



ACTED



The programme team strikes a pose in front of the ACTED office in Cambodia

Reducing the Risk of SGBV against Entertainment Workers in Phnom Penh

Case Study 2: An Entertainment Worker's Perspective

Background

Cambodia established a legal framework to address Violence Against Women (VAW) by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 and by including articles protecting women against violence in the country's 1993 Constitution. Unfortunately, the convention was not successful and therefore in 2009 the four-year National Action Plan to Prevent Violence on Women (NAPVW) was launched, aimed at encouraging stronger implementation of the laws combating violence against women.

Women in the entertainment industry are particularly at risk of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). In order to support the government's implementation of the NAPVW, ACTED received funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2013 to implement a three year project aimed to reduce the risk of SGBV against Entertainment Workers (EWs) in Phnom Penh whilst also increasing access to support services for survivors of SGBV. The project has now been on-going for more than two years and in order to assess the impact of the project to date, a case study was conducted focusing on an entertainment worker from one of the entertainment establishments supported by the project.

Case Study

Name: Phally

Position: Hostess

Entertainment Establishment: Le West Club, Phnom Penh

Phally is 24 years old and originally from Prey Veng province, one of the poorest provinces in Cambodia. She comes from a big family with 7 brothers and sisters. Phally is the second youngest in her family. Her mother died when she was young, and her father has since remarried. In order to help her family, she decided to move to Phnom Penh to look for a job so that she could send money back to them. Phally has now lived in Phnom Penh for ten years. First she worked in a garment factory for six years and for the last four years she has been working at the Le West Club, a karaoke establishment. Her job is to host the clients and sing during the karaoke sessions. She starts working at 7.00 p.m. and usually finishes around 1.30 am.

Phally has learnt about SGBV twice: the first time when she was working as a garment worker and then more recently at the Le West Club, where she has been participating in

ACTED's educational outreach sessions. The first time Phally learnt about SGBV whilst working in the garment factory, she did not understand why she needed to know about SGBV, and forgot most of the knowledge she learnt. However, by attending ACTED's outreach sessions, she started to realise just how important SGBV is for her. She commented, "I personally define SGBV education sessions as the knowledge of the entertainment workers' rights and how I can prevent abuse from happening to me in my work establishment. That is something that girls like me should be aware of".

She adds that, 'I realise that cases of SGBV have previously occurred to my friends and I in the entertainment establishments; I just didn't know that it was SGBV. I figured they were the result of us working in these establishments: my friends and I just endured it, put up with it and blamed it on our fate or bad fortune. By attending the sessions, I compared what I learnt with what was happening to us: I knew that some of my rights had been abused. I can now recognise when a situation is actually a case of SGBV that violates my human rights. Today, I know how I could solve these situations if they happened to me or my friends again."

Nowadays, Phally has taken more time to attend the outreach sessions conducted by ACTED's social workers. She has learnt a lot about the definition of sex, gender, domestic violence and how each one is different. She has also learnt how to identify cases of SGBV in the home, work place and public circles by sharing their experiences with her colleagues and ACTED's social worker. Furthermore, she also learnt about accessing help in case she needs it. "Now, I feel very confident and ready to apply the solutions I have learnt in cases where a client misbehaves towards me. For example, one day, a client tried to force me to go out and sleep with him. I rejected his offer which made him very angry. He forcefully asked me how much money I needed. I told him that even though I was an entertainment worker, I benefit from rights that are protected by government law, and that NGOs such as ACTED are reaching out to us about these laws and that what he was doing was abusing my rights and was against the law. As a result, he left the establishment angry, meanwhile she and her friends kept on working without issue" She also added that if he kept giving her any trouble, she would complain it to her manager and would seek support from the police hotline. Phally is thankful to her social worker, who has conducted awareness raising sessions and given ACTED's emergency number as well as the police hotline to her and her friends.

Phally has worked at Le West Club for 4 years. Before, she often witnessed cases of verbal or physical violence happening to her friends– and even herself, some of them resulting in injury. The clients insulted them for the only reason that they were entertainment workers. They did not respond because they did not know that they could contact certain people for help. Today Phally has expressed her strong commitment that she "could not accept such a situation anymore". She added, "At my workplace, I will not sit still and wait for something to happen. If my rights have been abused, I will try to fight against my abuser. We all are human beings; we have equal rights and it doesn't matter who the clients are. I would talk

to the client and also seek support from my manager (mekar). If it still does not work, I would contact ACTED or the police, with the numbers I have been given.”

Phally hopes that ACTED’s social workers will increase their times to visit Le West Club. She suggests that ACTED should come to conduct the outreach session with Le West’s workers on the 23rd of each month, when 200-300 entertainment workers come together for their monthly meeting.

Lessons Learnt

1. The staff’s strong pedagogical skills make the outreach sessions interesting for the entertainment workers, notably by emphasising the relevance to their work conditions. As a result, the entertainment workers have sought to understand more about finding solutions when they come across aggressive clients, and take more time to attend the outreach sessions.
2. Outreach sessions enable to create change in entertainment workers’ mind-sets. By attending the sessions with ACTED’s social workers, EWs are able to stop blaming acts of SGBV on their fate and bad fortune; rather they start looking forward, recognise clients’ misbehaviour and dare to seek support when they need help. One way of doing this is to keep the name card of police hotline and ACTED with them.
3. The managers’ knowledge of SGBV plays an important role in fighting SGBV effectively. When managers (Mekars) are involved in the outreach sessions, they understand what cases of SGBV are and how to act upon them. If and when they hear the concerns and challenges that EWs are facing, they will be capable of understanding and dealing with them. Their attendance will also encourage and motivate EWs to seek help from them. In addition, their support will determine the extent to which the social workers will effectively work with the entertainment workers and to which EWs’ situations can actually improve. They have the power to help EWs prevent cases of SGBV, as well as overcome them in case they occur. They can also create networks with external partners to promote EWs rights.
4. The project team (social workers) has built very good relationships with the EWs, which entails strong communication and understanding of the challenges facing EWs. Thanks to this mutual trust, the EWs have shared personal information, and have no hesitation to seek support from the social workers. They want to be more involved with the outreach sessions.

Recommendations

1. The project should continue to put a strong focus on the relationships between EWs, social workers and peer educators. Trusting relationships enable EWs to openly share their concerns, and also enables social workers and peer educators to better address the issues facing EWs.
2. ACTED’s team should place more emphasis on the role of the managers at each entertainment establishment to support the detection of SGBV and linking survivors of

SGBV to support services. The managers are often the first person that EWs will seek support from if they have a problem. Managers are present in the establishments and have the authority to intervene in case of client misbehaviour, which is the first step to preventing cases of SGBV.

3. Entertainment workers regularly change workplace, therefore the social workers and peer educators should keep providing them with ACTED's business cards or other outreach materials providing key contacting information, targeting the newcomers in particular. It is important the outreach materials provide information on the support services available to survivors of SGBV, including emotional, medical and legal, in order to increase awareness of these free services.