



Damnok Toek
(Goutte d'eau)

Poipet, Cambodia Street Children Survey December 2013



Poipet, January 2013: Jenny Holligan

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1. General overview

Cambodia currently has a total population of over 15, 25 million people and has one of the youngest populations in Southeast Asia: with 41 per cent aged 18 and under, and more than a third between the ages of 10 and 24. Three decades of war and conflict, a post-war boom and an average low life expectancy are some of the reasons for this imbalance in demography.

Over the past two decades, despite staggering economic development in Cambodia the situation remains dire, poverty and large inequalities persist. Over 20 years after the end of the civil war and genocide by the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia is ranked 138th out of 186 countries in the Human Development Index, placing it in the lower position to its regional neighbours. 22.8 % of Cambodians live below the poverty line, surviving on less than \$1.25 a day¹, and children are amongst the most vulnerable groups. The average years of schooling is 5.8 years, which means that the majority of the population does not complete the full cycle of primary school

Damnok Toek uses UNICEF's definition when referring to "street children". This includes:

- **Street Living Children:**
'Children/youth who have cut ties with their families and live alone on the streets'
- **Street Working Children:**
'Children/youth who spend all or most of their time working on the streets to provide an income for their families or for themselves, but who return to a caregivers home at night'
- **Children of Street Living Families:**
'Children who live with their family on the streets'

In Cambodia, street children are primarily found in urban areas as cities are considered to have better economic and employment opportunities by migrants from the provinces. Based on information gathered by the Cambodia Street Children Network in 2012, of which Damnok Toek is a member, 4,750 street children were counted in six Cambodian towns in one day. It is estimated that an approximate number 300 and 350 street children may be found in Poipet on any given day. The impact of street life on children and youth is significant. Unstable lifestyles, lack of medical care, lack of education, potentially hazardous jobs and inadequate living conditions increase young people's susceptibility to exploitation and abuse, unsafe migration and trafficking, substance abuse, health risks, sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases.

Poipet is located in the Northwest of Cambodia at the main border crossing to Thailand. While it was a small and quiet town barely a decade ago, its population has since been growing at a very rapid pace to reach a number of around 100,000 inhabitants. Poipet attracts many people with its false reputation of offering a new and prosperous start to the poor. Indeed, many poor Cambodians flock to Poipet from all over the country, bringing with them their children and the hope of making a living from the thriving cross-border trade, in the many Casinos around the Thai border area, or through self-employment in a small business. In reality, economic opportunities for the uneducated and unskilled are scarce, and the majority of Poipet's inhabitants are living at survival level in precarious and uncertain conditions.

¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KHM>

Poipet can be an exceptionally hazardous place for children. Extreme poverty has led the town to evolve into a hotbed of social ills: trafficking of persons and unsafe migration, commercial and sexual exploitation of children, substance abuse, prostitution, domestic violence, HIV and AIDS, land-grabbing, smuggling, and corruption at all levels are part of everyday life. Consequently and inevitably the most vulnerable members of society - children - are bearing the brunt of these problems, resulting in a high number of street children.

2. Damnok Toek

Damnok Toek (DT) works in three locations throughout Cambodia; Neak Loeung, Poipet and the capital, Phnom Penh. In partnership with the Cambodian government, DT has identified these locations as particularly high risk for children. DT began working in Poipet in 1999, and assists vulnerable children and their families through a range of targeted health, education and vocational programs. The programme in Poipet comprises the following activities:

Our focus.

- ❖ Drop in centre for street children and daily outreach
- ❖ Rehabilitation centre for children using drugs and street children
- ❖ Reception centre for children victims of trafficking/unsafe migration
- ❖ Residential centre (mid to longer term shelter)
- ❖ Non-formal education and vocational training
- ❖ Clinic
- ❖ Home based production for vulnerable families
- ❖ Childsafe Network and Hotline

3. Introduction of the study

3.1. Objectives

Every two years Damnok Toek Poipet conducts a survey among street working and street living children in Poipet. The objectives of the survey are:

- to identify the street children in Poipet (origin, family situation, education, economic situation and reasons for them being on the street);
- to identify Poipet's street children's needs;
- to find out if there is a gap between their needs and the services provided by Damnok Toek and to use the findings to adapt the services provided by Damnok Toek if necessary;
- to monitor general trends within the street children population of Poipet and identify any significant differences in outcomes between the last survey completed in 2011

3.2. Methodology

The social workers and educators from Damnok Toek's Drop In Centre conducted 122 individual interviews with children between the 2nd and 4th December 2013. The initial questionnaire used in previous years was reviewed by the team in October 2013, and adapted according to their input and experience. A second meeting was held in November with the staff to finalize the questionnaire and provide training on how to conduct the interviews. Each question was discussed, and issues such as confidentiality, how to approach the children and how to ask sensitive questions were raised. Each team member then conducted three test interviews to experiment the questionnaire and determine if any new changes were needed.

The surveys were conducted during day and night outreach (in the streets and near the border, where the target children can generally be found), when meeting the children at Damnok Toek's Drop In Centre, as well as in communities. 112 children were interviewed, amongst them 69 boys and 43 girls. "N" represents the total number of children the results are normalized on. When gender-aggregated data is presented in this report, the numbers are normalized on the total number of boys and girls respectively. This approach has been chosen, because if the numbers were normalized on the total number of children interviewed (112), the results would be biased as there is not an equal representation of boys and girls amongst the respondents.

3.3. Limitations

The data presented here represents a snapshot of street children in Poipet, on the Cambodian side of the border, and over three days. It does not aim to show a comprehensive or exhaustive picture of reality. Then number of interviews do not represent the real number of street children in Poipet. The actual number of street children on a given day is expected to be higher (between 300 and 350 children). Also, the number of street children in Poipet fluctuates throughout the year as families and/or children are subject to regular migration. Additional limitations of this study are the following:

- Limited amount of time (3 days) and number of children interviewed;
- The lack of availability/ non willingness of some children approached to participate;
- The sensitive nature of some topics within the questionnaire (for example on sexual and reproductive health, drug use, sex for benefits) : some children may have not always been open about these issues which may have affected the outcomes of the survey;
- There are several questions where answers were left blank, so the figures provided do not systematically represent the 122 children.

4. Results of the survey

4.1 Profile

4.1.1. *Number of children interviewed:*

112 children: 69 boys: 43 girls

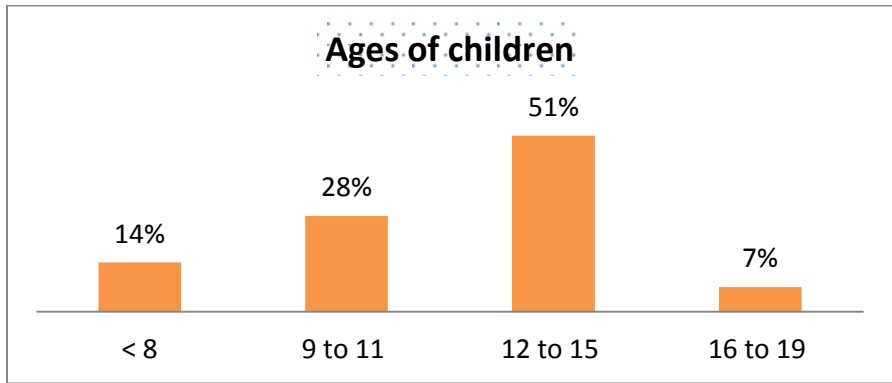
This is a lower number compared to the survey in 2011 (228 children). The main reason is that the team did not do interviews on the Thai side of the border this year, but focused on the Cambodian side, as this is Damnok Toek's designated area of work.

4.1.2. Location of interviews:

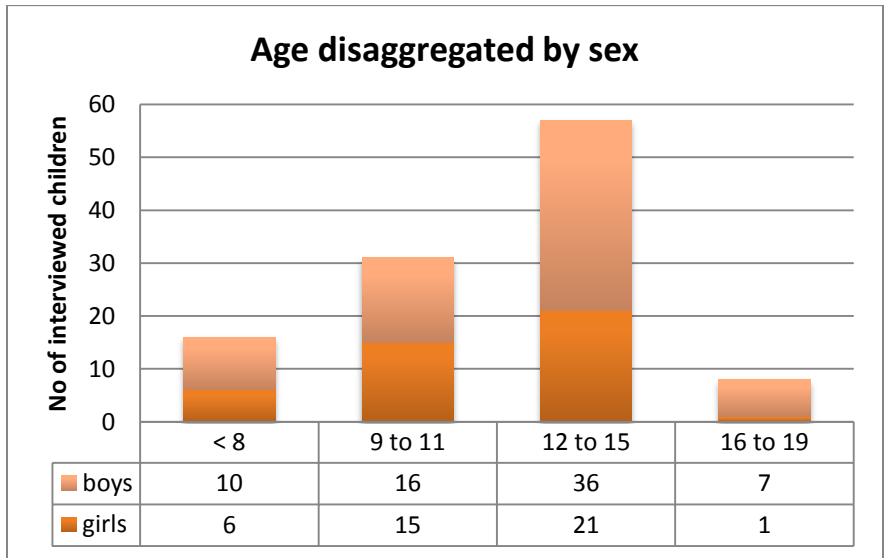
Location	% of children interviewed
Cambodian side of the border	69
Drop In Centre	24
Community	15
Other/blank answer	4

N=112

4.1.2. Age and sex



N=112



This shows a similar trend to last year’s survey, where the majority of children were also situated within the 12 to 15 years category, followed but the 9 to 11 category. No major new finding can be noted comparing to last year’s survey, except a tendency for girls to be a bit older and in the range 16-19 rather than 12 to 15.

4.1.3. Place of origin

This year's survey confirms the trend found in 2011, where 2/3 of the children were born in Poipet, as opposed to the situation in 2009, where only 26% of the children said to be born in Poipet. Indeed, in 2013, 65% of the interviewed children confirmed to be from Poipet. The remaining 35% of interviewed children come from the following provinces:

Province of origin	%
Battambang	11
Kampong Cham	6
Phnom Penh	5
Pursat	4
Prey Veng	3
Takeo	2
Kandal	2
Bantay Meanchay	2

N=37

4.1.4. Actual Living place

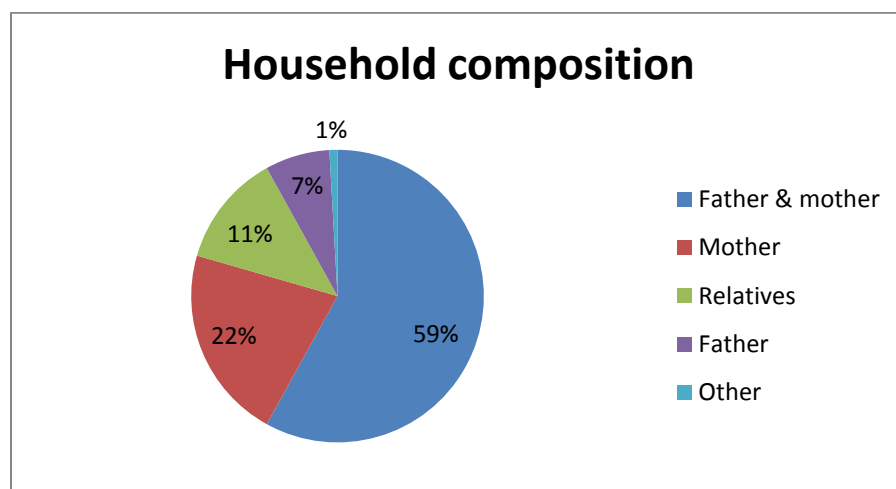
Living place	Number of children
Kbal Spean	73
Kilolekbourn (KM4)	14
Palelai	13
Psar Kandal	2
Borchear Thom	2
Total	105

Most of the children working on the streets can be found in the border area. There is an increase of the children living in KM4.

4.1.5. Living situation

75% of the children we interviewed are living in the communities, with 25 % living in the streets. A large majority indicate that both their parents are alive. Of the children with only one parent (28%), the number of children who do not have a father (21%) is three times the number of the children who do not have a mother (7%). Only 1% of the children are orphans from both parents.

Children living in communities live with the following members:



N=110

An overwhelming percentage of 99% of the children that are not living on the streets live with their families: this can be one or both of their parents, extended families, mostly their grandmothers, and for a minority a stepfather or stepmother. Only one child lives elsewhere, which is in the pagoda. It may be however that the term “relative” may comprise community members that are not part of the child’s extended family but considered close enough to fall under that category, and not “other”. On average, children share their house with 6.40 people: 2.80 adults and 3.60 children. The children have an average of 4.80 brothers and sisters. This indicates that in many families the whole family is not always actually physically living together. With such large households, children are often asked to contribute to its income and work.

4.1.6. Family working situation

Type of occupation	Mother %	Father %
Stay home	33	5
Sick	2	1
Beggar	11	0
Scavenger	20	8
Street seller	24	10
Smuggler	10	0
Cleaner	4	0
Construction worker	7	39
Cart puller/goods carrier	0	27
Works in Thai market	6	0
Other	17	6
Mototaxi	0	9

N=112

In the majority of cases both the mothers and the fathers are working. However, among the mothers there is a significant number staying at home. Many women stay home to take care of their children while the husbands are working.

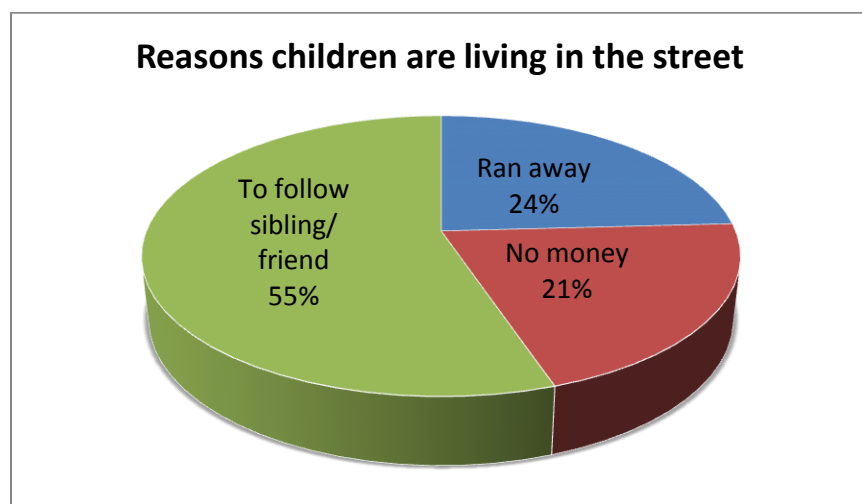
Women remain mainly engaged in the informal sector. The most notable change in 2013 is the clear increase in the percentage of scavenging, both for mothers and fathers. This trend can be noticed since our 2011 survey. Indeed, in 2010, only 2% of both mothers and fathers were engaged in scavenging, as opposed to 20% and 8% respectively this year. Begging is also steadily on the rise for women, from 2% in 2010, 7.6% in 2011 to 11% in 2013. This highlights a growing tendency of families to be engaged in particular precarious, unstable and fluctuating jobs

4.1.7. Housing situation

30% of the children live in “plastic” houses, 33% in wooden houses, 21% in metal houses, 3% in brick houses and 3% mentioned “other” (for example the pagoda). There seems to be some amelioration in the children’s housing conditions in 2013, as in the previous survey 59% of the children were living in “plastic” houses. These houses, built with temporary materials (i.e. plastic walls or roof), are particularly perilous and subject to flooding and mud during rainy season. They often consist of one room that is shared by all inhabitants and used for all purposes (cooking and sleeping). Living conditions are particularly hazardous, as access to safe water, sanitation and waste collection is not available. This is also a risky environment in terms of health, as the risks associated to poor access to water and hygiene are high. These houses are often rented on a daily basis, which is an additional source of vulnerability for the residents, as they are unable to plan their future and are living in a day to day, survival mode.

4.1.4 Street-living situation

25% of the children we met (28, of which 6 are girls) were living on the street. Amongst them, 61% declared to be living on the street all the time, whilst 39% said that they were sometimes living on the streets. The number of girls, though low in absolute terms, is actually quite high as it represents 21 % of the street living children we interviewed (6 out of 28). This is an increase compared to the 2011 survey, where girls represented only 2 out of 25 children living on the streets. The reasons giving by the children for living on the street were:



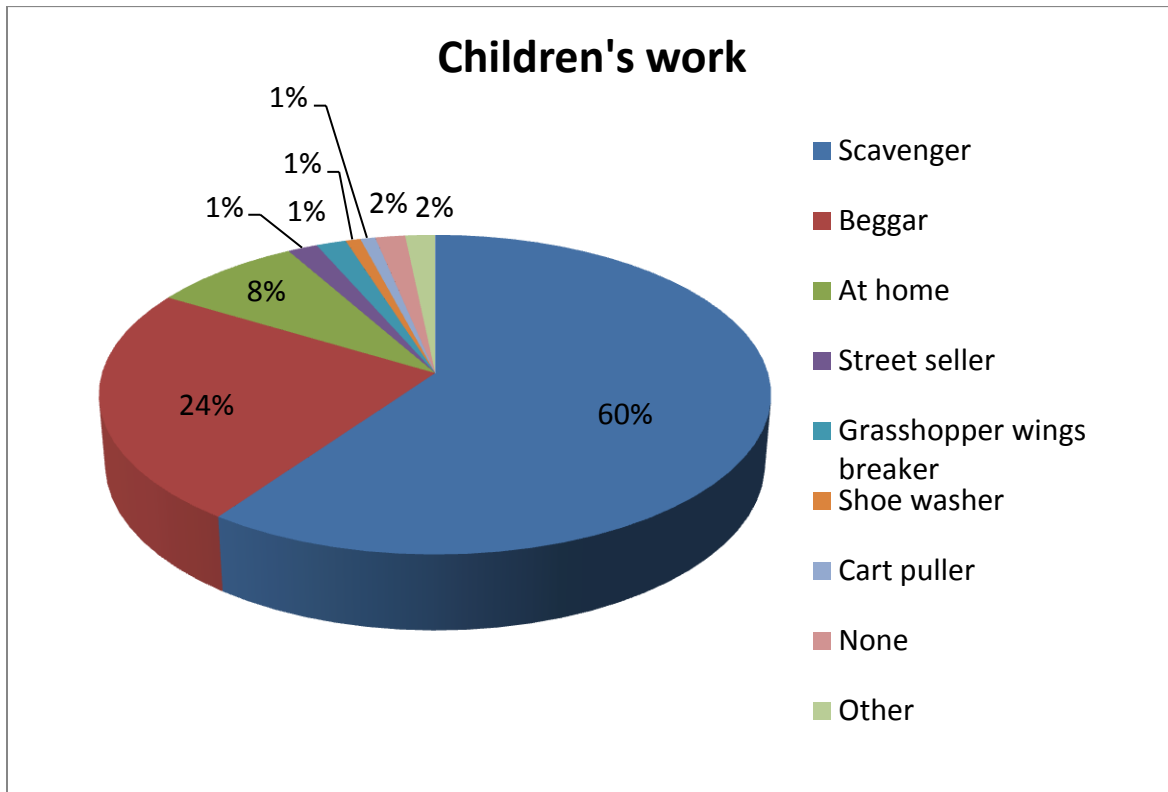
N=28

The main change from previous years is that no child mentioned that they had no family as a reason to be on the streets, nor that drugs were a reason they are on the street. What is apparent is that since 2011, the majority of the children end up on the streets after following friends or a sibling. We do not have more detailed information on the reasons why nearly one quarter of the children ran

away from home. Domestic violence, gambling, neglect and alcohol related harm are topics of concern for Damnok Toek in Poipet, and these may well be contributing factors, but remain suppositions.

5. Street working situation

5.1. Work

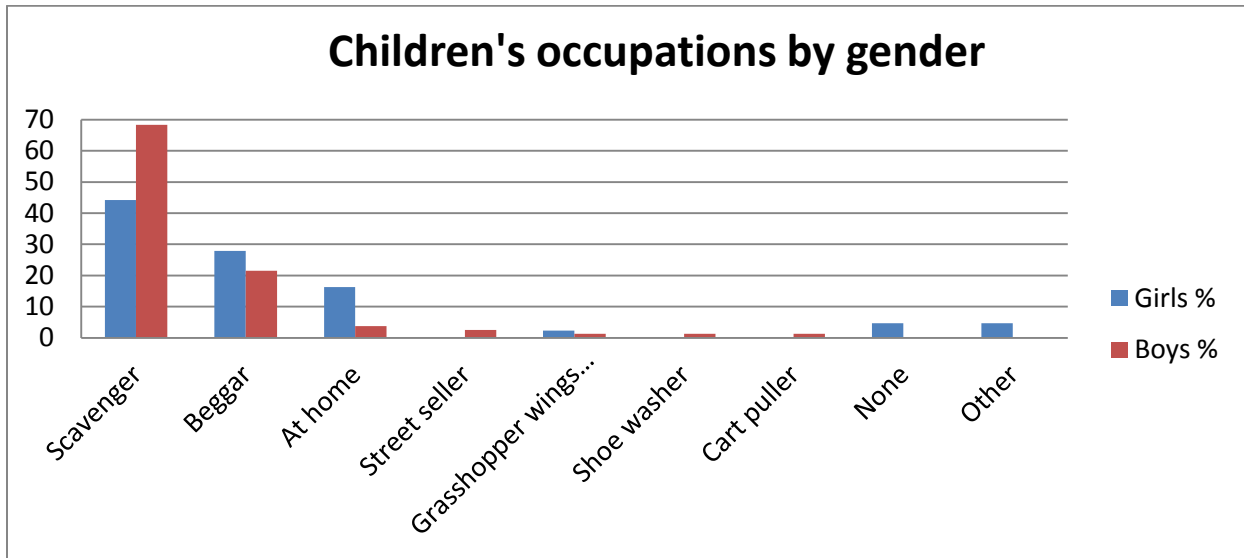


N=108

An overwhelming majority of children are working as scavengers or beggars. Scavenging is an activity whereby the children search and collect different recycling materials, (for example glass bottles, plastic, cans, etc.), going through garbage or simply on the streets.

There is less diversity in children's occupations compared to last surveys. For example, in 2010, 11% of the children (amongst them 80% of interviewed girls) were "umbrella holders". This year, no child, girl or boy, mentioned they were doing this job. This lack of variety in jobs could however be a reflection of the location of the interviews, as some jobs are done more on the Thai side (for example for umbrella holders are mainly working at the Thai border, protecting people crossing the border from the sun and/or rain. A new answer given by 8% of children this year when asked what they do as a job was "working at home". We suppose this ranges from helping the family clean, cook or/and take care of siblings, to helping parents with a home based business. This occupation exclusively concerns girls.

5.2. Work by gender



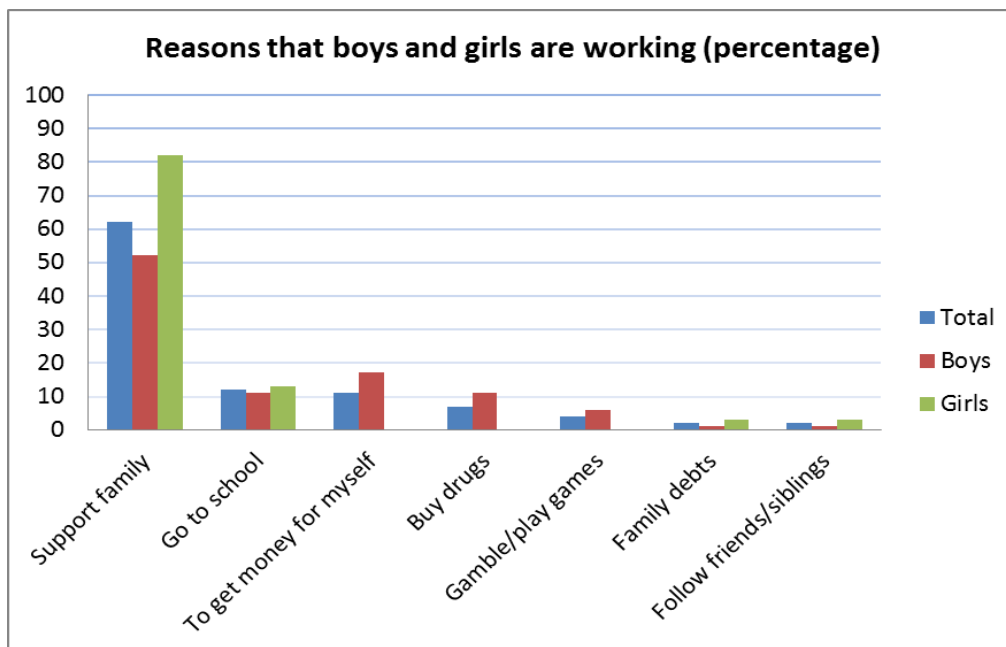
N=108

5.3. Working hours

52 % of the children working say that they work every day, 14% for a full day and 19% for half a day. 15% of the working children say to be working a few times a week. Working for half a day gives most children the opportunity to go to school. It appears that for many children working hours may vary, as they work part time some days and full time other days. Multiple answers were possible for this question.

5.4. Reasons for working

In percentages, the main reasons for working are exposed below, with gender- disaggregated information:

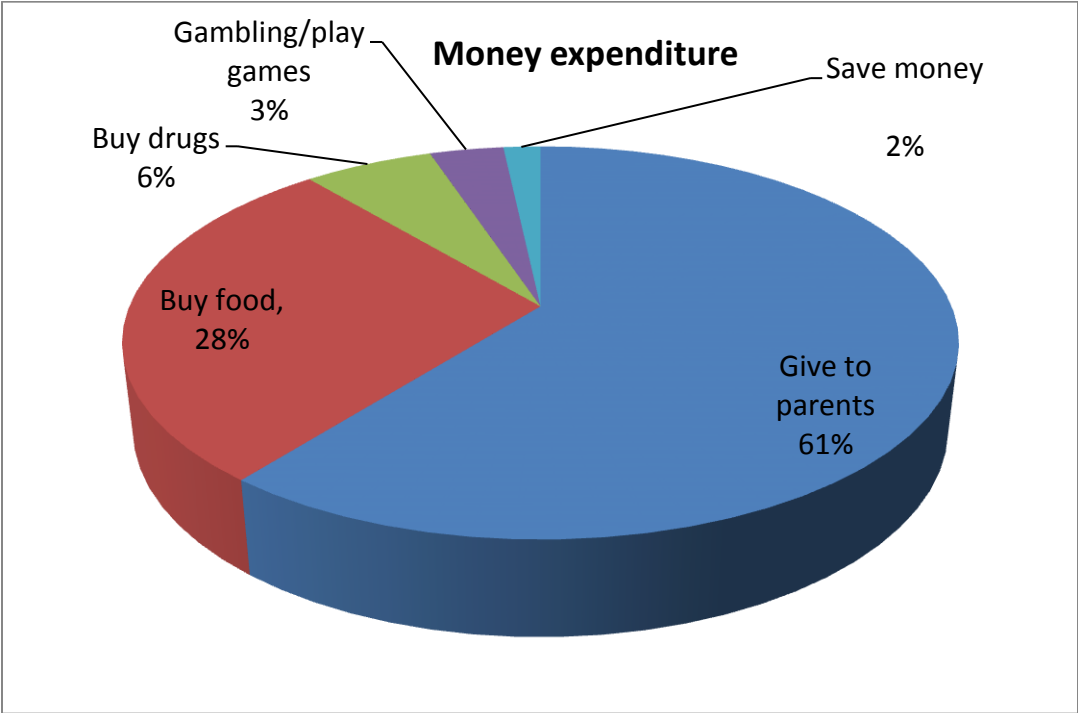


N=99

The most common reason for children to try to earn money is to help support the family, with 62% of the children referring to this as main cause for working. This specially concerns an overwhelming majority of girls; indeed, 82% of the girl respondents cited the needed to support their family, versus 52% of the boys. Girls are also earning money to go to school, in a similar proportion to boys. However, none of the girls state they earn money for themselves, to buy drugs, or to gamble or play games, which seems mainly activities practiced by boys. It also seems that contributing to family debts as well as following friends is more done only by girls.

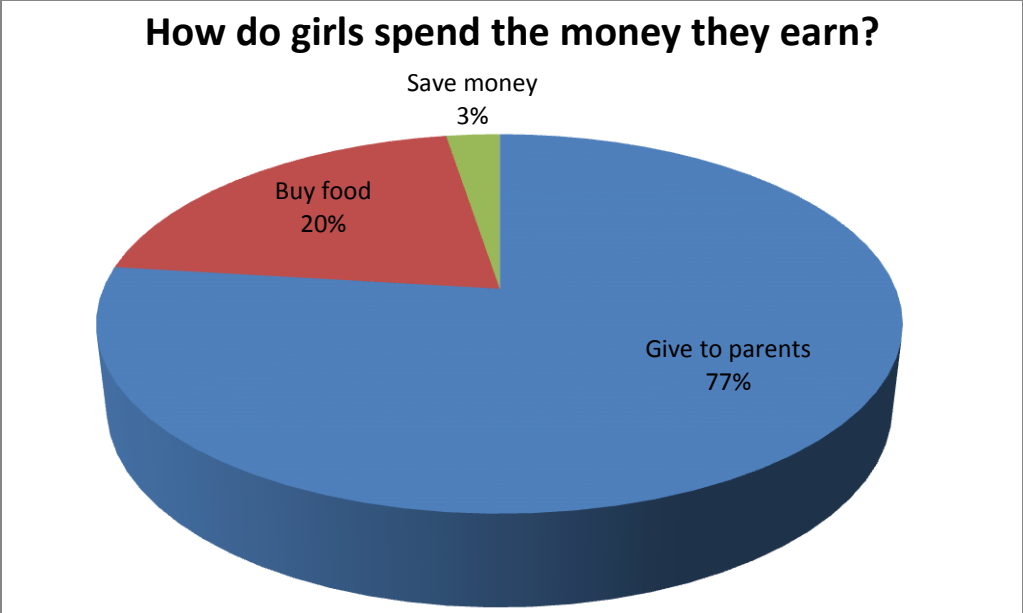
This is in general reflected in the way the children have last spent the money they earned.

5.5. Money expenditure of children

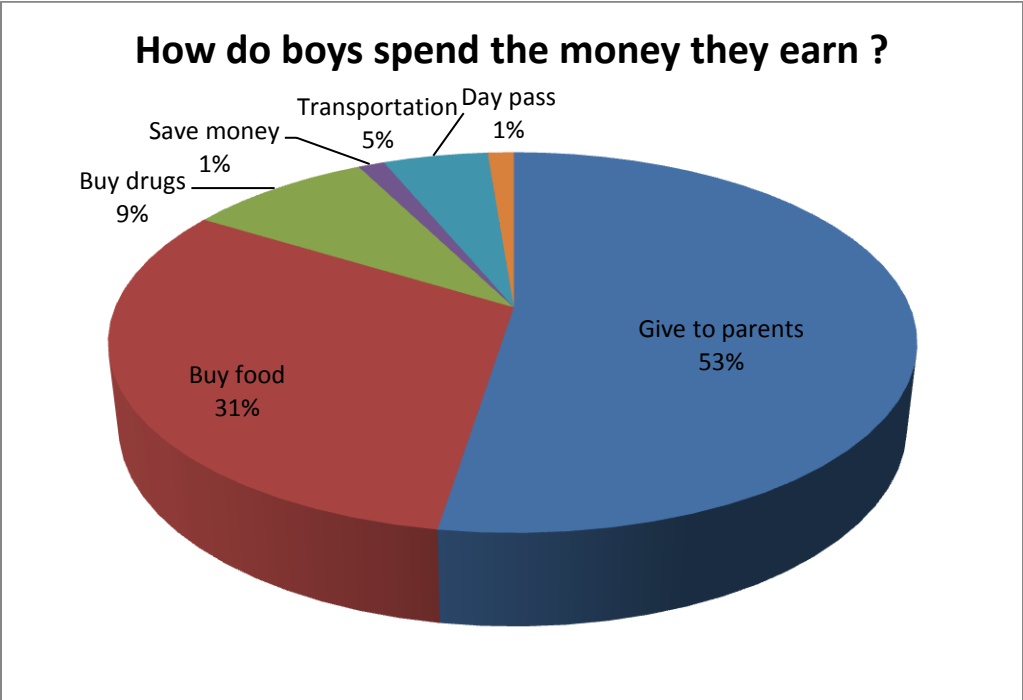


N=100

A clear difference with 2011 survey is the high increase of children working to buy food (5.8% of answers in 2011 and 28% is 2013). There also seems to be a wider range of ways boys spend money, as show the graphs below:



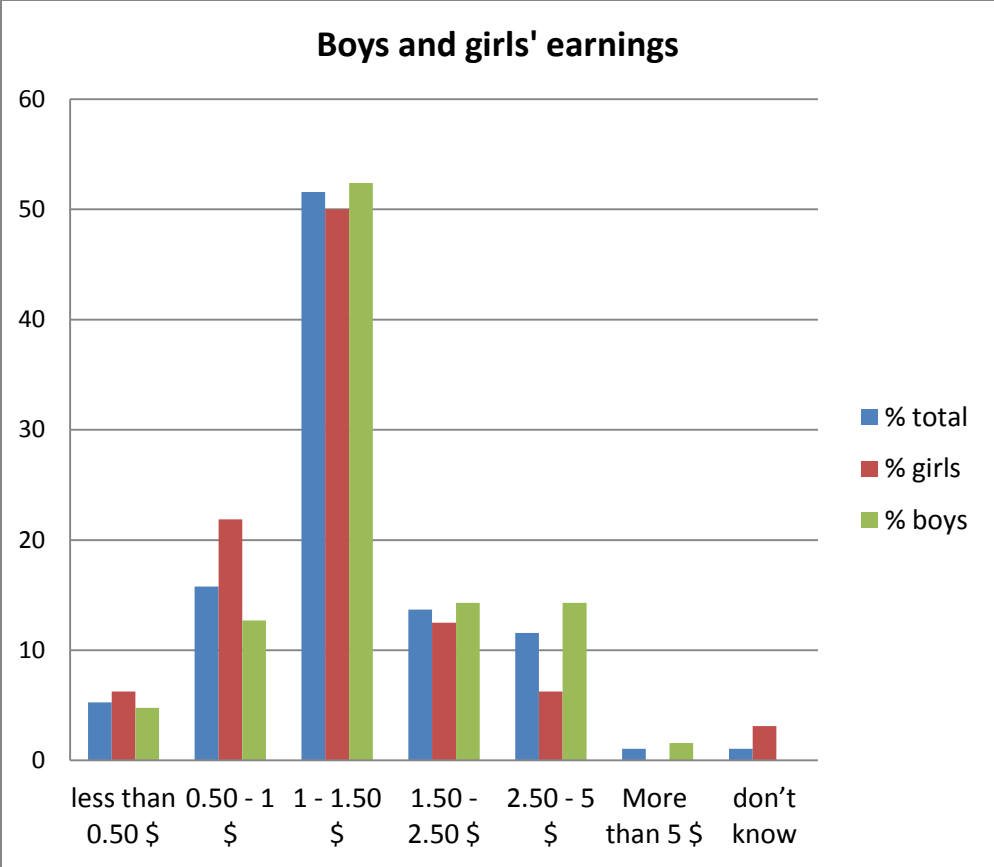
N=43



N=79

5.6. Income

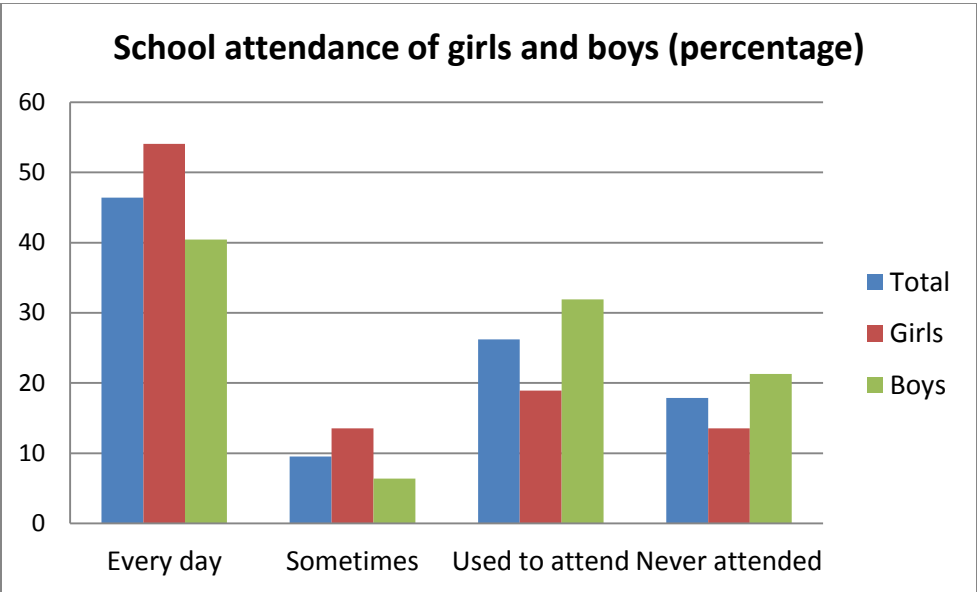
All working children interviewed were asked how much money they earned the day before the interview (in Riels: 4000 Riels = US\$1).



N=95 - Boys: 6; Girls: 32

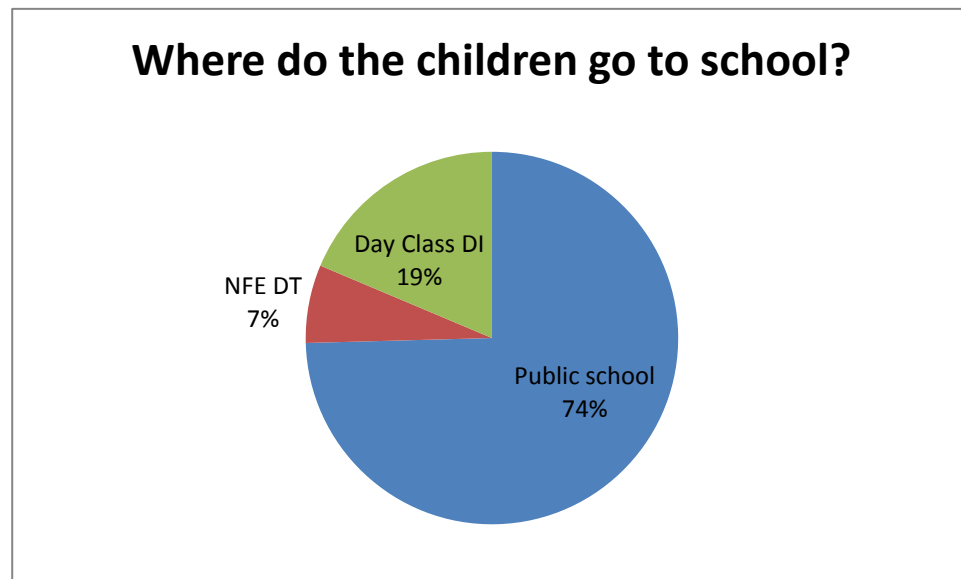
A high majority of children earn over 1 US\$ a day. This can be a considerable contribution to households' income.

6. Education



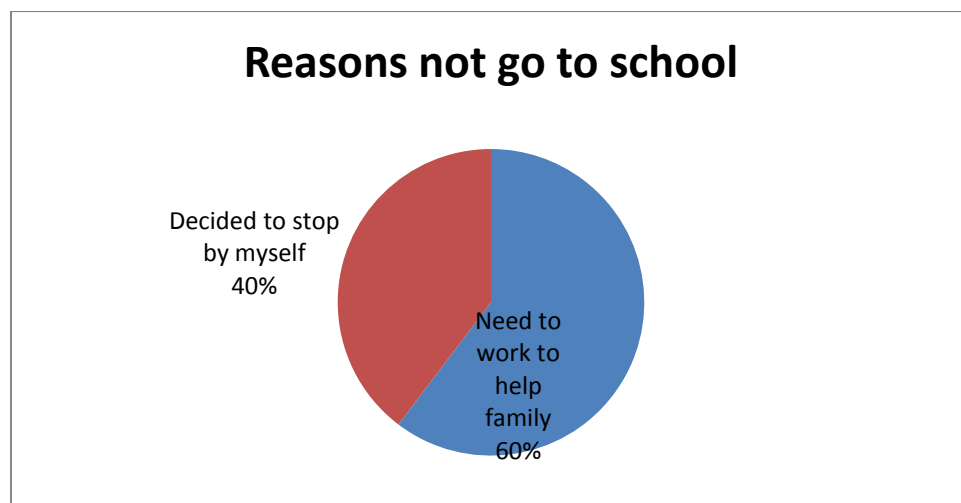
N=84 - Boys: 47; Girls: 37

46 % of the children state that they attend school every day, and girls go more regularly to school with 54% going each day versus 40% of the boys. .This is a 7% decrease in comparison to our 2011 survey, where 53% of the total number of respondents is going each day to school. A striking change is the fact that more girls are going to school in 2013, whereas in 2011 68% of boys were attending class each day and only 32% of girls. 10% of children go “sometimes”: 26% used to attend, whilst 18% never attended school. On average, the children stop attending school after grade 2. This means that they have not completed a full primary school cycle, and that one can assume that their literacy level is very low. As indicated below, a large majority of children in school are attending government public school, whilst 26% are engaged in Damnok Toek’s Non Formal Education programme or the basic literacy and numeracy classes at Damnok Toek’s drop-in centre. No children indicate to join the education programmes of other NGOs in Poipet.



N=59

The main reasons given by children not to go to school are the following:



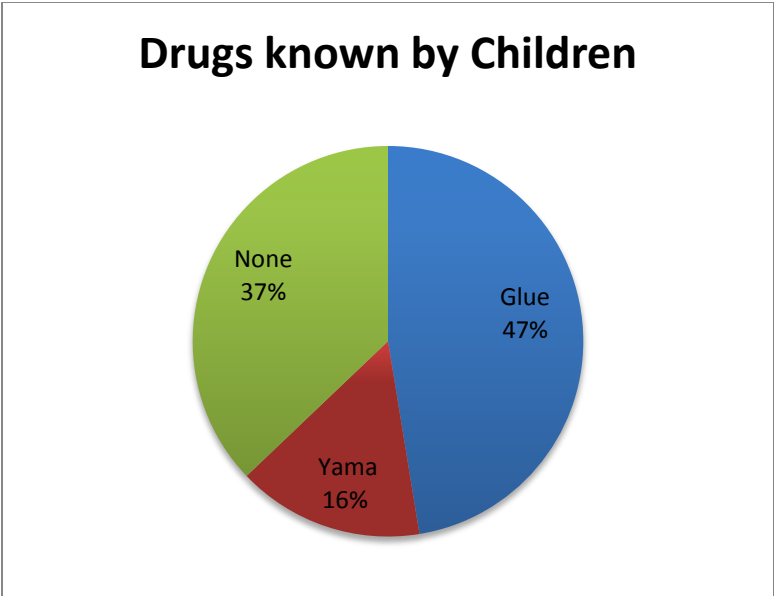
N=64

Most children state that they needed to work to support the household, or that they stopped school because they no longer wanted to go. One boy said he stopped school because he was using yama. No one mentioned that the school fees were a reason for them not to go to school, whilst in the 2011 survey 15% mentioned this as main reason for being out of school.

7. Knowledge and experience with drugs

7.1.Substance abuse

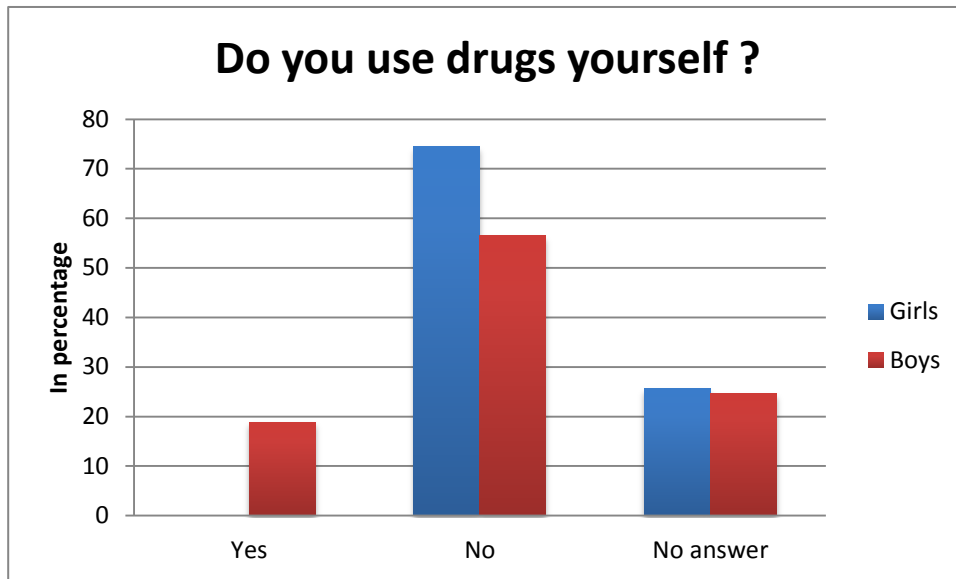
All children were asked whether they know any drugs and if they consume any themselves. Among street children in Poipet, glue and “yama” are well known. There is also quite a substantial part of the children, more than 1/5, that answers not knowing any drugs. This answer is mainly given among the children younger than 8 or between 9 and 11.



N=84

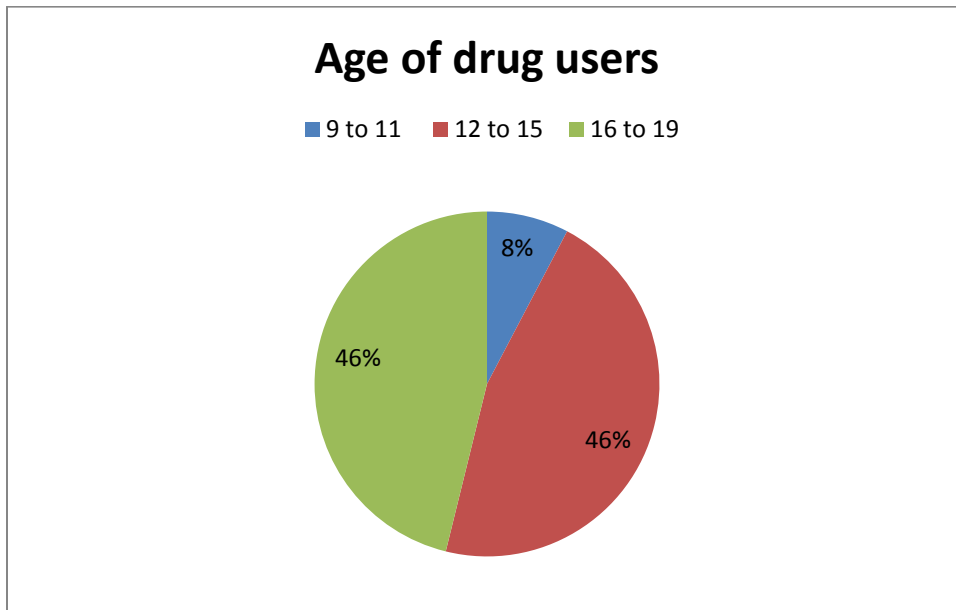
97 children answered this question. There is a 17% increase compared to 2011 results on the number of children that don't know any drug. Also, this year krystal ice and heroin are unknown to all children. Almost 30% of children state they know someone that take drugs: 66% names friends, 30% names family/relatives and the remaining 4% did not give an answer.

7.2. Drug experience



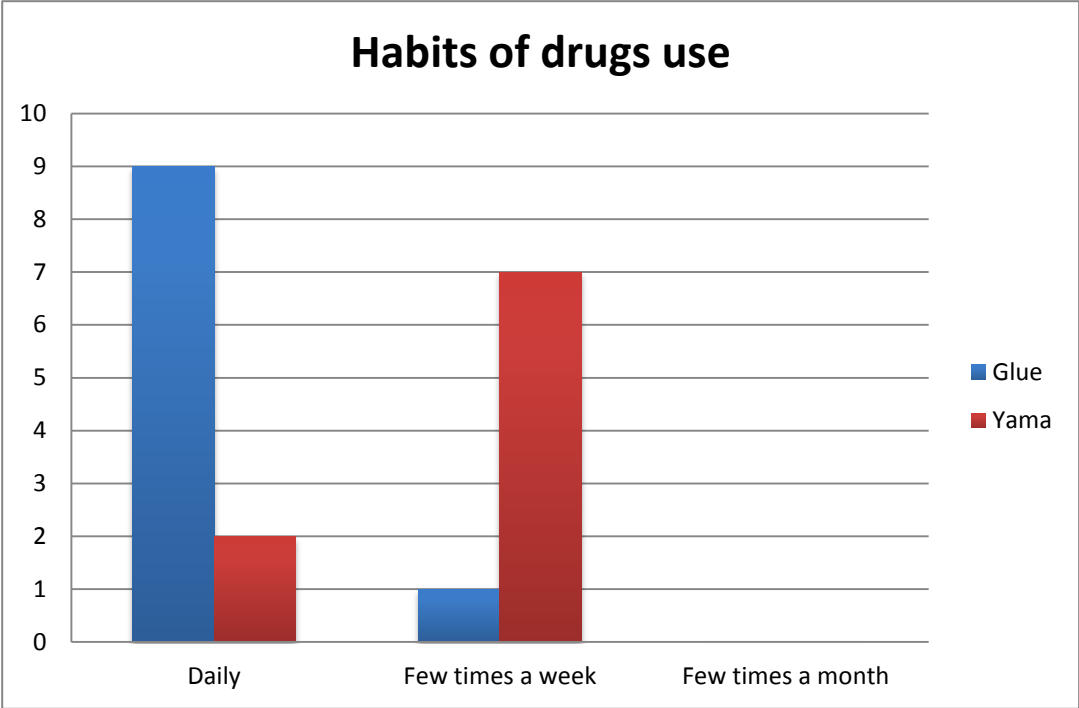
N=84

All the girls answered that they do not use any drugs. 19% of boys (13 children) admitted using substances. The ages of the children are broken down below:



N=13

This year, a rise of 12% can be noted regarding younger children (ages 12 to 15) using drugs, but a decrease in children below 8 using drugs. There are no changes in habit, as the children continue to use either “yama” or glue or both. The drug-using habits of these boys are described below.



Glue is used daily, most probably due to its cheap access. Yama, more expensive, tends to be reserved for weekly consumption. Indeed, 5 boys out of 9 that take glue everyday take Yama once a week. During the last survey, some children admitted to be taking heroin (1) and krystal ice (2). This year no one mentions other drugs than yama and glue. On average the children spend up to US\$ 2.50 a day to buy glue and between US\$2.50 and US\$ 7,50 a day to buy yama. This is a significant amount of money.

7.3.Reasons to use drugs

Nearly 1/4th of children did not give an answer to this question. The main reason indicated by substance abusing children to use drugs is “to have fun”, followed by increasing strength to work, forget my problems, do like my friends.

Reasons to use drugs

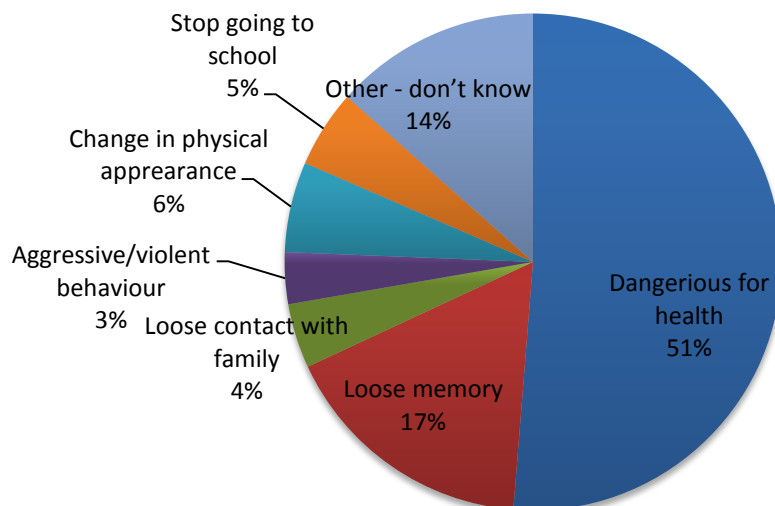


N = 13

7.3. Dangers linked to drugs

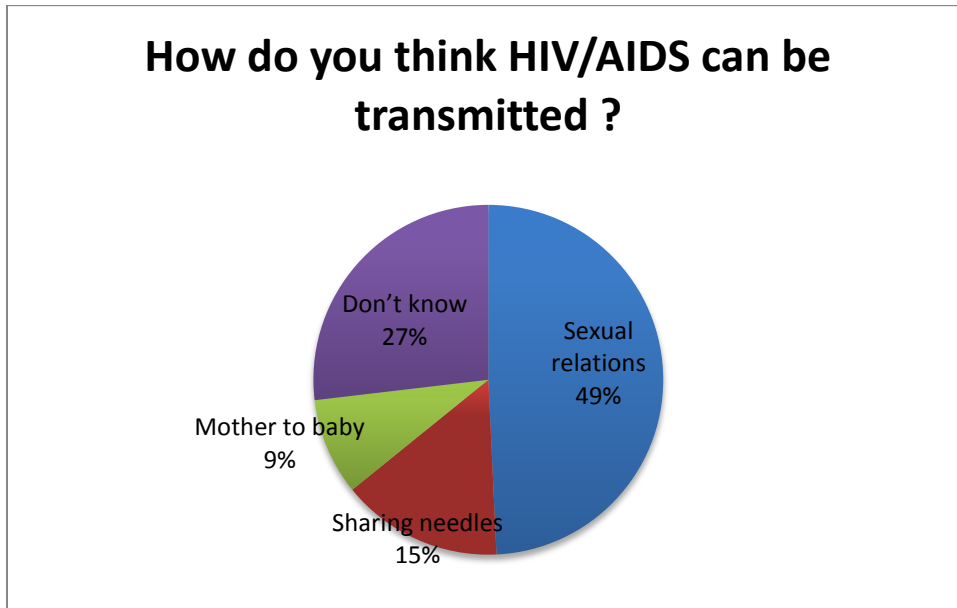
Most children can cite risks related to substance abuse.

What risks do you know about taking drugs?



N=84

8. Sexual relations, STIs and HIV/AIDS



N=66

Over one third of children that responded to this question can cite no mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS. Only 3 boys say they have sexual relations. Two of them use condoms. Only one of these boys (and one boy amongst the children interviewed) states he knows of other youths providing sexual services for benefits.

9. Recommendations

Education

The number of children that are not in school is a particular area of concern. Childhood is usually the time to invest in education that may be key to breaking a cycle of poverty, enabling one to find a more secure, skilled, and better paid job. A lack of skills may lead street children to remain in an accrued and durable position of vulnerability. It is recommended that Damnok Toek intensifies activities, whether directly in the communities, with children working on the streets, in formal or informal settings related to sensitizing both children and their families on the importance of education, for boys as for girls. An enrolment campaign could be carried out each year as an increase of parents' involvement throughout the year, in order to increase the awareness on the importance of education and prevent drop outs. More meetings with parents could also assist in consolidating their support to their children's education.

Prevention

HIV/AIDS

The proportion of children not being able to cite a mode of transmission of STIs remains high. Damnok Toek should maintain and potentially increase prevention on a regular basis, during outreach, mobile libraries in the communities as well as in the Drop in centre. Alternative settings could also be used to increase awareness, such as a peer education approach.

Substance use

Drug use continues to be a problem and an escape channel for children, primarily boys, working and living in the streets of Poipet. Most children who were found to use substances were not fully aware of the specific harm substance use could cause or were familiar with harm reduction techniques. Through offering educational opportunities, increasing awareness raising, some brief intervention and prevention activities around substances this could help the children to better identify the risks the use/abuse of these substances entail. It is also key to ensure we continue to be able to monitor substance use trends, which although have over recent years remained broadly the same with the main ones reported as yama, alcohol and glue , we must ensure our services can adapt and respond to any new substances that arise.

Street living girls

Street living girls are particularly exposed to all types of abuse and exploitation. Damnok Toek should monitor the number of street-living girls and how it evolves in the upcoming months in order to adapt or develop a response according to their specific needs if applicable. We need to ensure our outreach team have the capacity and skills to be able to help identify the different types of abuse including; emotional, physical, sexual, economic and mental and that we can respond and offer appropriate interventions. This means ensuring that alongside the interventions and activities we offer we continue to have strong links to other services, for example CWCC for protection from, domestic violence. Alongside this we need to ensure we can continue to educate children and communities in their understanding of abuse and exploitation and assist with reporting and prevention. This includes proactively increasing access and awareness to education, vocational training and income generation schemes as well as empowering girls to access these.

Early Intervention

Through our experience of working with vulnerable children and their families the evidence shows that to achieve the best outcomes for children in the long term is to be involved and intervene at the earliest opportunity. This means ensuring we engage the child into positive activities and opportunities including education, training, access to health care and nutrition as well as

intervening and addressing any harmful patterns of behaviour or risk e.g. substance misuse, abuse as soon as possible. An aim may be to develop, in addition to the existing structures and services we offer both at Damnok Toek and with partners, a strategy and service that seeks to engage in more preventative and community engagement work as a whole . For this to be successful it will involve working collaboratively with communities and empowering them and building their capacity through education, training to utilise their skills and experience. This will enable us to quicker address needs and offer earlier intervention and preventative work alongside the services we offer to offer structures to give children and their families the best opportunities away from street working and the harmful activities associated to it.

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