stone' is explained by one of the participants when she was caught up in a play fight with another person in which she said they were praying to a stone (Buddha statue) and they said she was praying to a piece of wood (the Cross of Christ). When we discussed using it some of the research team were concerned that it was too negative but we kept it because it symbolises some of the prejudice experienced on both sides.

⁸ <http://www.journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/428>

relationships and knowledge that the researcher team had with them. This greatly enhances understanding of the results. In the discussion section we have tried to be impartial but understand that we may have biases, which is why I have added a reflexivity section below.

Limitations

One's Spiritual journey changes all the time, as one interact with others and with one's understanding of a greater power (or not) beyond the everyday. It is not easy to articulate things about spirituality and especially for participants who are not professional religious people (clergy) and may have a limited vocabulary. Surrounding this topic for Christians, learning about their beliefs through Bible teaching classes and in church is more common than learning for young Buddhists so they appear to be better at explaining what they believe.

If this was a one-off survey and if the responses received were shortly after leaving the after care program we might be more cautious about positive comments about their experiences but most of the responses here are some time after they have left programs and the relationship that they have with the research staff is stronger. The research team believe that the responses are therefore likely to be more honest. The participants are likely also less concerned that someone is going to lose face as they understand that over many years their responses are kept confidential.

It is important to realise that this research is qualitative in nature,. This means that it does not profess to be representative of all people who have been sexually exploited, even in Cambodia. This cohort have a particular background described above. The cohort were also in a wide variety of shelters and after care programs and churches since leaving these programs with different denominational or non-denominational emphases. However they were Christian NGOs with mainly Christian staff and therefore a Christian culture is to be expected.

So, when some are talking to researchers the participants particular beliefs reflect their learning as well as their experiences. This means that it is hard to say how prevalent a particular idea is because we didn't ask the other participants if they also believed the same thing or not. However the research team still believe that the results are able to provide some useful insights.

Reflexivity - Dr. Glenn Miles, PhD

It is impossible to be neutral. So it is important when conducting research that the person doing the research report is able to understand their own perspective and that those reading can decide if the report is biased. In order to do this it's important that explain my background and religious affiliation. My background is mainly as a Protestant Christian. I was christened a Methodist and grew up in a primarily UK Brethren church. My mother later became a Quaker. Later I married my wife Siobhan in the Presbyterian Church in the USA and we became a member there. Several churches have supported me in my overseas work over the years including two independent evangelical free churches, an Anglican church and a charismatic church. When based in Cambodia I worshipped in ICA, ICF, the Anglican Church of Christ our Peace church and with the Quakers at different times. In terms of work, I worked in Site 2 refugee camp on the Thai Cambodian border with YWAM under the UNBRO/UNHCR (3 years 1989-92) and in Cambodia itself the Country Representative for Servants to Asia's Urban Poor (1 year), Tearfund UK which is interdenominational as Country Representative (5 years in Cambodia, 2 years in the UK) and Love146 which does not identify as religious (6 years).

In addition to this I have also worked in several countries with different dominant religions. This includes Hindu India, Muslim Pakistan, Catholic Philippines, Buddhist Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Nepal and I have taken an interest and attempted to be respectful of each of these religions in each of these contexts.

I have tried to anticipate the main readership of this paper. Although the paper is intended mainly for people of faith who are working directly with children who have been sexually exploited I anticipate that this paper will be of interest to others as well, for example, those who are working to understand the spirituality of children in general and how their faith impacts their lives. I also expect there will be a number of people reading this who are critical of Christian organisations and may consider that children are being forced against their will to take part in activities that could be harmful to them. I was also concerned about this when I started analysing the data that children, might have been coerced to attend church, Bible studies and/or specifically Christian worship times. However this is not what I found, but more of that later.

As a specialist and trainer in Child Protection from a child rights perspective I have a particular interest in the cross-over between human rights and spirituality and believe that spirituality should not be excluded from a human rights framework. I also have a particular concern for what is known as spiritual abuse where spirituality is used to manipulate vulnerable people and for the way people in positions of spiritual influence can abuse their power.

Literature Review

Making sense of Life for the Participants

Although the wider cultural religious context in Cambodia is predominantly Buddhist (Delaney and Scharff 2010⁹), over the past decade it has been largely Christian NGO groups who have taken a leading role in addressing prostitution and sexual exploitation. (Delaney and Scharff 2010; Jordanwood and Lim 2011¹⁰)

What does this mean and does it matter to these survivors' sense of understanding about their experiences of exploitation:

- that they are the second and third generation following the Khmer Rouge period,
- that they have been raised in a post conflict society,
- that following their negative experiences they encountered Christian influences largely through Christian Faith Based Organisations,
- that they live in a context of a wider dominant Buddhist milieu,
- whilst they live in a neo-liberal culture that is ever modernizing and changing, still there are traditional cultural beliefs, values and practices such as marked gender differences and expectations and filial piety where children are expected to work for their parents

Spirituality and Development

Missing out spirituality in our development programs may mean that we end up working in non-holistic programmes,

Spirituality is central to many of the daily decisions people in the 'South'¹¹ make about their own and their community's development, including that of whether or not to participate in risky but potentially beneficial social action. Despite its importance, development literature and development practices have systematically avoided the topic of spirituality. This avoidance results in

⁹ https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/faith-inspired-organizations-and-development-in-cambodia/pdf_download/en

¹⁰ <https://www.louvaincooperation.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/119.Deinstitutionalization%20of%20Children%20in%20Cambodia.pdf>

¹¹ A term used to describe developing countries in the Global South. Wikipedia suggest "The **Global South** is an emerging term used by the World Bank to refer to low and middle income countries located in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean which contrast to the high income nations of the **Global North**"

*inferior research and less effective programmes, and ultimately fails to provide participants with opportunities to reflect on how their development and their spirituality will and should shape each other.*¹² Kurt Alan Ver Beek (1990)

Marx, Freud et. al.

Marx, in 1844, argued that religion was 'the opium of the people' (Marx¹³, 1959:263). Freud (Freud¹⁴ 1949:42, 74) believed religion to be nothing more than an 'infantile' response and 'the adult's reaction to his own sense of helplessness'. Social science literature historically has tended to refer to spirituality and religions as belief systems based on myths, whose overall negative effect on society would be replaced eventually by sound scientific thinking.

Development practitioners can avoid the topic of spirituality more from a 'respect' of local culture and out of an awareness of the dangers of imposing their view. But there is a certain degree of condescension implicit in withholding what one believes to be a superior understanding of reality so as not to offend or impose. People's spirituality is viewed as weak and to be protected, in the way that quaint traditions should be protected, but with the silent conviction that science and development ultimately will allow people to leave behind their spiritual and 'unscientific' beliefs. This practitioner's scientific/materialistic bias, coupled with a non-respect for religion, effectively sidelines the topic of spirituality, resulting in an imposition of different secular values.

Humanists, like Innaiah Narisetti, see religion itself as a violation of the rights of a child. He advocates quite forcefully in his book *Forced into Faith* that children not be 'indoctrinated' by parents' beliefs. He points to many extremely negative examples from all major religions, asserting that UNCRC Article 14 is deliberately neglected and ignored by those with religious faith. He says "The child should be free to choose his religion or not to choose one until he attains the age of eighteen. Till then, the child should be left free from the impositions, the blind beliefs, the abstract thoughts, the unproven concepts, and the superstitions of the holy books of all religion" (Narisetti¹⁵ 2009, 41).

¹² Kurt Alan Ver Beek (1990) "Spirituality A Development Taboo" in Deborah Eade (ed.) Development & Culture (London, Oxfam 2002) [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=E01iQgAACAAJ&dq=Deborah+Eade+\(ed.\)+Development+%26+Culture+\(London,+Oxfam+2002\)&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWjQmcWf_ILIAhXFfFwKHU7IDLcQ6AEIWTAI](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=E01iQgAACAAJ&dq=Deborah+Eade+(ed.)+Development+%26+Culture+(London,+Oxfam+2002)&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWjQmcWf_ILIAhXFfFwKHU7IDLcQ6AEIWTAI)

¹³ Karl Marx (1959) '*Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*' Foreign Languages Publishing House https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Capital.html?id=bPnrAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud 'On Sex and Neurosis' Garden City Publishing Company <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OCqgAAAAMAAJ&q=Freud+1949+book&dq=Freud+1949+book&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWj32r7-YLIAhXNX8AKHZAKCFYQ6AEINDAC>

¹⁵ Innaiah Narisetti (2009) **Forced Into Faith: How Religion Abuses Children's Rights** Prometheus Books. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=B1kKAQAAMAAJ&q=Narisetti+2009&dq=Narisetti+2009&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWjjpL_Y_ILIAhXkmFwKHfIbC18Q6AEIKDAA

There is potential for tension between the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right of parents to arrange for their education and to organize family life in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions. (Marshall and Parvis 2004, 239)

Context of religious rights in Cambodia

In September 1992, the Supreme National Council, the body designated to embody Cambodia's national sovereignty during the transition period, and which contained representatives of all four of the parties to the agreement, including the Khmer Rouge, signed documents acceding Cambodia compliance with: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention and Protocol relating to the status of Refugees, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These assurances and agreements became the basis for the language of human rights that would come to permeate Cambodia through a massive media campaign undertaken by UNTAC in 1992-93.

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 14 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion):

“Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should help guide their children in these matters. The Convention respects these rights”.¹⁶

This article does make an important qualification in discussing freedom of thought. The exercise of the right is in keeping with the evolving capacities of the child, meaning the response of a six year old will look vastly different than the response of a sixteen year old. Ultimately every child makes a choice about what to believe and whether to adopt the values of their parents. Giving children freedom of thought does not necessarily mean that they will turn from the values or faith in which they are raised.

Further, Annex 5 of the Agreements ensured that the protection of fundamental human rights would be enshrined in the constitution of the new government to be formed after the UN sponsored elections. It reads:

Cambodia's recent history requires special measures to ensure the protection of human rights. Therefore, the constitution will contain a declaration of fundamental rights, including the rights to...freedom of religion, assembly and association (including political parties and trade unions)... and freedom from racial, ethnic, religious....discrimination. Aggrieved individuals will be entitled to have the courts adjudicate and enforce these rights.

¹⁶ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_summary-1.pdf

Article 43

- **Khmer citizens of either sex shall have the right to freedom of belief.** Freedom of religious belief and worship shall be guaranteed by the State on the condition that such freedom does not affect other religious beliefs or violate public order and security.
- Buddhism shall be the religion of the State.
- The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion, and the government does not tolerate abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors

Article 41

- Freedom of expression
- Khmer citizens shall have freedom of expression of their ideas, freedom of information, freedom of publication and freedom of assembly. No one shall exercise these rights to infringe upon the honor of others, or to affect the good customs of society.

*The 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT*¹⁸

With the vast majority of Cambodians following Theravada Buddhism, it should come as no surprise that the religion occupies a central and pre-eminent place in the life of the nation. Article 43,3 of the constitutions of 21st September 1993 states that Buddhism is the State religion.” “As far as the Christians are concerned, the success of the Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostalist communities in particular do not seem to have raised any particular difficulties up to the present. (US State Department)

Estimated Breakdown of Religious Belief in Cambodia

Source

- Buddhist: 94.0-97.0%
- Christianity
 - ▶ Protestant: 0.5-2.5%
 - ▶ Catholic: 0.25%

¹⁷ <https://www.constitution.org/cons/cambodia.htm>

¹⁸ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>

- Muslims¹⁹: 2.5%
- Other: 0.25%.

Buddhism

The Four Sublime States²⁰

1. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with loving kindness, likewise the second, the third, and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with loving kindness, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.
2. Here monks a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with compassion...
3. Here monks a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with empathetic joy...
4. Here monks a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with equanimity...

The Four Noble Truths²¹

Rather than doctrine, these can be thought of as ennobling tasks to engage in life.

*The Noble Truth of **Suffering** (dukkha), monks, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasant is suffering, dissociation from the pleasant is suffering, not to receive what one desires is suffering — in brief the five aggregates subject to grasping are suffering.*

*The Noble Truth of **the Origin (cause) of Suffering** is this: It is this craving (thirst) which produces re-becoming (rebirth) accompanied by passionate greed, and finding fresh delight now here, and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence (self-annihilation).*

*The Noble Truth of **the Cessation of Suffering** is this: It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.*

¹⁹ Although there is a minority of Muslims in Cambodia there are no participants from this background so an analysis of the Islamic Cham in Cambodia has been excluded. This could be an area for future research.

²⁰ Tevijja Sutta (D 13) and Mahà-Sudassana Sutta (D 17) - (e.g. D i 251 and D ii 186; trnsl. by Rhys Davids, 1899) <https://www.akincano.net/PDF/Brahmavihara.pdf>

²¹ A full translated script of the Four Noble Truths can be found in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta Samyutta Nikaya LVI, 11 <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.piya.html>

*The Noble Truth of **the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering** is this: It is the Noble Eightfold Path, and nothing else, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.*²²

The Eightfold Path²³

- right view
- right thinking
- right speech
- right action
- right livelihood
- right diligence
- right mindfulness
- right concentration

The essence of the Buddha's teaching can be summed up in two principles: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The first covers the side of doctrine, and the primary response it elicits is understanding; the second covers the side of discipline, in the broadest sense of that word, and the primary response it calls for is practice. In the structure of the teaching these two principles lock together into an indivisible unity called the dhamma-vinaya, the doctrine-and-discipline, or, in brief, the Dhamma. The internal unity of the Dhamma is guaranteed by the fact that the last of the Four Noble Truths, the truth of the way, is the Noble Eightfold Path, while the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, right view, is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Thus the two principles penetrate and include one another, the formula of the Four Noble Truths containing the Eightfold Path and the Noble Eightfold Path containing the Four Truths.

(*"The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering"*, **Bohdi 2013**)

Buddhist Views of Childhood

The Buddha left home aged 29 years and his wife gave birth to a son *Rahula*, meaning "fetter". Without seeing him he continued on his spiritual quest. At age 35 years he became the Buddha and returned to his homeland on invitation from his father. He ordained his son to become a monk. It therefore became possible for a child to start meditative practices and work on false representatives of the ego. This explains why children are welcome into the monkhood from a young age.

The Four Immeasurable Minds in Relation to a Child

1. **Loving Kindness:** prayer for health & happiness at birth

²² Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth" (SN 56.11), translated from the Pali by Piyadassi Thera. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.piya.html>

²³ "The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering", by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/waytoend.html>

2. **Compassion:** embrace a child to relieve suffering
3. **Sympathetic Joy:** rejoice as the child explores the world
4. **Equanimity:** observe the child as they learn without judgement

Buddhism sees children as connected to a long chain of re-births. Karma drives re-birth. A birth depends on past actions. Environmental conditions parents, family, society - are important factors in how a child develops. "Children have always been associated with Buddhism, have participated in Buddhist life and rituals, and have been the carriers of Buddhist expectations in a variety of ways" (Sasson and Metcalf, 2018)²⁴. In the field of Buddhist studies children and childhood is relatively new but an introduction can be found in Sasson's book.²⁵

Buddhism in Cambodia

Although an estimated 95 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist, according to the Ministry of Cults and Religions (MCR) most people do not have a deep understanding of Buddhist philosophy and many worship Buddha as a deity,, praying and making requests to him with incense. Monks are given alms by lay-people to gain merit. Traditionally dancers were paid to dance at the temples to gain more merit. Mothers can also gain merit by ensuring their sons are monks, albeit for a few weeks in their teenage years. Many people attend Buddhist festivals at the temples. Religion and State are intertwined. On the Government official letterhead it has "Nation, Religion, King". The King has traditionally been seen as a demi-god who is at the top of the country's Buddhist hierarchy. All people have been given the vote since 1992 so the Kingdom of Cambodia is therefore a democratic, Buddhist monarchy. However, the reality is that Buddhism does not have the same hold as it did in the past as modernity and technology take hold. Euan Black²⁶ describes this and it can be seen with fewer monks being ordained and seen in public and wats and festivals with fewer attendees.

History

Recent research of Buddhism in Cambodia has been hampered because of the political situation and war. However, Ian Harris has written a book called *Cambodian*

²⁴ Vanessa R. Sasson, Franz Metcalf Buddhist Views of Childhood 26 APRIL 2018. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199791231-0073
<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0073.xml>

²⁵ Sasson, Vanessa. "Introduction: Charting New Territory: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions." In *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions*. Edited by Vanessa R. Sasson, 1–14. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

²⁶ <http://sea-globe.com/the-decline-of-buddhism-in-cambodia/>

*Buddhism: History and Practice*²⁷. This book gives a history of how Buddhism developed in Cambodia and how it has re-established itself following the Pol Pot era.

Fr. Ponchaud (1990) describes the history of religious belief in Cambodia from the time when the Brahmins of India brought Hinduism and then later Buddhism to the elite classes which then filtered down to the masses. In 802 Jayavarman II was crowned the universal Monarch. The Kings wanted to reproduce Heaven on Earth with the sacred mountain of Mount Meru in the centre with five summits, the surrounding walls represented a mountain and a large artificial moat symbolised the ocean. Angkor became the Holy City, protected by the gods. In 1177 the Chams who were their enemies took the city and confiscated the protective divinities making them lose their sacred power. According to Harris (2005), over the next four hundred years, after the collapse of the Angkorian civilization, Cambodia experienced a number of changes but remained primarily Theravada Buddhist.

The Khmer Rouge's near total elimination of the Cambodian *sangha* (order of monks), the destruction of texts and temples, and the loss of Buddhist educational institutions for fifteen years means that Khmer Buddhism is only now being fully re-established. And it is clear that new outside factors are influencing the character of Khmer Buddhism. It is of interest that even though the Khmer Rouge tried to destroy Buddhism in Cambodia, the majority of citizens still adopt Buddhism the religion of their parents and society without much critical thinking.

Although the Khmer Rouge attempted to destroy vestiges of Cambodian Buddhism even knocking off the heads of Buddhas in sacred temples and de-frocking and sometimes beheading senior monks, many of the cultural traditions associated with Theravada Buddhism continued. The gradual resurgence and recovery of organised Buddhism after Pol Pot years has been slow partly because of the high proportion of senior monks who lost their lives under the Khmer Rouge. However the monastic order gave legitimacy to the new regime and this helped them politically. According to Harris, Cambodian Buddhism has successfully adapted itself to a variety of political contexts; Colonial, monarchical, socialist, republican. It seems that each political group has sought the approval of Buddhist hierarchy, giving them legitimacy, so that both benefit. However, some suggest that this in itself means that neutrality is not possible and would prefer Buddhist monks to remain separate from politics.²⁸

²⁷ Harris, I.(2005). *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/documents/Cambodian%20Buddhism,%20History%20And%20Practice_Harris.pdf

²⁸ After Pol Pot, the monarchy was restored together with new Buddhist groups. Harris's book give a comprehensive perspective on the challenges of the links between monks and politics. This isn't the place to go into detail about how some Monks have been involved in pursuing the rights of the ordinary Khmer person but readers are encouraged to learn more about this.

Contemporary Buddhism

A helpful perspective on Buddhism is the compact book of oral Histories called 'The Monk the Farmer the Merchant the Mother'²⁹ by Anne Best (2005) which is a description of survival stories of 4 individuals in modern rural Cambodia. The story of the monk describes daily rituals and experiences including chanting and what a monk can and cannot do.

The monk in the book said that according to the scriptures a Buddhist monk must live by three principles. firstly they should harm no one, secondly, they should strive to accumulate merits and thirdly they should endeavour to have a calm and peaceful heart and to find tranquility of spirit. Buddhist lay people are expected to live by five principles these are; they should not kill, they should not steal, they should conduct themselves with sexual propriety, they should not lie or cheat and they should not drink alcohol.

Hierarchy, Respect for Elders and Rules for Women

Cambodia has a strong hierarchical structure with the King at the top who has always been seen as a demi-God. This hierarchy is also associated with karma - a fatalistic attitude which means that those with power and money feel entitled to it and those who are poor feel that it is their lot and change is not possible. Hierarchy also impacts gender - Buddhist nuns generally have a much lesser role than monks and women are seen as less significant in many aspects of life apart from the family. The respect for elders gives value to people in authority but can also make children more vulnerable and voiceless. Children are expected to obey their parents and to serve them (filial piety). The positive aspect of this is that care for them as they age in the same way their parents cared for them when they were young. Also sharing in the needs of the household. The negative aspect is when some parents expect and push their children to work in exploitative ways The traditional *chbab srei* (rules for women) encourages women to be subservient and obedient to their partners and could be interpreted as making allowances for their partner's misdeeds. Although there are also rules for men *chbab pros* but these are not so well known.

Buddhism in Cambodia has some similarities to that in Thailand and Sri Lanka but it also has significant differences. **Theravada Buddhism** developed in Southern India and then traveled through Sri Lanka, Burma, and into Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Beyond. Theravada Buddhism ("doctrine of the elders") is the oldest and most orthodox of Buddhism's three major sects. Regarded as the belief closest to the one taught by The Buddha himself, it is based on the recollections of The Buddha's teachings put together by the Elders—the elder monks who were Buddha's companions However in Cambodia there is a mixture of Hindu and animistic traditions within the Buddhist framework. For example there is much fear of the spirit world so food and incense to the spirit houses are used to appease the malevolent spirits. Certain geographical areas also are thought to be haunted by spirits of people who for example, experienced a sudden violent death. As a result there are Khru Kmai (witch doctors) some of whom are simple herbal remedy

²⁹ The Monk, the Farmer, the Merchant, the Mother: Survival Stories of Rural Cambodia
ISBN 9995081806 (ISBN13: 9789995081805) <http://www.monument-books.com/shop/cambodia/the-monk-the-farmer-the-merchant-the-mother.html>

practitioners, other who are more linked to occult practices and divination. The mix between Hindu & animist traditions within Theravada Buddhism plays a significant role into a more mystic/theistic daily practice and belief here in Cambodia than for example Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet where it's very strict on the individual soul's enlightenment. A summary of the differences between Mahayana and Therevada Buddhism can be found at the link in the footnotes³⁰.

Supernatural connections in Cambodian Buddhism

This section will look at aspects of Cambodian Buddhism and its connection with the supernatural. Didier Bertrand (2004)³¹ gives a description from the observation of a number of mediums and the different activities that they perform. These include ceremonies to reinforce their powers, the construction of new alters, the celebration of anniversaries and holy days, healing divination and pilgrimages and is based on over 100 interviews over 3 years with medium healers. Some of the participants in the butterfly research project mentioned about visiting *Khru Khmai* (sometimes called witch doctors) so it is important to understand some of the ceremonies. All Cambodian Buddhist people are aware of the spirit world and many homes contain Spirit houses.

There are different shrines for different spirits and how the population feels toward them:

- In front of the house is a spirit house for the family's ancestors
- Inside the house are two spirit houses, one on the ground floor, one on an upper level. These are for protectors of the home. Friendly spirits (usually women) to help keep the home safe from outside evil spirits and ghosts. These spirits are seen as friends who one respects, not given offerings out of fear of their malevolence.

Village Spirits

- These are spirit houses that hold offerings to spirits who occupied the land before humans came. They are the lasting animist beliefs. They are the spirits that need appeasing to keep happy.

Buddhism and Human Rights

Kassie Neou, a Cambodian human rights advocate, and his colleague write “[t]he richest human rights tradition in Cambodia is that of Theravada Buddhism, the dominant religion.” With its emphasis on “compassion, tolerance, and nonviolence,” Neou and Gallup suggest, Buddhism stands “forcefully against abuses such as torture, maltreatment of prisoners, arbitrary arrest, discrimination, or suppression of the freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press.”³²

³⁰ <https://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/snapshot02.htm>

³¹ in the paper ‘A medium possession practice and its relationship with Cambodian Buddhism’ in the book history, Buddhism and new religious movements in Cambodia edited by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (2004)

³² Kassie Neou and Jefferey C. Gallop, “Teaching Human Rights in Cambodia,” *Journal of Democracy* 8:4 (1997): 160.

Ledgerwood and Kheang Un (2003)³³ suggest, “Widespread abuse of human rights is seen as the consequence of the breakdown of morality. Thus, respect for human rights can be achieved through the restoration of individual morality. If one adheres to the Buddhist precepts and follows the ideal of non-violence, not only are the rights of individuals respected, but social harmony and prosperity will result as well”.

The Center for Advanced Study team administered questionnaires and conducted qualitative interviews with 355 trainees from across the five provinces. They asked questions on a range of topics including rights. One response from Kandeng District:

We cannot separate religion from the kingdom. We respect Buddhist religion if we give up Buddhist we have no development. So we must work with them both together then we can develop fast. Buddhist theories advise people to be brave and struggle with their lives. It prohibits us from killing a living creature on the earth. It advises us to make a living honestly and respect the rules. It does not force us to do something. Yet, it's the same, don't steal one's property, don't commit sexual sins, don't tell a lie, don't drink wine. If you respect the human rights you have to have the five principles.

This demonstrates just how significant Buddhism is seen as inseparable identity to Cambodian culture

Other forms of Buddhism worshipped in Cambodia

Mahayana Buddhism³⁴ is the religion of the majority of Chinese (and Vietnamese) in Cambodia. Elements of other religious practices, such as veneration of folk heroes and ancestors, Confucianism, and Taoism mix with Chinese (and Vietnamese) Buddhism.

In the ethnically Chinese home, ancestors and household gods are honoured during prescribed times to help unite the extended family and to gain help from the dead, who can intercede for the living. Taoism teaches meditation and the use of magic to gain happiness, wealth, health, and immortality. Confucianism, part social philosophy and part religion, stresses religious ritual and pays great attention to the veneration of ancestors and of great figures of the past.

Several of the participants in the survey were or are connected to Chinese or Khmer-Chinese relatives and so are involved in a mixture of religious practices including some of the Chinese elements mentioned above.

³³ Judy L. Ledgerwood and Kheang Un (2003) *Global Concepts and Local Meaning: Human Rights and Buddhism in Cambodia*, Departments of Anthropology and Political Science, Northern Illinois University

³⁴ <https://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/snapshot02.htm>

Link between Christianity and Buddhism

Some Christians have been suspicious of Buddhism but those who are open can learn much from it.

Paul Knitter, a Christian theologian wrote a book called *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*.³⁵ In it, he explains that Buddhism teaches “practices that will help Christians draw on the mystical contents of our faith. Buddhism can help Christians to be *mystical* Christians...to realize and enter into the non-dualistic, or unitive, heart of Christian experience—a way to be one with the Father, to live Christ’s life, to be not just a container of the Spirit but an embodiment and expression of the Spirit, to live by and with and in the Spirit, to live and move and have our being in God.” Like Christian contemplative practices, Buddhist practices such as meditation, silence, and living mindfully can help us encounter the deepest, truest reality—our oneness with God.

Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh brings insights from Buddhist practice and teaching to social, political, environmental, and economic injustice:

*“Buddhists are much more concerned about waking up to our innate wisdom and compassion (our Buddha-nature) than they are about working for justice. If Christians insist that ‘if you want peace, work for justice,’ the Buddhists would counter-insist, ‘if you want peace, be peace.’ Thich Nhat Hanh gently suggests this in his book... Being Peace. His message is as simple, “the only way we are going to be able to create peace in the world is if we first create (or better, find) peace in our hearts”. **“Being peace is an absolute prerequisite for making peace.** And by “being peace,”... Thich Nhat Hanh means deepening the practice of mindfulness, both formally in regular meditation as well as throughout the day as we receive every person and every event that enters our lives; through such mindfulness we will, more and more, be able to understand... whomever we meet or whatever we feel, and so respond with compassion. Only with the peace that comes with such mindfulness will we be able to respond in a way that brings forth peace for the event or person or feeling we are dealing with”³⁶.*

Richard Rohr, the Catholic theologian suggests that, “Buddhist insistence on the necessary link between being peace and making peace reflects Christian spirituality’s traditional insistence that all our action in the world must be combined with contemplation...But the Buddhists are very clear: while both are essential, one holds a priority of practice. If action and contemplation form a constantly moving circle in which one feeds into the other, the entrance point for the circle is contemplation.³⁷

³⁵ <http://pdf.amazingdiscoveries.org/References/RB/284%20PDFs/without-buddha-i-could-not-be-christian-slide-45.pdf>

³⁶ <https://cac.org/being-peace-2018-08-23/>

³⁷ Richard Rohr, Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation *From the Center for Action and Contemplation* Taoism and Buddhism **Being Peace** Thursday, August 23, 2018

There is a story of when Mother Theresa visited Cambodia, after a year the Government staff came to see what they had achieved but there was nothing to see. The sisters insisted that before they could do anything they needed to pray and seek God's direction first. Rushing into action before meditation and prayer may not be helpful. Faith based organisations of all faiths could learn from this.

Christianity in Cambodia

A History of the Catholic church in Cambodia can be found in a fascinating book called *The Cathedral in the Rice Paddy*³⁸ by Fr. Francois Ponchaud, SJ (1990) describes 450 years of history of the Catholic Church in Cambodia. Gaspar da Cruz had been told by a Portuguese traders that Cambodian were keen to become Catholics but when he arrived, realised that the Cambodian didn't want to change their religion. In 1573 Fathers Lopa Cardoso and Joe Madeira both Portuguese Dominicans were sent to Cambodia but the Brahmins forbid preaching to Cambodians. In 1578 King Satha gave royal favour to Father Alzevedo and was allowed to sit in his presence. He was also given permission to build a church paid for by the King and in 1590 he announced religious liberty and said that every citizen could receive baptism without fear of reprisals. However it wasn't until 1659 the Catholic church issued a missionary charter and then 1665 two apostolic vicars were given jurisdiction over areas including Cambodia and Siam, Champa and Conchinchina. Nevertheless due to war and political reasons the church didn't get established. In 1768 Gervais Levavasseur arrived in Cambodia and In spite of rumours about him that he would cause a famine or that he was an ogre who would suck their blood, the governor protected him he became significant teaching in Cambodian translating a catechism baptising dying babies and adults and founding the structure of the native church. The growth of the Catholic church up the Khmer Rouge era is then described by Ponchaud who was himself the last Frenchman to leave the French Embassy on the May the 5th 1975 after the victory of the Khmer Rouge He was also one of the first to inform the world the tragedy of that time in his book *Cambodia Year Zero* (1978)³⁹.

The Catholic Church is quietly continuing to rebuild after being almost completely wiped out during the persecutions of the Khmer Rouge and then the Vietnamese occupation up till 1990. In June 2015 the leaders of the Catholic Church in Cambodia formally launched the process that is expected to lead to the beatification of 35 martyrs who were executed or died of hunger and exhaustion during the civil war from 1970 to 1975 and later, under the regime of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, who held power from 1975 to 1979. If the process is successful, it will be a first for Cambodia, a country which until now does not have any 'blesseds' or saints formally recognised by the Catholic Church.

³⁸ Ponchaud, François & Ramousse, Yves Bishop & Etchegaray, Roger & Pignarre, Nancy, (translator.) & Wilkinson, Sharon, (translator.) et al. (2012). *The cathedral in the rice paddy : the 450 year long history of the church in Cambodia* (Second edition). Phnom Penh, Cambodia Catholic Catechetical Centre Cambodia

³⁹ Ponchaud, F. (1978). *Cambodia: Year zero*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. <https://archive.org/details/cambodiayearzero00ponc/page/n7>

Vietnamese have been traditional enemies of Cambodia (Kamm,1978)⁴⁰ so the association between the Catholic church and Vietnam has increased the way Christianity is seen as a foreign religion with negative connotations. Ford⁴¹ describes how, “in 1970, General Lon Nol orchestrated a coup against the then Prince Norodom Sihanouk, whose increasingly anti-Vietnamese policies were further intensified. Pogroms, mass expulsions, and killings took place across Cambodia, and many Vietnamese were forced to flee south. On April 13, some 800 Vietnamese men were gunned down and by the end of the year, an estimated 7,000 Vietnamese Catholics were still living in Cambodia, down from 65,000 a year before” .

The history of the Protestant church is described in the book *'Killing Fields Living Fields'* (2009, OMF Publishing)⁴² which has recently been updated. It is written by Don Cormack who describes how the church was “first planted among rice farmers” in the mid 1920s. Although there with very little growth in the 1970s there was large growth described as a ‘spiritual awakening’ just before the genocide. Cormack says that there “simply was no room to accommodate all the people who came seeking solace in the Lord Jesus Christ in those final precious hours of freedom” .He goes on to describe, after the Khmer Rouge took control, a number of situations where Christians challenged the Khmer Rouge and some became martyrs. One story where a family were rounded up by young Khmer Rouge soldiers who described them as “old dandruff, bad blood, enemies of the Glorious Revolution, CIA agents” because they were Christians. After digging their own grave the father requested from the Soldiers a moment for the family to prepare themselves for death, so father mother and children linked hands to pray. They called out to God and everybody who was looking to “repent and believe in the gospel”. When one of the sons made a dash for it and ran into the forest, his father called him back so that he could die together with his family. After a few moments the boy came back and the father said now we're ready to go But the soldiers didn't want to do it so it had to be the commander who hadn't witnessed the events.

Appendix III in Cormack's *Killing Fields, Living Fields* provides a timeline from 300 BC to 2009 when the book was updated. it's suggested but it suggests that there are currently 350,000 evangelical Christians in Cambodia which constitute 2.5% of the population attending around 2760 churches with an average of about 30 people in each church.

Barnabas Mam is the writer of the book *Church Behind The Wire* (2012)⁴³ Moody Press. Barnabas was one of the few survivors of the Khmer Rouge and was converted to Christianity while spying on the Christian evangelistic meeting in the early 1970s. He was later sent to the Khmer Rouge “killing fields” and after his release fled to Thailand where he spent 8 years in Site 2 refugee camp along the

⁴⁰ Cambodia and Vietnam: Ancient Enemies by Henry Kamm New York Times January 7,1978
<https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/07/archives/cambodia-and-vietnamancient-enemies-border-drawn-by-france-cambodia.html>

⁴¹ Ford P (2017) **Cambodia, Catholicism, and Cauliflower**. The ups and downs of life in an ethnically Vietnamese community in Cambodia. *The Diplomat* March 14, 2017

⁴² <https://www.omfbooks.com.au/product/killing-fields-living-fields/>

⁴³ <https://www.moodypublishers.com/books/evangelism-and-discipleship/church-behind-the-wire/>

Thai Cambodian border. Barnabas inspired and encouraged a number of different house churches in the refugee camps.⁴⁴ At the end of the Cold War and Peace agreements and the Vietnamese had left Cambodia Site 2 refugee camp needed to repatriate around 200,000 refugees. Amongst these refugees were a number of Christians who chose to return to provinces throughout Cambodia so that a new 'diaspora' of the church occurred.

Christian Faith Based Organisations in Cambodia

Brian Maher with Uon Seila wrote, *Cry of the Gecko: History of Christian mission in Cambodia*⁴⁵ which particularly focuses on the past 40 years describing a number of biographies of key Christians including pastors and missionaries in the context of occupation, oppression genocide, regional and civil war. It is an account of some of the real difficulties as well during those years when there was competition sometimes unhelpful between different missions and pastors. But it also describes a real and serious commitment from the international Christian community to help Cambodia recover from years of trauma.

From the early presence of the Catholic church with who developed hospitals in Cambodia there have been more recently a number of faith-based non-government organizations who have been involved in providing health and social care. For example, World Vision, a faith based organization, was in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge time and was one of the first organizations to be invited back into Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge era. They were able to develop the National Paediatric Hospital. After the Cold War and the Paris Peace Accord in 1992 in addition to the UN troops who sought to provide free and fair elections a number of humanitarian organizations were allowed to come to Cambodia as long as they could provide explanation about what they intended to do and could provide the resources to do it.

In 2005, the faith based organization International Justice Mission (IJM) worked with news media including NBC news Dateline⁴⁶ to advocate for children who were being sexually exploited in Cambodia with a documentary "Children for Sale". They exposed a child brothel where children are being sold for sex to sex tourists. Although there have been several faith based Christian organizations already seeking to provide help for young women who chose to leave the industry and have the ability to do so, IJM wanted to rescue and remove children from the brothels and provide a safe space for them. The exposure in the form of covert video footage was shown by major International television news broadcasts around the world and created deep concern among the public in the US, Australasia and Europe. the US state department took this issue to a new level and human trafficking became a

⁴⁴ I first met him in 1989 in Site 2 when I asked him how I could best serve the church. He said to me that they had been praying for someone to help with the children's work. I then worked with Barnabas to develop a training for representatives of many of the different house churches to be able to creatively do Sunday school for the children in the camp. My main job in the camp with working under the UN as the maternal child health coordinator.

⁴⁵ <http://www.cambodianchristian.com/article/?p=313>

⁴⁶ http://www.nbcnews.com/id/4038249/ns/dateline_nbc/t/children-sale/#.XSW2BpO6POR

major target for them. In addition a number of Christians were inspired to do something about it. Since then, with help from Chab Dai over 50 Christian organizations became committed themselves to providing support to survivors of sex trafficking in Cambodia.

Christian Discrimination against Sex Workers

Research by Hester et al. (2017)⁴⁷ into attendance to church services declined after re/integration: 45% clients reported still attending church services, and 55% responded not attending church. When the clients were asked “If you are still attending a church service, who do you attend church services with?”, 68% were attending either with friends or alone by themselves. When all 29 were asked “Do you still accept Christianity for your faith?”, 72% responded “yes”, 3% were unsure, and 14% stated “no”. Questions targeting barriers or reasons why clients no longer attended church services after leaving the program were asked. When asked if a church was located near your home or village, 41% responded “yes”, and 59% clients said “no”.

In the same research (Hester et al, 2017) conducted by Precious Women with pastors and Christian leaders in churches there “appeared to be a lack of recognition or understanding on the impact of discrimination as a barrier for former FEW/FSW (Female Entertainment Workers/Female Sex Workers) to attend church. Approximately 40% of the church respondents stated that they themselves or other members have either in the past or currently do discriminate against former FEW/FSW. Another 30% of the respondents stated they did not know if discrimination occurred when an entertainment/sex worker attended or visited their church. There is evidence that an awareness does exist that discrimination is a strong response to former FEW/FSW. In contrast, however, only one respondent in the survey stated that “society and church members rejecting former entertainment/sex workers” is a barrier for these women to attend church. Furthermore, “unknown” was significantly the greatest response as a reason that former FEW/FSW do not attend church.

In previous research conducted by Chab Dai’s Safe Community Project Church Leaders Survey (Miles, Sworn and Sophorn, 2015)⁴⁸ a large amount of responses to the question regarding who outreach to prostitutes was carried out by (in terms of gender) were missing, either due to respondents not having outreach programmes or not understanding or wanting to answer the question. However, amongst those who did answer this question, it was encouraging to see that there were quite a few instances of mixed gender outreach (with 7 respondents choosing this answer from all sites). Outreach by females was also surprisingly high, higher across all sites than that by only men, suggesting that where outreach programmes do exist, their methods are fairly progressive.

⁴⁷ Tricia Hester, Sopheak Kong, Srey Oun Seng, Chamreun Seng, Srey Mey Seng, Sam Ol Neang Experiences of Former Cambodian Entertainment and Sex Workers Integrating into Christian Churches

⁴⁸ <http://gmmiles.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Chab-Dai-Safe-Community-Project-Church-Leaders-Research-Compressed.pdf>

Generally there was a positive response and openness to church members being trained on outreach to prostitutes from participants. However, many participants reported that former prostitutes are not presently welcome in their churches. Participants were given an opportunity to provide their reasons as to why or why not prostitutes were or weren't welcome in their churches. There was a significant amount of negative comments made that reflect correspondingly negative stereotypes and attitudes held about prostitutes. These included because prostitutes are perceived as doing indecent acts, because they are seen as being disobedient to God, because the congregation were scared they will corrupt the church, and because they are perceived as not good examples for the church (each reason was given by one individual participant). Two participants said it is because they do illegal work and do not want to change, while another two similarly commented that it's because their work is against the law.

Christianity and Human/Child Rights

The late Professor Judith Ennew (2015)⁴⁹ suggests Christians are encouraged to understand where we stand in the debate and be clear about their boundaries i.e. when what Christians are doing is spiritual abuse and when it is simply holistic care, including taking into consideration the spiritual needs of children.

Christian Evangelism

“For Buddhists proselytizing is an unimportant, worldly activity resulting in neither merit nor in improved karma, for Christian child welfare organisations, child beneficiaries are included in faith based activities as a matter of course, although this is looked on by others with suspicion. But Christianity is evangelical – “forbidding Christians to tell the good news is like telling a tree not to grow” Judith Ennew, (2015)

She adds “What Jesus intended was that his followers should communicate to others...sacrificial other person centred respect and love. There is no suggestion of coercion. Human beings, especially children can be compelled (or induced by related benefits) to follow rituals and obey religious practices. But it is unlikely that anyone can be forced to *believe* something against their wishes”

Christian Values on dignity, respect and love

Scripture mirrors values of dignity, respect and love for all human beings because they are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Many Christians stress their responsibility to deliver rights to other people, rather than to claim their own rights as entitlements.

⁴⁹ ‘What role does faith and spirituality have in caring for children at risk and other vulnerable people? How do we respond to those who say they were forcing children to believe things against their will?’ in Crawford C and Miles GM(Eds) (2015)‘*Finding our way through the Traffick*’ Navigating our way through the complexities of a Christian response to sexual exploitation and Human Trafficking’ (Regnum 2017) Available from www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum and Amazon

However things are changing and this is affecting mission values. In recent research by Barna⁵⁰ 60% of Americans believe it is 'extreme' to attempt to convert others to your faith, 57% say whatever is right or works best for you is the only truth you can know.

Rebecca & Hay (1998)⁵¹ suggests we have four major responsibilities which can be applied to any faith:

1. To help children keep an open mind
2. To explore with children different ways of perceiving the world.
3. To encourage children's awareness of their own spirituality and that of others
4. To become aware of social and political dimensions of spirituality

"Spiritual nurture rather than conversion must be the core of faith based activities... One human right is not to have the existence of a spiritual dimension is regarded as a delusion or neurosis...Spiritual lives of children must be neither abused nor distorted through power relationships" Judith Ennew, 2015

Janusz Korczak, the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit (1879 – 1942), was a Polish-Jewish educator, children's author, and teacher known as *Pan Doktor* ("Mr. Doctor") or *Stary Doktor* ("Old Doctor"). He previously worked as director of an orphanage in Warsaw, when the everyone in the institution including the children was sent by the Nazis from the Ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp, during the Grossaktion Warsaw of 1942. He refused sanctuary repeatedly and stayed with his orphans. He developed a series of rights of the child and said that "The child has the right to commune with God" was one of the rights he considered long before the UNCRC.⁵²

Resilience

Gray (2012)⁵³ identifies elements of resilience in young Cambodian survivors of trafficking through a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The nine constructs of resilience that emerge from the researchers analysis are perseverance, adaptability, self-preservation, interconnectedness, hope for the future, buoyancy, introspection, steadiness, and social awareness. The author describes these themes as follows (Gray, 2012).

⁵⁰ Barna Research. (2018) 'Spiritual Conversations in a Digital World'. <https://www.barna.com/spiritualconversations/>

⁵¹ David Hay and Rebecca Nye (2006) *The Spirit of the Child*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=lgQ0_pUdNd0C&dq=Rebecca+Hay+\(1998\)&source=gbs_navlinks_s](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=lgQ0_pUdNd0C&dq=Rebecca+Hay+(1998)&source=gbs_navlinks_s)

⁵² Lifton, B.J. (1988) *The King of Children: A biography of Janusz Korczak*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux <https://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0504-korczak.html>

⁵³ Gray Glori (2012) *Exploring resilience: strengths of trafficking survivors in Cambodia* Int J Adolesc Med Health. **2012**;24(4):363-71. doi: 10.1515/ijamh.2012.053.

1. **Perseverance:** Diligent, determined, and resourceful in their pursuits
2. **Adaptability:** their ability to successfully navigate changes in their environment and adjust to challenges
3. **Self-preservation:** behavior ensuring these young women's survival, expressed through the use of humor, determined attitudes, and intuition
4. **Interconnectedness:** described through survivors relationship with their families, but to a lesser extent also with friends in school and with a mentor
5. **Hope for the future:** entailed setting and achieving personal goals in order to move forward and avoid dwelling on past traumatic experiences
6. **Buoyancy:** expressed by using extroversion to build relationships with others
7. **Introspection:** being reflective on and aware of one's inner feelings is part of the healing process
8. **Steadiness:** being grounded or consistent in doing the right things no matter what, especially with regards to maintaining good family relationships
9. **Social Awareness:** involved both the capacity to feel empathy and to establish healthy connections with others (a desire to help others who, like themselves, had experienced trauma)

Interestingly a number of these themes seem to be linked to spirituality

1. Spirituality appears to increase perseverance. Many participants have demonstrated how their faith has increased their perseverance in adverse circumstances
2. Spirituality appears to enable adaptability to changes and challenges.
3. Spirituality appears to help survive in adversity as demonstrated in a number of participants
4. Spirituality provides opportunity for stronger relationships with family and friends (where stigma and discrimination is not expressed)
5. Spirituality appears to provide hope for the future.
6. Spirituality appears to increase buoyancy in building relationships with others as demonstrated in the above quotes.
7. Spirituality appears to enable introspection and being aware of one's inner feelings
8. Spirituality appears to enable being consistent in doing the right thing especially with regards to good family relationships (where stigma and discrimination is not expressed)
9. Spirituality appears to enable capacity to be empathetic with others and to want to help others, including those who have experienced similar traumas.

Child Abuse & Religious Institutions

A report on faith and spirituality cannot exclude the current increasing awareness that religious institutions have been complicit in child abuse. It should not be necessary to say that this is contrary to both Buddhist and Christian teachings.

Sadly there are a number of reports where children's rights are being violated in the extreme through sexual abuse. Here are some of the reports from the press on sexual abuse occurring in Cambodian churches & orphanages and Buddhist Temples.

Cambodian churches and orphanages⁵⁴

One report describes how the Catholic church knew of alleged child abuser⁵⁵ and another where scrutiny turns to child abusers among Catholic clergy.⁵⁶

Although the Catholic church has recently undergone considerable attention they are not the only branch of the church who have had members who have been abusers. Another report describes how a Protestant Korean Missionary is imprisoned in sexual abuse case and a further report describes how another Protestant Christian missionary is convicted of child abuse in a Cambodian orphanage.⁵⁷

Cambodian Buddhist Temples

One report describes a Pagoda chief who is jailed for 15 years for the rape of boys⁵⁸ and another of an elderly monk arrested for repeated rape of girls.⁵⁹ Unfortunately in many incidents like this there are cover ups and silence from those who should be speaking up on behalf of vulnerable children.⁶⁰

It is important to recognize that this behaviour is not seen as acceptable by the majority of people of faith and indeed scriptures in both the Christian and Buddhist faith would forbid it. This is one of the reasons why all partner organisations of Chab Dai and beyond are encouraged, indeed obliged to develop and adhere to child protection policies which include all types of abuse and violations of child rights.

⁵⁴ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/08/31/cambodian-court-imprisons-korean-in-sexual-abuse-children.html>

⁵⁵ <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/catholic-church-knew-of-alleged-child-abuser-128484/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/scrutiny-turns-to-child-abusers-among-clergy-128635/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.ktvz.com/news/coos-bay-man-convicted-of-child-abuse-at-cambodian-orphanage/742671050>

⁵⁸ <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/pagoda-chief-gets-15-years-for-rape-of-boys-113980/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/elderly-monk-arrested-for-repeated-rape-of-girls-2-106807/>

⁶⁰ www.sea-globe.com/the-sound-of-silence-sexual-abuse-in-cambodias-buddhist-pagodas/

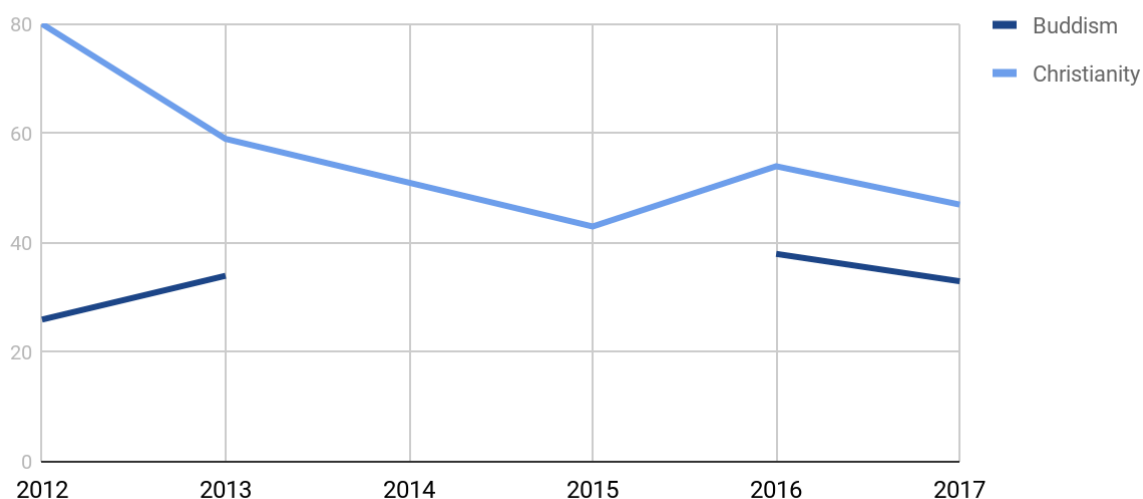
Findings

Cohort's Connection with Experience of Beliefs

Table 1: Participants confession of Faith

	Christian	Buddhist
2012	80	26
2013	59	34
2014	51	-
2015	43	-
2016	54	38
2017	47	33

Primary Belief



It is noted that the identity recorded here is according to what the participant said; not by the degree of their faith practice in their daily life. So some who claimed themselves belong to either Christian or Buddhist do not necessarily practice it all the time. Figures for Buddhism is not available for 2014 and 2015

These figures should be read carefully as the impact of faith appears to be much broader. In fact, some of the responses below do not provide definitive answers. Some participants have clearly been influenced by Christian faith but do not consider themselves to be Christian. More about this is included in the Discussion section.

Quotes from Participants

These results have been organized into categories but in this results section they have been left without commentating so that the reader is able to see that the words are coming from the survivors rather than the author. The authors interpretation is in the discussion section and they can decide if they think it is a correct interpretation or not.

Cohort's understanding of Buddhism

For many of the participants Buddhism is something they have experienced their whole life, their parents do it and so they do it too.

I believe in Buddha. As a Cambodian we have this religion to follow. I never go to the temple except at Khmer New Year time. I also burn the incense at holy days and go for water sprinkle at Pras Ang Check and Pras Ang Chorm⁶¹ only. My parents believe in this religion so I need to believe like them as well. (Tina)⁶²

I believe in Buddha as my house is close to the temple and I did that since I was a child. My mothers offers things on the special days. I go to the temple. I buy fruits to bring home for the offering. In the temple I pray and use the

⁶¹ Pras Ang Check and Pras Ang Chorm are holy places located in Siemreap province near the Royal Palace. People often pray for luck, prosperity and health there because they believe this is a Holy Shrine.

⁶² All names are changed to pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality

*incense and give the monk food but only occasionally [every 2 months].
(Veha)⁶³*

Some believed because they felt that Buddha responded to their requests for help and protection

When I wanted the partner I did not want him to drink and smoke. I prayed for about a year and a half and when I left the organization I got what I asked for. He did not drink, gamble or drink. (Khema)

If I had a bad day I would go to the temple to ask the monk for a blessing. I did this to protect me from being harmed. (Leng)

Some believe in the power of the Khru Khmer (traditional spiritual healers associated with Folk Buddhism)

I just went to the master [Khru Khmer] and he solved the issue for me. I was healed in just a few minutes. He could make things to protect you from danger. For Buddha, I believe, but I need to have things to offer. It solved the problem and issues for me. Some masters did not put the amount for their service, but some charge 300-400 USD. (Narith)

When we go the 'Master' [Khru Khmer] he said that my dead grandmother was angry at us. If we have something to eat and don't offer to her/his she will come for me. I saw the ghosts of my grandparents. I got help from the Master. I used the incense and informed him. (Sokchan)

⁶³ The family belief and practice of ID70 and another 2 participants (ID71 & ID72) is that they remained Buddhist even though they experienced sexual exploitation from the Monk. This shows how strong the family practice influenced them. They rarely had a negative perspective on the Buddhist monks. Yet, according to the IDI interview of 2018, they expressed a number of recommendations regarding what Buddhist practitioner and Head Monk should do to help protect children from being exploited and abused within the Wat (Pagoda) campus. These include providing safeguarding to children coming to the Pagoda. The head monk must protect them and at the same time should be strict to the monks to learn the Buddha's teachings so they can behave accordingly to Buddha's teaching. These recommendations are reflective to their past experience with the monks.

Another interesting point to note is that while they reported they believe in Buddha, one of them also expressed the appreciation of the Christianity practice during the time staying in the Christian after-care shelter, such as reading the Bible, singing praise songs and listening to the pastor preach the Word of God during Worship service. The participant said he felt relieved from the stress of his exploitative experience and at the same time found hope and strength to continue and he knew that he was not the only person who experienced this.

Others were also aware of the spirit world.

I believe in ghosts and so on. When I was sick the ghost guards came to meet me, one skinny and one fat.⁶⁴ I told them that my kids were too small.⁶⁵ My boy was two years but still drank milk from me. I told them if I go then no one cares for them. I was blessed by the water the next day. I did not see them after that. Others don't believe in that but I believe it. (Daly)

Cohort's Fluidity of belief

Having been exposed to Christianity in the centre some realize that they have a choice and chose Buddhism.

I prefer Buddha. I sometimes also want to go to Jesus too but I think my ancestors were Buddhist . All the people who are around me are Cambodians and most of them are Buddhists. My family and partner are Buddhist. (Makara)

Others were more ambiguous about Buddhist practices

I believe in Buddha but I don't like to go to the temple. I sometimes used the incense and sometimes I did not. Some people say that my house does not have the Buddha followers as we don't go to the temple and join the celebrations. The old people told me to go and I did not go. I believe and don't believe. (Jimpa)

Some believed in God in the centre but changed their minds later on

In the Centre I believed in Jesus but changed to Buddha when my grandmother died and her/his body was put in the temple. I was instructed to respect. My mother is a Buddhist and I feel happy when I go to the temple. I know I must respect my elders and parents I have to be humble. (Pich)

⁶⁴ More info on Buddhism and Ghosts in Theravada Buddhist context can be found in 'McDonalds The Lovelorn Ghost and the Monk p.75-99<https://books.google.com.kh/books?id=LnykFauU0XAC&pg=PR1&lpg=PP1&focus=viewport&dq=Buddhism%2Bghosts#v=onepage&q=Buddhism%2Bghosts&f=false>

⁶⁵ Folk spirits/dieties/ghosts in Cambodian Buddhism--are all under the authority of the ever watching Buddha, and these vengeful spirits need to be reminded of the Buddha's presence from time to time. The Buddha and the Naga <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ERzw9crOrA1P7VP1I-yO5AGbsGNd22EuMDsfgsxBucE/edit>

Some had experience of Christianity from when they were small

Since I was young I believe in Jesus. Even though I sell something on the street or go to the pagoda but in my heart I still believe in God.⁶⁶ This faith didn't start recently but I had it many years already even before I came into the centre. Since I grew up I heard about Jesus. I only believed in one religion only. All my family are Buddhist but I don't care. (Dara)

Others were convinced by others behaviour

I just decided to believe in God because I think that Christians are good people; they are friendly and they don't talk badly to one another; this is what I have observed. This makes me think that I want to believe in God. (Mealea)

Others became convinced later on when faced with a problem

Before I didn't believe in God or have faith in Him, even though my workplace is Christian but I never paid attention to it for 7 years. But when I was faced with a problem I knew what I experienced shows I was broken and I didn't have peace in me. But when I believed in God I had a peace and I can forgive other people. I can control my feelings. What is best for me is prayer; when I pray God answered my prayer. I pray every night. This is how I have a relationship with God. I had a strong faith in God for 2 years. (Phalin)

Father died so respect to his passing changed their belief

My father died. I was instructed to hold the incense. My family members used the incense so I could not deny doing it. I then turned to Buddha. Since then I have reduced my link to Jesus but I did not cut ties with God. I still pray to God sometimes. (Leng)

Convinced themselves but others in family changed

My spiritual life is stronger than before.. My faith will never go away from me. I won't sometimes follow Buddhism and sometimes follow Christianity. This will not happen to me. I have a daughter in law and she/he was not sure with her/his faith. She/he said "mom I really want to burn incense" and then I said, "daughter Jesus doesn't want you to burn incense but if you want to do it, then do it in your house and not this one because your partner and I believe

⁶⁶ Whatever they do, they still believe in God, secular or spiritual. At this point they were trying to explain how strong their faith is in Christ, though they rarely go to church as they are busy with their business for making a living. The reason they mentioned about selling on the street and in the pagoda was because many times people would assume that they are Buddhist because they are selling the offering for the monk and Buddha statues, such as the lotus flower. But for her, the focus of their mind is on their relationship with God rather than their actions. They're aware that it may not be seen as appropriate for a good Christian to be doing. However, selling flowers in the pagoda and on the street may be the only choice that they have to make money in their community.

in Jesus. Jesus is real and you can try to pray to him and you will experience Him". Now she/he believes in Jesus. The partner seemed disappointed with his faith and then his wife said "honey please don't stop your faith because I am starting to believe in God as well. She/he encouraged her/his partner, "how can your faith go backward and mine go forward!" (Phana)

Some experienced a 'miracle' in their life which convinced them

A miracle happened to me. When I got pregnant, for seven months my partner blamed me. He used strong words to hurt me. I was upset because I had given him my life and he was my beloved partner... When I went to the road I prayed and saw the police under the bridge and they helped me to cross the road every day. After I delivered my baby I never saw them again. Although I used to be scared but I don't experience that anymore... and I have become stronger since that time. (Phalin)

Some took a more cerebral approach

I have read the word of God and a lot of other books as well. Some books talk about Buddha, some about other religions. As I read I thought that Jesus is true and especially when I read Genesis. (Phana)⁶⁷

Don't go to church or temple, don't look down on any religion. Believe in both

I didn't go to either the church or pagoda. I still believe in God but I never read the Bible or sing the songs. I never go to church but I still believe in it. I still believe in Buddhism. (Sokchea)

Cohort's Reflections on Teachings of Buddhism

It is of note that the participants have far more to say about Christianity than Buddhism perhaps because there is more emphasis on Bible teaching in Christianity than scripture learning in Buddhism. Although studying is deeply integral to the path of reaching enlightenment the typical Cambodian Buddhist may not have time or energy to study.

Although boys traditionally go to a monastery for at least a couple of weeks during lent as a traditional 'rite of passage' to be monks this may be done more to provide merit to the parents for bringing them into the world and so that they can be re-

⁶⁷ They have great knowledge about God. They also found God when facing difficulty. They were connected to a Christian NGO and church, and that was where they could calm down and keep trying to study and learn about God. Faith played a very important role in their life both healing themselves and showing willingness to help others to experience healing. They volunteered work as the outreach worker for the sex worker on the street. In addition, they're always willing to help others, especially the poor and addicted children in their community. In my opinion, they a "change agent" for their community. Their desire is to see a positive change in the lives of children and other people in the community. They often introduce people to Christian Faith and connects them to Church.

incarnated into something better as much as benefiting the son so Buddhism may feel a bit 'forced'. In addition women do not have the same status as men in the wats and entering the monastery as a nun is more reserved for widows than young women. Nuns do not teach as their role is more cloistered. So teaching of Buddhism for the majority of the population is reserved to listening to the monks at the major religious festivals.

A key understanding of Buddhism by participants is 'kharma'

The most famous quote in Buddhism is that if people do good then they will receive good things. If they do bad things then they will receive bad things too. This helps me. (Romdaul)

I tell myself that I need to do something good. Even though I do not have hope in getting the good thing back from a person, but I think I would get a good response from other people. (Romdaul)

For those who plant a tree, the tree will grow; if you plant a gourd, it doesn't grow a pumpkin. Some people cause me problems. If they plant Kdart then they get Kdart. It will never come out with Trav.⁶⁸ So I mean that even I didn't do bad to that person but one day another person who has experience like me will do something back to them. I just think like this, they may have their own family problems. (Mealea)

It depends on our action that makes us to be sinners⁶⁹. I didn't cause trouble to anyone and I don't speak badly about people as well...what they do, they will receive. (Mlis)

Respect for relatives, elders and monks important]

When I believe in Buddha I respect monks, elderly and the people who are older; parents, siblings and relatives. We respect each other. (Sim)

Going to the temple. Listening to the monks. Not doing wrong.

Regarding Buddhism we go to the temple on the special day and we listen to the sermon. I used to be the monk assistant. They gave the sermon about the great things to do in the religion and also sermon to educate the young person as well. It helps those who did wrong in society. For example the monks instructed them to ride the motorbike properly. They rebuked us for doing it wrong and also gave a sermon about it. (Veha)

⁶⁸ Both Kdart and Trav are a kind of vegetable for cooking. The difference is that Trav has a tuber that can be used for multi-purposes (for soup, desert, snack...) while Kdart doesn't have a tuber and can only be used only in savory dishes.

⁶⁹ To do bad deeds

Cohort's reflections on Teachings of Christianity

God created everything⁷⁰ and he loves everyone⁷¹

God created the plants and the birds and helps them to grow up and how much more does he love us as human beings. (Nary)

God teaches us not to discriminate or look down on others⁷²

Jesus teaches us not to discriminate to anyone else. Even if we clean the bathroom or clean up dog shit we are doing it to serve God. God told me not to look down on the dirty person. Last night a man's hand was bleeding and I got my olive oil to put on him. I didn't feel bad. I think God won't allow his disease to spread to me. Some people don't like it and are scared of blood and they were afraid of getting the disease from him but I remember God's word not to discriminate and I just helped them. I just follow God's command. Even the garbage collectors or beggars I brought fruit salad for them. I bought two bottles, keep one for myself and one for them. (Nary)

God teaches us to help others and not expect return⁷³

When I help someone I don't expect back from them. I support the family who need things. I help them with my heart. I do not take the interest from those who want a loan. Some people took advantage of poor people. (Champa)

God teaches us not to worry⁷⁴

In the Bible God said not to worry about tomorrow so I don't worry about tomorrow. I told my friends not to worry. God will never leave you. I encouraged them about God. I had arguments with some people but I don't hate them. God wants us to love our enemies. I was always the one to start talking with them ahead with humble behavior. (Maly)

I sometimes feel discouraged but I encourage myself. Job⁷⁵ had a very difficult life but he endured it. Just in a blink of an eye, 10 of his children died and he had a lot of property and it was destroyed. I don't have property and I don't need to worry. (Kanya)

⁷⁰ Genesis 1. Story of Creation

⁷¹ John 3:16 God loved the world so he gave his son

⁷² Matthew 7:1-5 Do not judge

⁷³ Luke 6: 25 Do good expecting nothing in return

⁷⁴ Matthew 6:34 Do not worry about tomorrow

⁷⁵ See the Book of Job in the Bible

God teaches us to forgive and to love⁷⁶

I learnt about love from God. I was taught about love from the Bible and that I need to forgive others. I think about this every day. I have more love than at that time when I did not believe in God. It is still difficult for me to forgive, including anger when we had the problem and then we just confess. I think that the wrong-doer needs to meet me first and then I can forgive. But God does not want me to be like this; God wants us to move ahead but even though I have tried, I can't do it yet because I am still angry with the person. We only understand our feelings. You think you are right and they think they are right. I easily get angry and aggressive. It is my attitude and I need to reduce it. But I also have love in my feelings and I try to talk about good things. (Malis)

God teaches us not to be envious of others⁷⁷

I told my partner that I don't care if we make money or not. I said, "honey I am happy with what God gives me". Before I got so jealous even of my own siblings but now I never care about this. I never feel greedy anymore. Even though my sister got a car, I am not sad about this. (Kanya)

God teaches us to be good, not drink wine⁷⁸ or commit adultery⁷⁹

God teaches us everything including how to speak and teaches people to do good. He teaches us not to drink wine, not to commit adultery and the teaching is really good. (Danith)

God teaches us to be honest, not to lie, to keep promises

I learnt a lot from the Bible. I learnt how to be honest. I do not lie. I learned about justice and I am always honest. I do not lie because I know the bad effects of lying. If you lie then you do not receive good things but bad things. When I say something I will do it. When I promise I will do it. I have to do this. (Da)

⁷⁶ Colossians 3:13 Forgive each other as God has forgiven you

⁷⁷ Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet...

⁷⁸ Ephesians 5:18: "Do not get drunk on **wine**, which leads to debauchery.

⁷⁹ Exodus 20: 14,15

Walk the narrow path with God⁸⁰

I will work with God seriously. I would not walk in the wide path as that is the world and goes to the lake of fire. I will walk on the narrow path which is with God and to heaven. (Suon)

God teaches us to confess our sins to him, He answers us.⁸¹

God helps me to try the best. If I do the mistake then I need to make adjustments. I always confess my sins to God. When I am faced with difficulties God answers me. It is important for me in my daily life...I found my true God. (Suon)

Jesus forgives our sins (but hard to love our enemy)⁸²

They told us that even though I have committed sins if I believe in Jesus these sins will be forgiven. God taught us to love our enemy. God told us that if someone is persecuting us then we should be happy with it but I think it is impossible for me. I could not do it. (Visal)

Comparing Christianity and Buddhism

Both encourage us to be better

Jesus is good as he instructs us to be better. I used to hear the sermon about Buddha. I learnt that if we do good, we will receive good things. If we do not do something good we will receive something bad too. (Tevy)

Buddhism less likely to be encouraging when have difficulty

When I faced difficulty I can talk to Jesus and pray to Him and tell Him about my difficult feeling. For most of Christian people they encourage each other a lot but for Buddhism they only teach not to rob, kill, talk badly about others or commit adultery. Christianity also talks about this but for Buddhism they rarely talk about encouragement when people have a problem/difficulty. So in their hearts they don't really talk about it. (Sokchea)

⁸⁰ In Matthew 7:13-14 we read of Jesus saying, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because *narrow is the gate* and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (emphasis added throughout). For the participants many will recognise that following Jesus has not been an easy decision and Jesus describes the challenges in Luke 9 and 14. The lake of fire a Christian teaching emphasised by some Christians as equivalent to hell where those who don't believe in God will end up when they die. The five **Bible** verses that mention "the **lake of fire**" show it to be a symbol rather than a literal lake. (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8).

⁸¹ James 5:15 Confess your sins to each other and pray

⁸² Matthew 5: 44 Jesus says to forgive our enemies

Harder to be Buddhist than Christian

I think Buddhists have more difficulty practicing their faith than Christians. They have to go to the market to buy fruits for offering, cook the food and go to the pagoda on holy days. But all we need to do is to fold our hands, bow our heads and pray. But we still complain! Sometimes I am afraid of getting away from God. I pray because I am afraid I will be separated far from God. Sometimes I pray to God, "although I sometimes feel far from you, please Father God do not abandon me". I pray and talk to God like this. (Chea)

Only get what we want by working hard

When Christians feel sad they pray to God for his help but I think the belief can't help us much. There is no belief that can help us to have a big house, money or car. Only us that work hard to get what we want. (Davuth)

When we die:

When we die I don't know if we will experience reincarnation or how we will be. We can't know about this. I only know that we live with people so when they say it is good I just follow them. I don't know when we die if it will become true to us or not. Is heaven and hell true or not? I don't know what will happen to me after I die. I only know when we are still alive just don't commit bad deeds. I think everyone who is born a human being sins. They say everyone has sinned. Even anger is a sin; cursing children is also a sin. Christians also ask us to do good work; they don't want us to commit sin. If we commit sin we will go to the lake of fire.⁸³ I asked the true Christian and pastor about this and they said the same thing; nothing is different from Buddha. For those who do good deeds we will receive good and for those who commit bad things will go to the lake of fire. (Mlis)

Cohort's understanding of Religious Practice

Buddhism

I do incense on the special days. I go to the temple with my mother during P'chum Ben. I do not cook the food for the monks as my parents are alive so I just give them the money. It is normal. It is tradition and I just follow the elders. They believe and they bring food to the temple to give food to those who died. My parents are living both sides so we just give the money to the temple and they use it. (Mach)

Christianity

I first pray for everyone in Cambodia, then for me and my family. I also pray for those who are around me too. I pray for the things I wanted and the times I have a bad feeling or in a mood. I am learning to practice the songs to praise God. (Vanna)

⁸³ See Footnote 65

Misunderstanding about Christian Funeral Practices

I did not believe [in Christianity] in the beginning because I heard that when the parents died they would not allow us to cry but they told me it wasn't true. We [Christians] can cry when we lose our loved ones. (Phearun)

Impact of Faith on Personal Life

It is of note that the participants have far more to say about what they experience as Christians than Buddhists.

Buddhism

Enjoy listening to teaching at temple or on radio

I believe and offer things on special holy days. I give food to the monks as well. I don't go to the temple as it is far away from home. My mother goes and when she goes I get something good from that too. I don't offer food to the monks on work days or when I am drunk. I think by myself. I love to listen to the teaching of the monk when I went to temple or on the radio. (Daly)

Healing and blessings from the monks.

When I go to the temple I feel relieved. I was dizzy but I was blessed by the monk. I had problems with guests, with my boss and my family and asked for money too. It causes me to be complicated. I have little money. I came to the temple to ask for a blessing to relieve me. When I have a disease I pray to be healed and I have been healed. I offer the things that I promised to give. (Bopha)

Protection and safety

There were two cobra snakes that came to bite me. I put them in front of the house. I then said, "if you come for a good thing please make everything good. If you come for bad thing then please go away". I then used the incense. The snakes then left. The people were about to kill them but I did not allow. (Bopha)

Buddha Helps me overcome my problems and helps me to sleep.

When I pray to Buddha I just say, "Please help me to overcome this problem". When I am sad, I could not think about anything so I pray. I pray that I can overcome my burdens. After I pray I manage my feelings and go to bed. I never go to the pagoda. When I pray that I won't have any problems it makes me feel better and I can sleep. I have a good dream and I think about the good things. I don't remember the praying term but I just pray. (Sean)

Doing good, means receiving good

I don't believe that if you do good you will receive good. (Mealea)⁸⁴

Getting help from fortune teller

I followed my sister to go to the fortune-teller to predict for me. She told me that my partner and I could not live together and we will separate one day but this made me feel not good and I don't want to believe what makes me sad. When I came home I did the complete opposite with what they asked me to do. If I followed them I would argue with my partner and we would separate. I told my partner what happened and he asked me if I believed it but I said I don't believe it. The most important thing is my belief and [the faith in] my partner. My father and most of my siblings believe in witch-craft and prediction. (Sean)

Christianity

When I have a problem I can talk to God by praying

I went to my homeland and I could not attend the church then I felt far away from it. But if I am happy or sad I can talk to God through praying. Yes and God did a miracle to me. He made me to believe in Him. I pray to God and ask Him for good health, taking care and protecting my child. I pray at nighttime when I am free. When I am home, I listen to the Bible as well. When I have a problem I can use my Bible knowledge to practice and I don't feel stress in my heart. God teaches to not get angry with other people even if they speak badly against us and we need to forgive them. We don't just think its difficult- we need to forgive them. If I obey God, I feel relaxed in my heart. (Danith)

God understands me and is with me

I think that when I face the issues in my life, I could pray to God and ask for God's help. He knows the problems in my life, even though no-one understands my feelings but there is God. He is near me. I think God helps me a lot. (Nimul)

God healed me physically

I was having an operation. I was sick. The staff encouraged us to believe in God as God heals those who get sick. I I was brought to church. I was given

⁸⁴ Matthew 5:45 it says "the Father makes his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sends rain on the just, and on the unjust." In other words, bad things happen to good people and just because you are righteous it doesn't mean that you will be rewarded for it. Good things happen to bad people. Also the gospel speaks a lot about God's undeserved grace- that we don't deserve all the good that we receive but `God gives it to us anyway.

medicine but the people and organization thought I was going to die but I have a God who saved me. God is important to me. (Suon)⁸⁵

I believe God blesses me with everything I need include my wisdom and all the needs in my family. I went to church and they had a program...and since then I have faith and my emotions are healed. God really knew all that happened to me and it healed me completely since that time and now every time I want to sleep I can sleep well. (Phana)

Attitude changed, no longer gossip

I decided myself. I wanted to learn about God. I changed my attitude a lot. I changed to do better. I did not gossip about other people like before. (Leng)

I am more calm and respectful and loving, less violent, aggressive and angry

I learned from the Bible that I shouldn't speak impolitely and respect others. Before I came to the shelter I was an aggressive person and didn't listen to others. When I had an argument I didn't talk with them easily and used violence instead. I was still young at the time. Later I spoke and communicated with others in a more tolerant way. (Chea)

My friend opened the Bible where it talks about the aggressive people and changing our attitude. My boss told me that my attitude had changed. I used to be the gangster in the village and I have been changed. (Vida)

When I started to believe in God from the bottom of my heart I wanted to love/care for others too. When I love other people they also love me in return. I hate and they hate me back. I realized this and started to work on my weaknesses. (Chan)

Don't react to meanness. Better able to control my feelings. More patient. Don't harm others.

I feel that my relationship is closer to God and my faith is much stronger than before. I don't care what other people say and the most important thing is that I know how to control my feelings. Some people said I was a prostitute. They used that kind of word but it no longer affects me. I don't care much about what people around me say especially those who look down on me. I don't think much or compare myself to other people or anything else. Before I used to compare myself and get jealous of those who got warmth from their families but now I don't have that feeling anymore. I just think that if Jesus is true and God and the only one who loves me. (Phalin)

⁸⁵ It should be noted that this participant had physical and mental health challenges and their responses are inconsistent. However, although their physical disability and mental health are problematic, they have found hope and courage to live their life. Several times they've thought of suicide but many times they've also experienced the presence of God through prayer and the encouragements they've had from other Christians. They could not have done any spiritual activities but they felt in the presence with God and had a personal relationship with him through praying. See Mathew 2: 8-9

I am more patient than before. It has its limitations! (laughing) but it is better than before. I am less likely to say something bad about those who say something bad about me immediately. I do not do something aggressively. When I believe in God I know how to do according to the context. When God does not answer we should keep praying. (Socheat)

I never harm other people. In every situation in my life I always have God with me. I give all my burdens to God and can solve the situations for me. (Romdaul)

God never gives up on me. He helps me.

I had a weak faith before but now it is strong. I feel close to God. I want to go to church. I know God is great. God never gives up. God always helps me. (Maly)

I experience love from faith which helps me survive when I don't experience it from elsewhere

Most people have love from four ways. Love from lover. Love from friends. Love from family and love from faith. If we lack these we cannot survive. I do not have love from family, lover or friends I have only from faith which makes me to survive right now. I hope in faith a lot. (Phala)

I am more honest. Accept mistakes. Feel God's presence - He took away my burdens

God made me to be the one who accept the mistakes that I did and I do something honestly now. I do not lie, even though I have been told to lie. For example, we went out and came back home late. I was told to lie but I could not lie. I just told the real reasons. I am better than before. The people like me a lot. God changed my way of life. He took away my burdens when it happens in my life. When I am alone God stays with me. (Anchali)

Before I felt alone, stressed unable to talk to others but can pray

When I am alone I sometimes pray to God to take away stress and bad feeling. I have been relieved when I asked God. I don't trust anyone to talk about family issues to them so I just spoke alone. (Chhet)

God comforted me (when I broke up with boyfriend)

I love God so much. After I broke up with my boyfriend, there was a song, "the great love of God". I loved to sing that song. I wrote that song and I sing it. I heard that the love of God is enough. I was very motivated when I wrote that song. I desperately need God. This point really spoke to my heart. I have put songs on my phone and I listen to it every day. (Champey)

Before I felt ashamed, untrusting of others but now feel happy and normal.

When I compare myself from before I believed in God it was so far away and completely different. Whenever people asked me I felt so sad but now when people ask me I feel happy and normal and even when I am sad I am still happy because I have God. (Leng)

God gave me more confidence and I passed my exams

I believed in God when I was studying. I used to fail my exams. Before I took my exams I went to church and told the pastor and they prayed for me and gave me advice. I felt more confident when I went to take the exam. It was different from the previous years. It is a miracle for me because I used to fail but because of God I can do it. I used to tell my teachers that I prayed before exams. They said "no", actually the result came from myself that I study hard. They always tease me like this. (Dara)

When my family sick, I can pray to God

My child was sick and fainted. I prayed for my child... when he is sick I never skip it and I coin him until he becomes redder than a over-ripe watermelon. My mother-in-law went to get the witchcraft and they said the spirits will come back next year. So I still pray for him. (Kanya)

When I am sick, I can pray to God

When I have sickness for example my stomach hurts I put my hand on my stomach and pray. Then I don't feel hurt anymore. I don't change or forget (Malis)

When I pray I can sleep

I pray at night. Some nights I just pray a bit and read the Bible and it is like sleepy medicine! (Malis)

Peace, Safety and protection

Recently, when I was walking home late at night 1-2am it was so quiet and there are only people who use drugs. I was scared but I prayed, "Jesus I am afraid the drug people might hurt me" When I said that the light turned on and an aunty came out. Then I was able to walk home with joy. Since then I am happy because I used to be the girl who was always afraid of ghosts. (Nary)

I often pray for safety when I travel and/or have problems. When I pray He answered my prayer. It truly happened to me. One time there was a man driving his moto and he cut right across us. We were both driving very fast at the time. Fortunately it felt like something was holding my motor to protect me and my partner from falling down and crashing the moto. Only our

materials fell off but we did not fall down. Everything was fine. Nothing broke except my carrier bag. (Chan)

Protection from ghosts

I was in a house where people believed it was a place of ghosts. I then prayed and asked God to protect us as I slept there. I heard the sound of crying. I then prayed to God to take it away. It then disappeared. I did not see anything but the people said they saw the ghosts. (Suon)

No more fear of death

I do not fear to die as I know that God does not give up on me. If I die I will go to be with God. God always responds to me so I think God will not go away from me. (Champey)

God saved me from suicide

I used to be away from God. I did not have trust at all. I was very furious and I wanted to kill myself. I took the poison. I mixed it and swallowed a lot. I was shaking a lot. I dropped to the ground. My father was drunk so he couldn't help me. I slept a lot. If my mother knew about it she would beat me. She did not know. I did not tell her. I did not do that again. I prayed to God that I had made a mistake. I met a believer and I told them my story and they prayed for me. They thanked me for telling them. I did not dare tell the Buddhists. (Suon)

I was about to kill myself before I went into the Centre as I did not have a mother. I was about to throw myself off the roof of the building. I closed my eyes and was about to jump but then I didn't do it. I was praying but didn't know which God I was praying to. I prayed if my life is valuable please save me. If it has no value, please allow me to die. I prayed to God, if there was a God he would save me. I would believe in Him. I just thought this to myself. I did not kill myself and felt refreshed and happy. I then came down and went to Phnom Penh where I was arrested. My life was difficult when I was small. I tried to learn about praying by watching how they did it in the movies. (Mony)

Before I believed in God, I couldn't do anything. I was so aggressive. I felt most of the time I wanted to cut my neck or take poison. I changed a lot. I feel happy all the time. When people say something bad about me I don't care about that. Last time someone was angry with me I was angry in my mind but I didn't do anything. God is with me all the time. God helps me! He told me to be a good child and don't care about what others do to me. When I feel sad, I pray to God. I ask God to help me. He said to me to throw all of those sadnesses away. If I keep them in my mind I would feel difficulty. (Soriya)

When I faced difficulties I accused God who gave me the trouble but I still believe and respect Him. I then said sorry to God. I said I wanted to walk with God even if I faced persecution or difficulties. Even if some people give me lots of money to make me change my belief I would not change it. I

sometimes think too much. Once I wanted to stab myself to death. I then thought again and I put the knife down though my hand was bleeding. I realized that if I killed myself I couldn't go to heaven. Even though I have done many good things if I kill myself God will not forgive me. God has given me the body and life and my parents also gave me my body so I should not do that. I thought that if I died I would be out of sorrow as Buddhists think but those who live are full of sorrow so I did not want that. My faith helped me until now. If I did not have faith I would be sitting with the ghosts and not you [the interviewer] now. (Phala)

Impact of Faith on others - Connection between personal beliefs and family

Buddhism

Prayer for sickness for family

When I took the medicine and did not heal I prayed for help from the ancestor. After praying to them I felt a bit better. I used the incense and prayed for my second son and the result was as I asked. (Daly)

I respect in the Chinese way. We do many offerings. I need to do lots of things there. My mother is sick and we ask master to find the cause of the sickness. We offer something for the ancestors and the angels and the disease is healed. (Narith)

Give to poor (Alms). Prayer for ancestors.

I gave things to the poor and I gave food to the monks and prayed that those will be sent to my ancestors who died before. I asked them to bless us for happiness and out of illness. It helps me when I do things like this. It helps me to be relieved. (Makara)

Christianity

Love, respect and understand and listen to others. Don't discriminate against others. Love and listen to parents.

Since I believe in God I do not discriminate and I love, respect and understand other people. I wanted to learn but I could not because I didn't have enough money. Then I prayed to God so I could learn again and I met

the people [in the church] and then I could learn. My faith is stronger because God responded to my prayers. The Bible teaches me a lot. For example it says we should love and listen to our parents. (Chariya)

God gives wisdom for our family to develop

God helped me progress and gave me wisdom to advise my family. I was afraid to share the gospel with them, but through my actions I can show to them little by little. God helps my family to develop more. Through my action, my family feels happy. (Linda)

Prayer and Relationships

Relationship with partner

Before I got my partner, I also prayed to ask God for wisdom to know my partner's personality; was he good enough, would he love and care for me? I prayed that God would prepare a man for me. I prayed I would not have a problem with him. But since I prayed my partner is always doing good to me. So I am so happy about that. I believe that he truly loves me and we decided to love each other until now. (Chan)

I asked the staff to pray for me. I told them I had an argument with my partner so please help pray for me to not have more arguments. When I went home I could see that my partner had changed. (Socheat)

Relationship with mother

I used to pray I could live with my mother. I prayed for more than a year. When I had a daughter I prayed to God to bring my mother to me and that she would quit her job. One day God responded to my prayer and my mother decided to come to me. It makes me happy. Before I thought that God did not do something great. God only responded to others but not to me. But God did a great thing in my life too so I am happy. (Maly)

Relationship with brother

My brother got drunk and had problems with my mother so they got quarrel with each other and I just know that tomorrow it would be better because I offer this issue to God so that God can solve it for us. (Linda)

Relationship with family

My family started to be broken. I prayed to God and I felt stronger. I prayed to God for my family to be reunited. I then heard my family were living together again. I then thought there is nothing bigger than God (Vanna)

Connection between personal beliefs and others

Serving others

I sometimes do something good for other people and I think God helps me. (Mony)

I want to serve Him. I want to share my experience. I want to meet young people and share my experience. I want to achieve my dream since I was small. When I was in the centre they asked me what I wanted to do when I am big. I said I didn't know. I only knew a little about cooking. If I learn more I think I love drawing and cooking. I have the innovative ideas. I love singing and dancing. In the church we get love from them as they care about us. They try to encourage us. They support us with medical things when we have sickness. When I went to the church I helped them in some work and I visited the elderly as well. (Phala)

Now I help in teaching to help the rescued kids who are hated by society. I work with them to be better people. (Champey)

I helped a lot of people, which is why I am so poor today. Before I had a friend in the Centre who I was closest to .She faced a lot of problems but she never left me alone. It doesn't matter how angry she got, She always came back to me and do you know why? Because I gave a lot of support to her; I encouraged her and helped her but now she uses drugs. She worked in a night club close to my home and then lived with an older man who didn't like her going out but she escaped and came to live with me so now the old man hates me. (Sokchea)

I helped my sister's friend who was a garbage collector so she could finish early and come to the concert with us. She asked me, "Don't you feel ashamed [to help a beggar] " But I said I didn't feel shame. I helped to collect until the shack was full. I also brought bread and water for her so we could eat along the way. I also helped a man who was in a car accident. He broke his teeth and his legs were damaged as well. The other driver was really nasty. She said he was a gangster and wasn't careful driving when she was the one who crushed him. She gave him only 30 USD when even one tooth repair would cost 50 USD. I gave him water and tissue to help clean him up and later when we saw him we gave him 15 USD as a love gift. We gave them our number and now they invite us as their friends as a normal friendship. (Nary)

There was a man near my house who used to drink alcohol every day. He said to me, "sister I could see that your life seems to be really fresh in your heart". I said, "how did you know about this, you are a teacher but how do you know about my heart?" . He said he knew by the way I talk; he said he thought I was a Christian. Then I thanked him and it helped me to recognize

that I am a Christian and people can see my identity through my speech. Normally when I talk to people around me they respect me. They said since I believe in Jesus I am so polite. Praise God. (Phana)

I told one man "don't use the drugs anymore because it will make you lose your beauty. Before you were so handsome but not now" I just told him this and I didn't care if he got angry with me but he said "when you tell me I will listen to you". I said "This way is not good for you to walk on because you already have a wife and children". He said, "Sister, I want to cut down and when you told me I want to follow you." Sometimes he wants to use it again but when he saw me sit nearby he is afraid to use it. He said he wants to minimize it because it is not giving benefit to him. So when I meet those who use drug I share with them and if they don't listen then I don't tell them anymore". I am worried nowadays that my child might follow them too. (Soda)

Interceding for others

When I hear the ambulance at night, I pray for the people to be fine. I pray that the doctor will be kind to them and not take too much money from the patient. I pray for them even though I don't know them. I pray that they will be healed. (Nary)

I pray for everyone in Cambodia, then for me and my family. I also pray for those who are around me too. (Vanna)

Attitudes Towards People of Other Religions

Christian Attitudes towards Buddhists

Be a light to others

If we want others to believe I need to do good things. If we want them to see good things we need to have those things in our life and family first. There is no Christian in the village so I must shine so that is why I stay in the village. To shine the light on them. I think that this is the plan of God. (Nimul)

Speak kindly

I tell people to observe those who believe in Jesus, 'Have you observed them express their anger?' No they don't do that. Sometimes if you speak wrong to them they smile back. We all get angry but Christians know how to be more patient. For example, I will just walk away and not talk back to them; because I just leave it to God to solve it. When I talk with people they say I am so

polite. I don't talk much and I am so kind. I said it is because I have God in my heart. (Soda)

Gentle Persuasion

When I first believe in God, I didn't tell anyone. Only my family knew about this. When I got married I did not tell my parents in law that I am Christian. My family then told them that I am a Christian. I saw people got married in a church and I prayed that I could get married in a church too. My mother in law rejected it. She said if I wanted to get married in a Christian way then I needed to save the money [and she wouldn't pay for it]. She is the strong believer in Buddha. I thanked God for blessing me. Even though my mother-in-law did not like God allow me to do the rituals in my wedding. I did not expect my mother-in-law to join the wedding but she came. She said it was great and she listened to the pastor share the gospel and we sang the songs. She then knew about it and when she goes to the temple she doesn't call me to go with her as she knows that I am a Christian. She doesn't say anything bad to me. My partner doesn't believe but he doesn't block me either. I sometimes ask him to go to church with me. He did not persecute me about my faith at all. (Ratanak)

My partner said it was fine (that I was a Christian) as it was my right. I do not force him to believe like me. When I asked him to go to church, he also went there. He sat and listened. He did not believe but I pray that he would believe. (Romdaul)

Love and care first

Regarding other people I show them love and care first and then I talk with them about God when they have a problem. When I talk with God they say they don't believe in that religion. I just tell them I believe in God but I cannot force anyone to believe in the same thing. It is up to their decision. (Chan)

Encourage others to pray to God for help

I told those who got sick to believe in God and God will help you. I tried to share the good news to others but they didn't like it. They hated the believer. I asked them the benefits that got from their faith. They said that their faith is good. I told them my faith is also good. God told me to be patient and strong. Sometimes, even when I don't pray I hear the voice of God. (Suon)

Respect family to worship at temple but still a believer

My father-in-law is happy to say I am a believer in God but can be flexible. Whenever they are celebrating the ceremony I need to bring food for them so they can take it to the temple. I bring them to the temple so they love me. They said I can believe what I want but I need to respect my parents. When I go to respect the cement Buddha I pray to God. I think it should be fine. I pray to God for forgiveness as I do not do it with my heart. After I prayed I felt

fine and relieved. I do not have parents to care about me but I know about my heart. I know that God refreshes me even if my parents and siblings do not know about it. I learnt about this from the organization but also directly from God. (Mony)

Help my family understand but not force

I told my family members to please believe in God. I talked freely with them, I want my grandmother to believe in God like me. I did not use force. I just make them to understand but I need to see myself better first. When people see my goodness they would follow me. My grandparents do not believe in God yet. They believe strongly in Buddha. They know how to recite the scripts of Buddha. I do not want to have two choices like my friends did. They believe both. (Phala)

Respond to questions they ask me

My partner's relatives ask me what I believe. They asked if I was a Christian and I said "yes". Some of them said that Christianity is great as they are humble to other people. They said they sometimes want to be Christians too as Christians don't get sick as they saw I never get sick. They said that Buddhism needs to offer something like that too! I sometimes got fever and I pray to God to heal me. We sometimes were so tired as we worked so hard. We need to pray and be strong. (Mony)

Afraid to tell people

It is hard to see my mother burn the incense; I want to tell her not to do it anymore because it is useless but I was afraid to tell her. In my household only I believe in God and why don't I tell them about the good news? I am disappointed with myself. No-one else in my village believe in God. I think it will be difficult for me and I may do something bad. (Linda)

I don't tell others that I believe in God. I am afraid that if they know they will hate me. But in my mind, I don't care if they hate me. But my neighbour asked me why I don't go to the pagoda now? Why don't I burn the incense now? (Soriya)

Can't force others

I used to tell my partner many times about Jesus but he remains the same. I don't know what to do because Buddhism is his belief. How can I force him to believe? No matter how many times I tell him because he does not have much knowledge about Jesus but he does not care/think about it. One is cow and another is Buffalo. [represent different beliefs]. It is like pouring water off a duck's back [does not change his beliefs]. But I always pray that my partner will believe in God so we don't have to waste money to buy fruits and I don't have to be tired of celebrating the Buddhist ceremonies. (Chea)

Attitudes towards Christian Believers

Like the way Christians forgive each other

When there were arguments they [Christian staff] always forgave me. They were the ones who spoke to me first. They were humble to me. The people gave love to each other. When I stayed alone they came to visit me. (Romdaul)

Like the way Christians were humble and helpful but not perfect

The staff were Christian. The boss was great. They opened the centre because they got help from other Christians. They were humble for us who come from different places. But they are not perfect. When I had problems they came to help. They gave me advice. (Champa)

Like the way Christian staff forgave me mistakes but instruct me to do better

The place I work now has encouraged me a lot. I wanted only caring which made my heart to be warmed. I never experienced this in my previous workplace. The Christian staff forgave me the mistakes that I have done. They just want me to do good. I sometimes know that I did something wrong and I worried about it but I could see in the heart that they did not care about it. They do not focus on my mistakes but instructed me to do better. This is good. (Champey)

Like the way Christians treated the poor

When I attended church in Phnom Penh I saw rich people; there and not only poor people believe in God but rich people too. They are so friendly and humble and I am happy when I saw people at the church not discriminate to the poor or rich. When they see us they greet us. (Danith)

Like the way Christians treated women fairly

One thing I liked about the staff is that they treated all the women fairly without favour to anyone else. (Phana)

Able to tell the difference between those with strong faith and those without

In the Centre a few of the staff really believed and had a strong belief. When we live among them we can tell who strongly believe and who don't. For those who don't, they just pretend to be a Christian and use it as the bridge to earn support for their needs. (Kanya)

Barriers to Faith & Practice

Family Barriers

Parents said I forgot traditional religion. Forced me to follow them

My parents don't believe in God so it is difficult when I go home. I did not eat the offered food. I have been asked to use the incense when they offered something there. I denied and then they said I forgot the traditional religion. I then felt upset about that. I then thought that all religions are good. I sometimes use the incense but I think and talk to God. If I don't do what [my family] told me to do then they still force me. I then need to follow them. I then talk to God that I just want to satisfy the feeling of my parents but my faith is with God always. (Vanna)

Family pressure from mother

Before when I believed in Christ, I read the Bible when I didn't have anything to do. After reading, I felt happier. It could help me to release the concern/sorrow from my heart. It helped to relax my mind. However, after I came back to live with my mother at home she did not allow me to read and encouraged me to practice Buddhist belief. (Botum)

Felt pushed by grandma against what I want to believe

When I went home I met my mother and grandma to go the temple. Grandmother told me to use incense but I didn't use it and it was difficult for me. I do not want to believe in Buddha (Achali)

My family consider me to be away from them

My family is the believer of Buddha and they do the offering ceremony. Before I participated but now I don't, so they wonder why. I told them I am a Christian so they do not force me. I do not eat the offered food. I told them the reason I don't do that and they said it was meaningless. When I do not join with them they consider me to be away from them which makes me think I have changed a lot. I have changed. (Kesor)

Sometimes it causes division with partner but we don't speak so much about it now.

I believe in Jesus so I can pray to him when I have trouble. My partner is Buddhist. He doesn't want me to believe in Jesus but we think differently about that. I just feel I want to believe in God. I feel further from God right now as I don't go to church a lot but I do pray at home. I pray when I am in a bad mood. My family believes in Buddha and I believe in God. Sometimes it causes division. They spoke like this for 4-5 years. They don't speak so much about it now as they know I don't like to hear it many times. (Mlis)

My partner doesn't believe but we respect each other

I am now married so don't have time to go to church. But I have devotion time with my workmates. Every morning I worship to God, sing songs and pray to God. My partner does not believe in God. We have opposite belief but we try not to be against each other. For example on my wedding day I preferred to have in a Christian way but I followed him to celebrate it. I had to bow my head to the Buddhist monk. However, before I married this way, I prayed to God and told Him that I am sorry that I had to do that. (Chan)

My partner threatened divorce and keeps money from me

I used to get in an argument with my partner and he would tell me to leave God and if I continue to believe he would divorce me but I told him that I would not go away from God. He said if you choose Jesus you and I will separate. I said I didn't care if we separate. I just said it like that. Because I live until today and I have food to eat because of the grace of God. Then he said he will spend all the money he makes and he said I would need to ask for money from Jesus instead. So he spent all the money he made and he didn't give me any. I didn't leave God and he asked me if I was still going to church and I said I was. He asked me to leave God but I didn't. I don't care if he wants a divorce. (Kanya)

Mother-in-law misunderstands but told she will still love her

My partner's mother asked me if it was possible for me to stop believing in Jesus after we got married? I asked why she asked me. She said that there was a person in her homeland who didn't care about his parents and she was concerned that when I got married to her son I wouldn't care about my parents either. I asked her, "Why do you worry about this? You see who I am today and I will remain the same. I will love you more if you are a good mother. It doesn't matter what others say. No-one else can help me and love me more than God; there is only God who loves me very much. (Nary)

Fear of rejection by mother if disobey her

I told my mother I would start a new life with Jesus but she blocked me. She told me to follow Buddha. It was difficult for me. If I rejected my parents advice they would not care about me. I have to follow them. I am away from God now... God knows about my difficulties. (Champa)

Mother got angry and asked why not thank her rather than God?

Before when I believed in Christ, I read the Bible. After reading, I felt happier. It could help me to release the concern/sorrow from my heart. It helped to relax my mind.

My mother said "in fact Jesus does not help you anything beside ourselves working hard to help ourselves. If you give thanks to Jesus for this, can you

ask him for a plate of rice for me?” She said, “how about me as your mother? Every time I give you rice, why don’t you thanking me like you do to Jesus?” (Phhoung)

Brother-in-law push me to use incense, sister defended me

When I went home during the national holidays I was instructed to use the incense by my brother-in-law but my sister told him that I am a Christian so I would not use that and they did not force me. It is my rights. Sometimes my sister wants to thank God. (Maly)

Mother afraid I will be persecuted by others

My mother was angry with me that I did not believe in Buddha. She told me that I would be persecuted when I believed in God. (Suon)

Loss of friends. Family split when I believed in God

Some people do not want to be my friend as I am a Christian. They refuse to communicate with me when I study at the class as I am a Christian. Also my family was split when I believe in God. When I stayed with my step-father he looked down on me and forced me to do something which caused me not to live there anymore. (Sokchan)⁸⁶

NGO Staff

Staff at Centre actions did not match their words

In the centre the leader is very Christian and speaks in a godly way but many of the staff are not Christian and their words and actions were in the worldly way. (Narith)

But sometimes I get angry with the staff because sometimes they talk badly about each other and tell me about the problem. The staff have white ears [easily believe what they are told] when other people tell them. But then they don’t appreciate how difficult the girl’s situation is and give value to them. (Mealea)

In the Centre some of the staff spoke about God but their practice was not honest, the same as what they taught us. They said the children of God are one family but then they eat alone. They spoke it but they didn’t do it. They were too proud of themselves. Their talking was different from their heart. One of the staff would get angry and then never speak to you again. Once I asked her to bring the lotion for the class and she said my face was bad and that even if I spent 10,000 US dollars my face would be the same. I didn’t

⁸⁶ However, because of the family separation, Sokchan was able to live in the church, study and get closer to God.

know how to respond to her. My faith was gone. I did not want to see her face again after said that. (Da)

Community Members

Church leaders don't practice what they preach

I went to church here twice but I did not like the teaching. They taught the way that they do not have faith in their life. They just taught nothing. The pastor talked and instructed other Christians there but I think he did not have faith in his life. He did not do the things he talked about. No-one came to talk to me so I didn't go anymore. In the church I went to, first the pastors raised important points for us and then inserted examples to explain to us too. (Chivy)

Some pastors are bad and some people in Buddhism are bad too. (Vida)

I hated the pastor at [X] church. He expelled me. He forced me out like an animal. I don't want to go there again but I will go to other churches. I don't even want to see the fence of that church. Even though God doesn't want me to hate [the pastor], I still hate him. (Sokchan)

Peers did not give value to Christianity but sinned in secret

In the centre, they give value to Christianity a lot because they went to church every weekend but I saw no-one followed them well. Many didn't listen to the 'mothers [caregiver]' They use drugs and fight each other. They did gambling. They did bad sinful things a lot but secretly. They did not like the toy stories [Children's cartoons and films] there but took the VCD player and watched porn movies. (Phala)

Cursed my beliefs

If I tell the Buddhist people I am Christian they will curse me and say I am crazy with Jesus. I used to have that experience. Occasionally, I met with this kind of person as well. (Mealea)

Misunderstand my beliefs

When I went to the market, I was asked will I be allowed to cry when my parents die? I responded, " We will be allowed to cry". I told them it was wrong. I told them it was my right [to believe]. They did not believe [in God] but I believe. Jesus supports and encourages me. I have hope and joy. (Romdaul)

Tease me - child of Vietnamese. I tease them back!

Nowadays people tease me as well. I told them every time I had a problem I pray to God and they said it's not true. They called me a "child of Vietnamese" as well. We often get into argument about this; we make fun of each other for a while and then we come to this kind of argument. I call them "child of burning incense" and they call me, "child who obeys the wood" and I say "child who obeys the stone" . We just argue with all the useless issues like this. We argue and then when we ask what caused the argument we don't know why! It is not reasonable at all and most of the time we are just like that.
(Dara)

Need to walk away from arguments

When I read the Bible I know that when there are arguments we need to just walk away and do not need to be the winner. The idea stays with me always.
(Meas)

Physical and Emotional Barriers

Quit when I left the organisation

I prayed to God when I stayed at the organization. Then I quit when I left.
(Bopha)

I love Jesus more than Buddha but I could not find a church.

I love Jesus more than Buddha. My mother is different. When I was in Phnom Penh I went to church and it made me happy. I read the Bible when I was home. I used to live as a group with other kids, friends. We prayed and read the Bible together. I don't read now. I still think about God but I don't do it. I think I could do it if I stayed in a group but I stay alone so I can't do it. I love Jesus but my parents go to temple. I could not find a church in my city.
(Chouma)

Don't go to church much. Too busy. Lost Bible to fire. Forget to pray.

When I was in the centre I could go to church often. I do not go often now. I am busy. I work on Sundays and sometimes I need to bring my mother somewhere too. I used to open the Bible and read about God but my house burnt so I do not have the Bible to read anymore. I do not pray a lot too. I just forgot. I sometimes play with the kids and then sleep. I still go to church occasionally and I still believe in God. It is just a bit different now as I did it a lot before and now I can't because I am working. When I do go to church I feel relieved and fresh as I can pray and ask for something. It helps me to be relieved too. (Achariya)

Need others to go to church with. Don't want to go alone. Don't have time.

I do not have time to sing the songs, to read the bible and dance for God anymore. Now I don't think about God or Buddha. It doesn't stay in my mind.

If I had time I would go to church but I need to have someone who knows the pastor and the members of the church. I don't want to go alone. I do not have someone to introduce me. (Chivy)

Need others to go with. Too tired from work

I live alone and I don't have any Christian friends to go to church with. Through them they could inspire my heart and call me to go to church but I don't know them. Sometimes I want to go to church but on my day off on Sunday when I don't have work I sometimes sleep until 1 or 2pm. (Sokchea)

Accused of being a 'rice Christian'

I don't like to go to church because people in the church say that I want something back from the church in the first and second weeks. Then I decided not to go. It is difficult, when you go to church and you do not have the encouragement from the people there. I think it is better to pray alone at home. I need to think about God and not think about those people. (Mlis)

When I have a problem, I remember God, but otherwise I don't think about faith

But I feel my faith is fragile now because I didn't care much with my faith, so I feel far away from God now because I don't go to church. Unless I have a problem and then I remember God. But if my life is normal then I don't think about God because I am really busy selling and caring for my children. But I always pray before I go to bed except when I sell at the pagoda ceremony [Banh Chos Seima] at night time because sometimes I don't get back until midnight or 1am. (Dara)

Children distracting in church

Sometimes when I go to church with my children they cry and pull me around so I could not concentrate on the preaching. It goes in my right ear and comes out the left ear instead. Sometimes I go to listen but my child causes problems and I have a headache because I was sleepy so I could not listen well. So I felt a little bit far from God but even if I don't listen to the Bible verses I still pray and go to church every week and listen to the Bible verses on the radio. (Kanya)

Get frustrated with God

I blame God and asked Him why he put me in a poor family but he did not respond. I compare myself. But I still believe in God because he made my life to be changed. If I did not hate Him. I am wrong to accuse Him. (Sokchan)

Good experiences but also bad experiences not hearing response of God and with pastor of a church who expelled them.

Other Barriers to Christianity

Theological barriers

But I just didn't understand when we committed sin, how God can save us to live again. I don't understand that part. I think that no one can save us to be alive again but they can help us not to commit sin. But if someone over talks/boasts about this, it is not appropriate. It isn't logical enough because if we die we will pass away already; no one can save us to be alive again. (Mlis)

Genocide and theology of suffering barriers

When I was in the Centre I heard the testimony of how God helped the boss. I asked them about the genocide in Pol Pot regime. Why didn't God help the Christians at that time? After asking the questions I was invited to drink the bitter tea (laughs). (Vida)⁸⁷

Nationalistic barriers

When people ask me why I don't believe in Jesus I say that I don't believe because I am Khmer.⁸⁸ Most of the Vietnamese like to believe in that religion [Catholicism]. (Tina)

The Right to believe

It is my right to believe in God or not and it is my right to choose the way for myself to walk. (Sokchea)

Barriers to Buddhism

In centre, some clients argued that Buddhism is better and Staff said clients can choose their beliefs

In the Centre most people believed in Buddha. When there were ceremonies mostly they didn't care much but those children who believed in Buddha could attend the pagoda and those who believed in Jesus could go to church. Sometimes the children would argue that Buddhist is better than Christianity but the staff would say, 'At this place we don't mind what religion and if you want to believe in Buddha you just believe it and if you want to become Christians you can do it as well. No need to argue about this.' (Sokchea)

⁸⁷ Meeting with the boss/supervisor to talk through what she/he had said during the meeting

⁸⁸ This contradicts the idea from other participants who are Vietnamese eg: Sokcha, Visal, Phala, Sothy

Buddha stone, Cross wooden; represents different faiths

Before I felt I got into arguments with other people when they believe in Jesus because I was a Buddhist. They said Buddha is only a stone for people to bow down to and I said how about the cross, it is only wood! (Nary)

Some Christians say Buddhists obey the cement but for me the cement represents our Buddhist faith that we believe in the same way that the wooden cross represents the faith for Christians. (Sokchea)

Hostile culture towards Buddhism

Sometimes in the Centre, they speak badly about the Buddha. They stand firm for their own faith; they seem to be proud with themselves. I used to get into argument with the caregiver there. She said it is like praying to the stone [Buddha]. I said didn't you respect the wood [cross]? If someone says something badly about what another person believes she/he will feel bad about it. She didn't give me value and she looked down on my religion. I didn't like it and I argued with her. I felt disappointed with Christian people since that time but I didn't want to make things worse. I told myself it depended on the individual. I think all religions teach people to be good but it depends on the individual; because some people over believe it and don't use their belief in a good way. They just think that their faith is good but they look down on others people's faith. So I don't think we have equal rights. I spoke to my counselor and she encouraged me to believe on what I wanted to believe and don't mind other people's speech. But I was young and didn't know how to think deeply and I couldn't live outside yet when I got emotional treated [abused] in this way. (Sean)

Told they could not go to the temple or they would get sick

They told me if you believe in God, you can't go to the pagoda. I got angry about this. She said if I did I would get a headache. My friends and I didn't know about this so we went to the pagoda to play there. After leaving the pagoda all of us left with a headache. (Chea)

Told should not eat "offered food"

When I see my parents doing the offering in the temple I want to tell them not to do it. Others think that I do not care about my parents because I am always in church. In church they told us that we should not eat the offered food. The pastor told us that it needs to be prayed first even after the food is not yet offered. Normally it was been offered even by the meat seller. God has created those animals for us humans to eat. We need to thank Him only. (Visal)

Told Ceremonies meaningless

Some of my neighbours understood. Others did not. One said she/he didn't like the fact that monks were not allowed there when people die. The important thing is that my heart has God. My mother does not believe but I could not force her. If parents don't believe in God that is fine. She/he said she/he could not get me back. I respect my parents. When there are ceremonies I want to do something good for my mother and not something meaningless. (Suon)

Misunderstandings

An elder told me that when parents die the children aren't allowed to cry. I said that is not right. They are not allowed to use the incense only. They can cry. But I was not able to win them, as they were old and I was young. I do not know how to talk. (Chivy)

Monks/Kru Khmer/Pastors misbehaving

It is not easy to believe Buddha. I see the monks in the temple there. They drink wine. They do not respect the 'law'. They still get support from abroad. I saw it and the people saw it too but they still believe. The things the monks got they could use. They did not use it for public interest. They only did it once a year but they received lots of support. (Phala)

I do not believe in Buddha as some of the monks went to the 'guest house'. I do not want to talk about that. They have the smartphones too. I do not respect them. (Suon)

Christians Feeling Persecuted

Told "You should stop!"

I believe some people have lost their friends because of their religion, such as my neighbours. Some are Christian, others Buddhist. I am afraid to tell my Vietnamese Buddhist friend. She is not my closest friend but I am close to her/him because she/he has a good heart and I am scared if she/he knows I am a Christian what she/he will say about me? That is why I hesitate to talk to her/him about my beliefs. I had a non-Christian friend in school and she/he said Christians do this and that and because of that we argued against each other. She said to me straight "you should stop!" I am afraid that will happen a second time. (Chouma)

Unable to rent a home/room

There are persecutors. When I went to rent a place they said they didn't want me to rent it because I was a Christian. After that we asked God to guide us to a new house to rent. They said we can have Bible studies 5 times a day ,

it's up to us! But the neighbours didn't like us at first and persecuted us but after a while they said Jesus believers are good people. I told them that Jesus never teaches people to do bad things. God teaches us to love one another. I love my neighbours as my own family. Even when they persecuted me I still talked to them and God blessed me through this. (Phana)

Family persecute me but makes me stronger

There are a lot of people in my family that persecute me. I just give glory to God. If God didn't allow this to happen to us, we would not be strong in Him. (Kanya)

Freedom to Choose One's Religion

Freedom to choose

The centre didn't force the children. They asked if someone would like to go to church and they could choose if they wanted to go or not but they encouraged us to read the Bible every day. If someone wanted to go home to do a Buddhist ceremony they just let them go as normal. They seemed to give us freedom. We can believe Buddha or Jesus. Some of the children went to church because they liked the handsome men there but for me I didn't like them. I didn't like the pastor preaching because I always felt sleepy when he preached. (Linda)

I wanted to do it

They did not need to force us; we went there. I wanted to be the people who did it. Some people heard about it but did not follow. Some people know about it but it did not affect them. (Nimul)

Invited to participate

In the centre the staff always invite us to participate in the events for special occasions. They did not force us to believe. They didn't say, "if we don't believe they will not allow us to work there". There was a person who didn't like Christians but then she/he became a strong believer him/herself. (Soda)

Not persuaded in centre. Never choose to believe in God even though felt 'pushed' to believe in church.

In the centre, I never believed in God. When I stayed there I can believe whatever I want to and they still supported me. They did not persuade me to believe in their religion. The organization had services to worship God. I did not go but I just read the Bible and sang songs. They told me that God is good. But in the church I felt they pushed me to believe. I did not like them but sometimes I liked. They talked about reading the Bible. They read beautifully. Some spoke correctly and I liked to listen to them. (Veha)

Did not force us. Did not compare religions.

In the centre they did not force us. It was up to us. They just taught us. Some kids believed in God, some did not. They did not force us. I was happy to sing and dance at the church. The [house] mothers brought us there. The teacher who explained [about God] was funny. They did not compare Buddha with Jesus. I trusted him. Then I believed in God. I committed that I would not leave God. I took the Bible and sang the songs and read the Bible. (Chivy)

Encouraged me to pray and go to church but up to me. Up to me to remove red strings

I was very strong with God in the centre but I am a bit away from God when I am outside. In the centre they encouraged us to pray to God and go to church. I then started to understand and then I put my trust in God. At first I was a bit fearful and wondered why they went to church but then I followed them to church and believed in God too. It was up to me. They did not force me. I used to wear the red strings. The house-mother said it was up to me to decide to take it away. I then decided to take it away as I believed in God. (Achariya)

Told myself that I wouldn't go if they forced me but when I saw their actions, they gave me a choice, so I agreed to do it.

In the centre I could see most of the leaders were Christian but they never forced me and other children to believe in the same. They knew we were from a Buddhist background but it was up to our decision to go to church for example. Because the staff were Christian they were open to everyone and helped us to get to know more about God but the choice was ours. Sunday was our personal time. For those who wanted to go to church it was up to them. Before I told myself that I wouldn't go if they forced me but when I saw their actions, they gave me a choice so I agreed to do it. (Chouma)

Persuaded to believe in God but then changed to Buddha.

At the centre they tried to persuade me and they also instructed me too. They use the language of God saving the people and it was good. It made me believe and I believed at the time. For about a year and then I changed to Buddha. I didn't know whether Jesus existed or not. The pastors used their strategies to speak to us, they knew the way to communicate with us and it made me believe in them. They didn't force me. Most of the people they practice and believe in Jesus and I followed them. They advised us to be good people. I love them as the believers in Jesus are good. They are not trouble makers and they are humble. They are not easily angered. (Narith)

Not persuaded to believe in God

I worked with Christian organization for 4-5 years. I do not believe in God and the boss asked me why as I had worked with them for many years. When they

did a water baptism they asked me but I said I did not believe in God yet. Many girls there don't believe in God but they still stay there. The people told me that they will not force you to believe in God but if I want I can invite God to stay in my heart. I told them I don't know how to invite Him because I do not believe yet. When they worship I say the word "Amen" louder than anybody there! My friends just laugh at me. (Vida)

Rights

Most of the staff did not teach us about God a lot. They just taught us about kids rights. They did not force me to believe. It was my own decision. (Visal)

Feeling Forced to Practice Buddhism

Mother forces me

Mother always forces me to go to the temple. She forced me to go there and offered the fruit too. They told me I should just follow the people. They said I didn't listen to her. When I have difficulty with my feelings no one spoke to me. If I do not solve the problems myself then no one solves it for me. (Rachana)

If father believes, we must follow

I was very happy when I stayed in the Centre but my father is a strong Buddhist. He said that it is fine for me to believe in God there but here if the father believes in something we must follow. (Meas)

People will denounce me if I go to Jesus

My house is close to the temple. If I go to Jesus the people will denounce me. I used to stay with the monk when I was small. I go to the temple and so some activities there but I am not forced to do something. (Veha)

Participants' Anticipation of Faith in the Future

Christianity

I have given my heart and life to the Lord. I can do it. I could not go anywhere else. (Vanna)

I don't think anything can change my love of God. I love God so much. (Nary)

There is no Christian in the village so I must shine so that is why I stay in the village. To shine the light on them. I think God wants me to shine the light in the village. When I am in trouble God helps .I am motivated and encouraged to do this. (Nimul)

I cannot go away from or forget God because He helps me so much. He has done great things in my life. Even if I am faced with problems. I was young and I didn't forget God before. I think my faith will become stronger. I want God to help me have a stronger faith. I want my family and sister's family to have children who believe in God too. I want God to do great things for me like that. (Ratanak)

As long as I am still alive I will love Jesus. I will tell my grandchildren to believe in Jesus more. I have a plan for the future when I have money. I want to go to my hometown where there is no church and start a ministry there at my own house. Every time I call on God He comes to me. God knows what is happening to me and He blesses me in what I am doing. I cannot do this without God and no one else can heal besides God. (Phana)

My partner and his relatives are Christian too so I think I will become a stronger believer. I don't want to lose my faith in God. (Chouma)

I will not change my faith because it has been for along time. I commit myself to believe in God forever. I commit my heart not to change it because even though I seem to be a little bit far away from God but I still remember God and in my thinking, I still have faith in God. (Dara)

I believe that in the future my faith will grow stronger because I have God to protect me and be near to me. When I have a problem, I call to God and he helps me. (Soriya)

My family are Buddhists. I can't cut the tie with Jesus either. I still think about God. I sometimes pray to Him when I face trouble in my life. I don't use the incense. I just close my eyes and talk to Him. God is always close to me. (Leng)

Buddhism

In the future I will believe in Buddhism because it is the national religion. I can't change my belief. (Davuth)

I will not change as I love to believe in Buddha. (Bopha)

I will believe in Buddha in the future because my family believes in it and when I want to get anything I pray to him. For example I will pray for a house and if I get it I will buy an offering to give to him.(Tina)

In the future I think I will go to the Buddha. My sister is also Buddhist. I could not be a stranger in the family. My ancestors were Buddhist. My mother does

not convince me to go somewhere. It is up to me what I want to believe in. (Achariya)

I shift my faith to Buddha. I believe in Jesus only 50%. But Buddhism is 100%. I believe in Buddha more than Jesus. Jesus has cross and Buddha has no cross. (Sim)

In the future I think I will become Buddhist. I have been away from Jesus for 4-5 years already. I do not have a church where I can attend. I don't like to be the only one in my family and community who don't believe in Buddha. I want to be with the majority as it makes me feel good. If 3 or 4 of them are Christian then that would be fine but it is only me alone here. Different religions have different perspectives, attitudes and principles. Believers in Buddha speak differently than believers in Jesus. (Vida)

For the future I don't know but I think Buddhism. (Sean)

I do not think clearly yet about the way I should walk, I am now in the middle. My family is Buddhist. I am the Christian alone in the family and there are issues. It is difficult for me. I need to wait and see in the next two years. (Chivy)

In the future I need to follow my partner whatever he believes. (Da)

In the future, I still feel that I will believe in God. If I get married I may change to their belief. Or when I visit my hometown when they celebrate ceremony, I may join them as I used to do. I am not sure about this yet. (Chea)

Discussion

Spiritual Practices

For the majority of participants faith was important in their lives. Spiritual practices especially prayer and lighting incense was an important part of their spirituality. Also asking the monks/pastors to pray for them/bless them.

Prayer was an important part of worship for many participants. Theoretically for Buddhists the focus is normally on the breath or on stream of consciousness but for Christians it is on a personal relationship with God of love and trust.⁸⁹ However, our understanding is that some Buddhists in the cohort had personified Buddha and felt they were praying to him perhaps in a similar way that Christians do to Jesus. It may be easier to imagine you are speaking/praying to a person than not.

When praying some had hope that God/Buddha would meet some or all of their needs. Sometimes this became unhelpful when they saw God as a 'sugar daddy' as in prosperity theology⁹⁰ because when he didn't appear to provide what they wanted they felt disappointed. But some Christians trusted that God would answer their prayers in the way that would be most helpful to them and in His will. This demonstrates one of the tensions between the way Christianity has been interpreted and exported from the West compared to the Buddhist more collective culture of the East

Praying for physical and spiritual protection and safety for themselves and others was described by Christians and Buddhists and appears to be an important aspect of faith. Both Christian and some Buddhist theology says that spirits come under the power of Jesus and the Buddha.

It is of interest that the participants who identified mostly as Buddhist did not refer to Buddhist scripture or for example the Eight Fold Path whereas more Christians talked about the Bible and referred to Scripture even if they didn't know the actual book or verse. However many Buddhists did understand '*kharma*' and the importance of respect for others, especially elders.

There is much evidence in this report of a fluidity of belief that changed from Buddhism to Christianity and back again for example. This is one of the indications that they did not usually feel 'forced' to believe one particular faith but understood they had the freedom to change their beliefs. Although being convinced of the particular faith you are part of is seen of importance to Christianity it is not so significant for Buddhists. After all Buddhism is more a philosophy as it does not recognize a God.

⁸⁹ Gross RM and Muck TC 'Christians Talk about Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists talk about Christian Prayer' A & C Black. https://books.google.com.kh/books?hl=en&lr=&id=1srK98wArIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=Buddhist+prayer&ots=uZSXzo7cpA&sig=jRgOsIQa4EBPLGafdAZro11jgQI&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Buddhist%20prayer&f=false

⁹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_theology

When they were unable to practice their faith practices due to lack of time or lack of accessibility to places of worship then they felt lacking. Those who identified more as Christians described being far away from God. A number felt not as close to God as they had before in the after care programs, (even though the Christian faith emphasizes that God is always close to people e.g. Matthew 28:20 'I am with you to the ends of the earth'). They often looked back fondly on times when they did feel more connected to their source of spirituality.

For many, faith involved being connected to others with the same faith, starting with their own family and then with friends and members of the community. Sometimes this connection felt coerced where even their own families became antagonistic. For those whose families, friends and community did not support them or who persecuted them for what they believed, it was harder to maintain their faith, although not impossible.

For many it was not helpful for them to have to say that they were one religion or another. Christianity had been helpful for some in the shelter but now they were home they didn't see the need to continue. For others they felt loyal to their acquired religion for a while but then went back to the familiar. For some, they maintained their faith even when all the odds seemed against it. When other support was lacking some felt that God's presence was with them.

Surprisingly a significant number of participants maintained their acquired faith in Jesus/Christianity, even several years after being away from direct interaction with other Christians and churches.

Impact of Faith on Cohort's Healing and Restoration

For those who identified more as Christians their relationship with God was of particular importance. They described feeling loved, being able to talk to God, feeling understood by God. They felt they could hear God speaking to them through the Bible, they felt that the burdens they had were taken from them, that God helped them when they or their family were sick. They felt God's peace, safety and protection.

Some described specific ways in which their attitudes were changed, where they were less ashamed, less concerned about what others thought of them, where they were able to control their feelings more, where they could be more patient with others, less aggressive and violent. Some described how they didn't feel the need to lie, where they were willing to accept that they had made a mistake, where they were more confident of themselves and more trusting of others. Some described they were no longer afraid of death.

For Buddhists they described how their faith leads to praying for their family and giving alms. For Christians they described how their faith leads to loving and

respecting others and not discriminating against them. This includes parents, partners, parents and children but participants also added friends and the vulnerable including elderly, street kids and alcoholics. Where they couldn't reach out directly they described the importance of intercession. It seems likely that the example shown to them by the aftercare organizations contributed to their understanding of the importance of this.

For some, faith allowed them to overcome serious significant challenges in their personal lives from relationship breakdowns to suicide

For others they believed that an important part of their faith was reaching out compassionately to and praying for others in their community, especially the poor and needy.

Others realized that suffering was a part of life and that having a faith didn't exclude those hard realities. Indeed the Buddha has a deep understanding of suffering and Christ has personal experience of suffering, making a point of relieving the suffering of others and later experiencing suffering on the cross .

Figure 1. Shows how feeling connected to God/Buddha, feeling connected in their beliefs to their natural family, feeling connected to their spiritual family/community can lead to experiencing positive emotions of self and towards others which can lead to empathy and reaching out to others. It can also lead to a sense of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction leading to resilience. It is possible to see the converse of this when there is a perceived disconnect between the person and God, their own family and their spiritual family/community.

Figure 1: Spiritual Wellbeing as a result of connections leading to resilience and empathy.

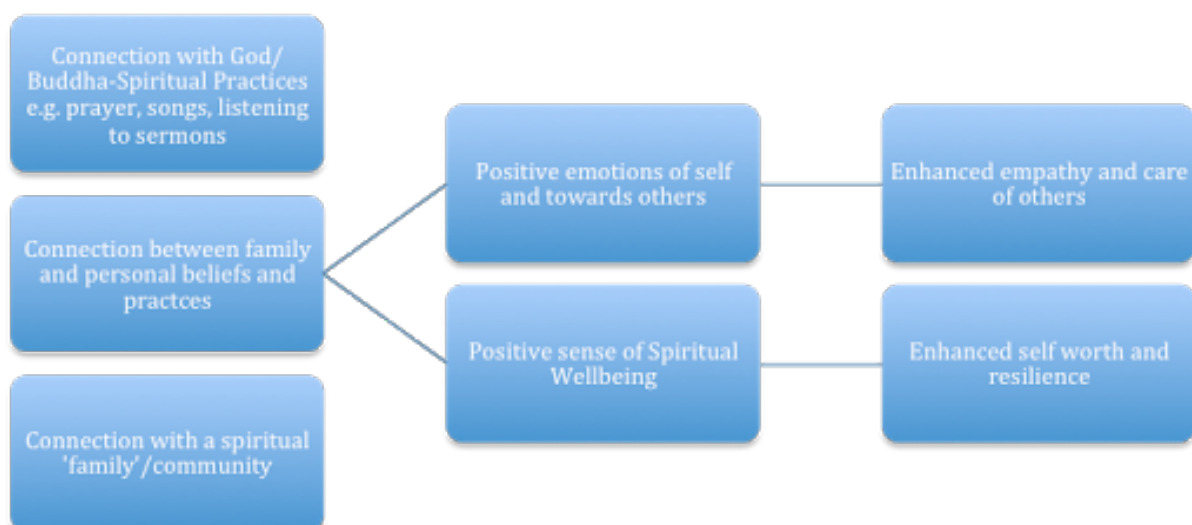


Figure 2: Resilience and its connection to spirituality



According to the American Psychological Association, “**Resilience** is the adaptation in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or stress: family/relationship problems, health problems or workplace/money issues”⁹¹.

The research also indicates that these factors are helped by a sense of spiritual well-being, a greater connection to understanding self, a connection with Buddha/God, a connection with families spiritual beliefs and a connection with a spiritual community/family. It also indicates that it is much harder (though not impossible) when they are unable to pray and worship and therefore communicate with God/Buddha, when their family are opposed to their beliefs and when they are unable to be part of a faith community that they feel connected to. In the absence of one or more of these connections they can sometimes compensate but the more factors, then the harder it may become.

One participant suggested that the Head monk in the pagoda must protect boys when they come to the temple from being abused on the temple grounds, to instruct the monks to learn Buddhist teachings so that they behave according to the teachings.

⁹¹ <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience>

It is of importance that very few participants indicated that they felt coerced to undertake faith activities in the aftercare programs but had freedom to choose. Those who already had a faith usually continued in that faith. Some who had no serious faith beforehand were therefore able to weigh up whether the faith of the staff that was being offered to them could benefit them. Several tried it out and were not convinced. Others tried it out and took it on wholeheartedly.

For readers with no faith, it may be helpful for them to respectfully put aside their own assumptions and understanding of faith and look at what has been helpful to the survivors. The results indicate that faith has been helpful to those who have experienced it.

For readers who have faith, it may be helpful to look at what seemed to work and how it could be better applied.

Recommendations

Aftercare Centres and Community Programmes

Programs working with children and vulnerable adults should continue to provide them with holistic care which includes spiritual aspects of care. This means providing them a choice of faith options or none if they prefer. This research indicates that those who have experienced spiritual input have experienced positive changes for themselves including healing of traumatic events, forgiveness, reduction in anger and stress and also enabled them to pray and reach out to others. For some the spiritual path from survive to thrive is a real one.

Staff need to be screened to make sure that they are kind and patient towards survivors in their care, whether or not they have faith themselves. Survivors should have the opportunity to be able to complain about staff's behaviour so that it can be confronted. No-one is perfect but rudeness or unkindness is unacceptable and should be followed by apologies if and when it occurs. **All staff should be signatories of the child and vulnerable adult safeguarding policies.** All 14 NGO partners of Chab Dai involved in this project have their own policies which often include and address spiritual abuse. All Child Safeguarding policies should include the importance of prevention against spiritual as well as other kinds of abuse. All staff should understand that **children have the right to choose the way they express their spirituality and faith.**

Spiritual abuse is when spirituality is used to manipulate or force someone into doing or thinking something rather than providing them with space to decide for themselves.

“Spiritual abuse is the denial or use of spiritual or religious beliefs and practices to control and dominate a person. Spiritual abuse can have an impact on someone's self-esteem and confidence, make them feel guilty, damage their spiritual experiences and isolate them.”⁹² Children and vulnerable people should not be further exploited.

This is why churches, pagodas and faith based organizations require accountability and transparency to ensure that leaders understand their role and how easily it can become negative.

It is important that staff in residential care **do not develop a culture of intolerance against other faiths.** Survivors need to be able to freely choose whether or not they want to change religions or continue in the religion they are used to. Although most of the participants said that they were able to choose whether they were involved in Christian activities or not, some felt that they would be at a disadvantage if they stayed Buddhist. If there is one thing this research shows it is that staff with integrity, hope and love inspire others to their faith, far more than words.

⁹² <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au> definition

Christians and Buddhists who are strong in their faith should be confident enough in their own faith that they don't use fear or doubt to make others question their own. Going to the temple to please their parents, lighting the incense, eating food dedicated to the temple, wearing strings on the wrist, all of these are not inherently bad and they will still be able to maintain their Christian faith if they choose to. For some, prevention from doing these can cause anxiety, isolation from community, judgment from and against others. One positive example was a survivor who whilst working in the temple area selling food etc. was able to maintain her/his faith in God believing that God would understand that she/he needed to do this to survive.

Some of the survivors had legitimate but very challenging questions about what happened to them and for example the genocide. Why didn't God appear to intervene in their suffering? There must be discussions about these things rather than survivors feeling they can't ask them or are embarrassing the staff. A theology of suffering must be explored with survivors where they understand that God may seem to be far away but that his grace and love is available for them always even in the darkest moments.

In assisting survivors to reintegrate with their families, reintegration and community programs should **talk with the family about the importance of their allowing them to practice their faith in their restoration and support them** to pray, read and attend the place of worship if it is helpful to them and accessible. They should explain the importance of the right of freedom to believe, positive aspects of belief and dispel any misconceptions such as not being able to cry at funerals, lack of respect for parents, etc.

Programs working with survivors should **consider the long term spiritual care of their recipients** - with permission from the recipients they should attempt to make contact with different options of churches and religious leaders so that when they return to their communities they are aware of where they can go to where they feel comfortable and welcome. These religious leaders may need help in understanding that the participants have been victims and did not choose to be exploited. With a deeper understanding of spirituality they can heal and become active and strong members of the spiritual community. For those who want and request it, especially those far away from or too busy to attend churches/temples, information on radio shows, scripture to read or listen to and worship songs on CDs and radio could/ should be made available to them.

It is gratifying to see that four of the participants said that their **faith prevented them from suicide.** But there is an understanding that suicide is not forgivable which can be a huge strain on the families left behind. However there appears to be nothing in the Bible that suggests that.⁹³

Respectfully, again all Christians who come in contact with vulnerable people in programs or in the community should be reminded of their responsibilities to be kind and not be abusive in any way. Any working directly with these people should be screened beforehand and sign a child and vulnerable persons protection policy.

⁹³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/july10/30.61.html>

Buddhist monks and teachers

Some important Buddhist teachers have suggested that Buddhist teaching aligns with human rights. Respectfully, monks might become more aware of this and continue to promote **good morality and compassion for others**. They should continue to preach sermons on this for radio, social media and television. They should also encourage their followers to **treat everyone with respect**, including those who have experienced previous and current suffering and those who have different beliefs and practices. They should dispel erroneous beliefs such as suffering being deserved. They should welcome everyone into temple areas to meditate and pray.

Many attendees to Buddhist pagodas attend because it is the tradition of family and because it is seen as Cambodian but they don't always understand the philosophy behind it. If this were understood and applied in people's lives more perhaps it would reduce sexual violence and vulnerability.

Having more teaching in Buddhism including on moral behaviour will help people to treat others with respect, including men towards women and adults towards children. It will also help to understand that filial piety is not unlimited. Respect for parents is good. Abuse of children is wrong.

Respectfully, Buddhist monks and teachers who come in contact with vulnerable people should be reminded of their responsibilities to be kind to the vulnerable and not be abusive in any way. Three of the cohort experienced sexual abuse by monks. **Any working directly should be screened beforehand to ensure that those with a history of abuse are not working with vulnerable people and sign a child and vulnerable persons protection/safeguarding policy.** The policy/guidelines should be developed for staff to align and adhere with while working with children and vulnerable adults. This policy/guidelines should encourage and foster an environment where each team staff can express their faith/core ethos into action (integrate their values into their work) with no harm to others as well as upholding child and human rights.

Christian Leadership in Cambodia

Christian pastors, priests and teachers should continue to welcome all types of people into the church. They should provide a place where people feel loved and cared for whatever has happened to them in the past or is happening to them now. They should have a strong emphasis on *imago dio* i.e. that everyone is made in the image of God and avoid emphasizing teachings that focus on fear (e.g. "lake of fire"). They should encourage their entire congregation to seek the 'fruits of the spirit' (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, modesty, self-control and chastity Galatians 5: 23-25) and reach out and pray for those who are in difficult situations. They should make the Bible freely available

and their sermons and worship songs available through radio, social media and television where possible.

They should also encourage all their congregation to behave in a moral way, treating everyone with dignity and reaching out to those who are more vulnerable. Men should be encouraged to treat all women with dignity and respect.

Many Christians who are fearful of the spirit world and ghosts need reassuring that they can pray and ask for help and protection at any time.

Church leaders should understand that sometimes those who are recovering from abuse and exploitation will take time and they need help and support after discharge from aftercare programs. However, later they can become the supporters of others as those who understand suffering and difficulties. They should not treat them differently in a negative way.

Christian pastors and teachers who come in contact with vulnerable people should be reminded of their responsibilities to be kind and not be abusive in any way. **Any working directly with children should be screened beforehand and sign a child and vulnerable persons protection/safeguarding policy.** The policy/guidelines should be developed for staff to align and adhere with while working with children and vulnerable adults. This policy/guidelines should encourage and foster an environment where each team staff can express their faith/core ethos into action (integrate their values into their work) with a Biblical foundation as well as upholding child and human rights.

Researchers

More research is needed in understanding how spirituality can help to heal trauma and help children become more resilient and how children and vulnerable people can move from survive to thrive.

