

MUSLIM WOMEN EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA: AN OVERVIEW OF PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY ROLES AND STABILITY

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Abstract: Cambodia is in the process of rebuilding its education system. Progress have been made over the last decade, but is this improvement really affect minority Muslim lives in Cambodia especially women? Cham Muslim women in Savy Khleang struggle to survive and nurture their children. This paper will examine current situation Cham Muslim women with a focus on education. Barriers that affect attainability for education, including constraints on education and perspective towards education are explored. This paper also identifies the implication of education into family roles and stability.

Keywords: Cambodia, Cham Muslim Women, education, family roles, stability

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Cambodian women represent 51 percent of the country's population. In Cambodian society, women considered to be of lower status relative to men. Women are perceived to be less intelligent and reported have shown rates of women literacy are lower than men (Siobhan et al. 1999). Therefore illiteracy limits women choices to involve in development activities which mean they are unable to compete for professional and decision making position because of lack of skills and qualifications.

The present study has been undertaken to provide an overview of the situation Muslim women in Cambodia with respect to educational barriers, perspective toward education and implication into family roles and stability. Kampung Savy Khleang where the study took place is populated by Cham Muslim in the country. The Cham ethnic minority in Cambodia were reported received less educational services from the State especially among women (Kurt Bredenberg, th.).

The Current Education

Cham women earn less education than men. Kurt (th.) study shows that Cham population demonstrate the lowest levels of educational efficacy. In Cham society, there are some limitations for women to progress in education and to be considered outside their family roles, expectation and responsibilities (Uzoma 2013).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study was conducted in Savy Khleang Village, which involved 30 Cambodian Muslim women as the respondents. A set of questionnaire which was translated into Khmer language had been used by the researchers. The data were analyzed using 'SPSS software' to the 23rd edition of *IBM SPSS Statistic (Predictive Analytic Software)* in descriptive form. In addition, this study also used a structured interview. Which based on total of ten respondents. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents were based on a five-point *Likert* scale with score 1 strongly disagree, score 2 disagree, score 3 somewhat agree, score 4 agree and score 5 strongly agree. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistic which involved percentage and mean value. The findings were divided into sections A, B, and C.

Section A: Respondents' Demographic Background

Table 1. The Frequency and Percentage of The Respondents' Demographic Background

| Category | Group | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Status | Single | 2 | 6.6% |
| | Married | 15 | 50% |
| | Single mother | 7 | 23% |
| | Widow | 8 | 26.6% |
| Academic Qualification | Primary School | 9 | 30% |
| | Secondary school | 1 | 3% |
| | Not finished school | 20 | 66.6% |
| Age | 18-25 years | 2 | 6.6% |
| | 26-35 years | 13 | 43% |
| | 36-45 years | 8 | 26.6% |
| | 46-55 years | 2 | 6.6% |

Section B: Perspectives' Towards Education

Table 3: The Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation of the Role of Women in Education

| PP | Education Item | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | S.D. |
|-----|--|-------------------|----------|----------------|-------|----------------|------|------|
| PP1 | I am good at reading | 70% | - | - | - | 30% | 3.09 | 1.60 |
| PP2 | I graduated from school on time | 70% | - | - | - | 30% | 3.09 | 1.60 |
| PP3 | I have financial problem to further my study | - | - | - | - | 100% | 5.00 | 1.00 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| PP4 | Women do not need to study at higher level | 100% | - | - | - | - | 5.00 | 1.00 |
| PP5 | The culture of knowledge is less welcomed in the society | - | - | 21% | 45% | 34% | 4.56 | 0.79 |
| PP6 | I like to study | - | - | - | 31% | 69% | 4.32 | 0.89 |
| PP7 | I will continue my study if I have a chance | 16% | 32% | 22% | - | 30% | 3.36 | 0.73 |
| PP8 | I have high qualification which can provide me a comfortable life | - | - | - | - | 100% | 5.00 | 1.00 |
| PP9 | I have financial problem to continue my study to a higher level | - | - | - | - | 100% | 5.00 | 1.00 |
| PP10 | Educated and uneducated women are considered similar. | 100% | - | - | - | - | 5.00 | 1.00 |

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of women's roles in education. From the descriptive analysis, the result showed that E1 and E2 obtained the same mean score which were $4.35 = SD 0.82$ with 70%strongly disagree and 30%strongly agree. For E5, the mean score obtained was $4.56 = SD 0.79$ with 21%somewhat agree, 45%agree and 34%strongly agree. E6 obtained a mean score of $4.32 = SD 0.89$ with 31% agree and 69% strongly agree. For E7, the mean score obtained was $3.36 = SD 0.73$ with 16%strongly disagree , 32%disagree , 22%somewhat agree and 30%strongly agree. For E3, E8 and E9, the mean score obtained was $5.00 = 1.00$ with a very strong percentage of 100%. In contrast, the findings of E4 and E10 showed that 100% of the respondents expressly disagree with a min score of $5.00 = 1.00$.

In Cambodia, the basic education sector is defined as Grades 1 to 9. Kampung Savy Khleang is located in rural area. As rural women, they are culturally constrained by poverty to finish their study. Women are not considered as intelligent as men, therefore no need to further study into high level. Majority of the respondents didn't finished their school. Most of them attended school until grade 3. Survey result shows that, one of the constraint that women didn't further their study is financial problem. The study indicated that 100% agreed that they faced financial problem to finish their study and drop out from school (PP3). The study also indicated that knowledge culture is not promoted in rural area. Rural community are not supportive to promote knowledge culture. Children whose attending school are preferred to help their parents' need to work at home (Velasco 2014). It cause large number of absenteeism in school. The children have lack motivation to go to school because parents are not supportive towards education.

Section C: Future Expectation

Table 4: The Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation of Future Expectation

| PH | Items for future expectation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | S.D. |
|-----|--|-------------------|----------|----------------|-------|----------------|------|------|
| PH1 | I am satisfied with my current life | - | 100% | - | - | - | 5.00 | 1.00 |
| PH2 | I would like to develop myself further | - | - | - | - | 100% | 5.00 | 1.00 |
| PH3 | I have future plan | 17% | 78% | 5% | - | - | 3.23 | 1.01 |
| PH4 | I just follow what I have planned | - | - | 5% | 17% | 78% | 4.65 | 0.89 |
| PH5 | I need strategies to empower the role of women | - | - | - | - | 100% | 5.00 | 1.00 |
| PH6 | I do not like changes | - | 78% | 21% | 1% | - | 3.19 | 0.66 |

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of Cambodian women's future expectation. The results obtained from the respondents recorded that FE1 obtained a mean score of 5.00 = SD 1.00 with 100% disagreement. For FE2 and FE 5, the same mean score were obtained 5.00 = SD 1.00 with 100%strongly agree. FE3 obtained the mean score of 3.23 = SD 1.01 with 17% strongly disagree, 78%disagree and 5%somewhat agree. For E4, the mean score obtained was 4.65 = SD 0.89 with 5% agree, 17% somewhat agree and 78% strongly agree. For FE6, the mean score obtained was 3.19 = 0.66 with 78% strongly disagree, 21%somewhat agree and 1%agree.

4.0 IMPLICATION INTO FAMILY ROLES AND STABILITY

Despite of survey, the researcher also conducted an interview to 10 participants to investigate the implication of education into family roles and stability. Women tend to accept the traditional socialization process without any arguments. This perception transmitted negatively on the family role and stability. Family responsibilities influence the careers and education choices of women. Based on the interview data, women mostly choose working at home to nurture their children. Cultural and social beliefs, attitudes and practices, poverty and opportunity prevents women gained education to the same extent as men. In fact, in Cambodian society, there are some limitations for women to progress in education and to be considered outside their family roles, expectation and responsibilities. The participants also reported that at every educational level, women earn less than men because men earn better education than women. From the structured interviews, the researcher indicates three major problems on women's education which are:

1. Cultural Constraints and Attitudes

Cambodia's cultural norms are one of the roots causes of women's inability to move ahead in school, the workplace and in politics. Some of them, even not have any chance

to continue schooling because of the cultural influences and attitudes in the society. Women are considered less intelligent than men.

2. Poverty and Opportunity

Most of the reason women didn't further their study into higher level is poverty. Because of poverty, they couldn't have any chances to gain education.

3. Quality of School

Poor school-infrastructure caused absenteeism among Cambodian children. The environment fail to promote healthy and conducive school climate to educate the children.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have provided some important information about the reality of life of Cham Muslim women in Cambodia. The role of women in Cham society is big. They play important roles as a housekeeper, an educator and an economic contributor of the family. The present study determined cultural constraints and poverty create inferiority complex in many Cambodian Muslim women. A lot of efforts have to do to ensure education is made accessible in rural populations especially in low income families in Cambodia.

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