

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

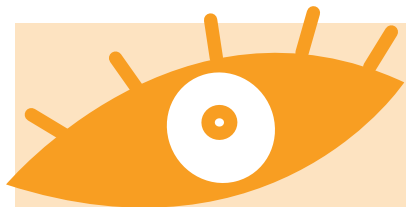
Voice & Visibility

A Participatory Exploration of Minority Women's Human Rights in Cambodia

1 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW...

In Cambodia, women and girls continue to face hardship, discrimination, and violence: more than 1 in 5 women (21%) report having experienced gender-based violence (GBV). However, it is important to recognize that not all women in Cambodia are alike. Their individual experiences are shaped by myriad cultural, social, religious, and economic factors. Indigenous and other minority women face particular forms of discrimination, marginalization, and vulnerability to violence.

Simultaneously subjected to gender and ethnicity-based oppression, they face a 'double burden'. Wider recognition and urgent action to address these intersecting and compounding forms of oppression is needed, with minority women at the centre of and active in any decisions that affect their lives.



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WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

The study, titled "Voice and Visibility: A Participatory Exploration of Minority Women's Human Rights in Cambodia," forms part of the "Owning the Space: Voices from Minority Women in Cambodia" initiative led by Women Peace Makers (WPM). It collaborates with women from four distinct communities—Cham, Khmer Krom, Ethnic Vietnamese, and Indigenous—in Cambodia, who co-create the research process to articulate their experiences, challenges, aspirations, and visions. This endeavour encompasses 205 minority women sharing their life stories, obstacles encountered, and recommendations.

The women participants and action researchers in this study represent some of Cambodia's most marginalised minority groups. These women and girls face negative gender stereotypes from within their own communities, which frequently discourage them from speaking out, seeking higher education, working outside the home, and representing their communities in political or advocacy positions. Additionally, they face simultaneous challenges stemming from negative stereotypes among the wider Cambodian society, placing them at a disadvantage based on their ethnic identity. Throughout the report, a range of thematic human rights issues identified by Minority women themselves are examined.



HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CARRIED OUT?

Employing a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodology, this research has centred young minority women as creators of new knowledge about their own lives and realities. The action researchers, young women from across the four minority groups, have been equipped with the technical research skills to harness their own expert knowledge and lived experience to explore these issues and to make recommendations to the government and other duty bearers.

Any research applying FPAR sees the methodological process as being of equal or greater importance to any subsequent output. As the section on methods explores, marginalised community members telling their own stories and using their voices to make their struggles and aspirations visible is a crucial step in the decolonisation of knowledge production, as well as towards a fairer and more intersectional development agenda at the local and national level. By prioritising their voices, this report aims to amplify their struggles and aspirations.



OUR FINDINGS

Barriers to Education:

Minority girls faced intersecting barriers to education, including gender inequalities and racial discrimination. Cultural norms prioritising boys' education and anti-ethnic sentimental discouraged their school attendance. In fact, only 29% of respondents reported that they have never experience discrimination against them based on their ethnicity.

Barriers to Public Participation

Exclusion from public participation processes was reported by 61% of minority women, attributed to gender roles, authorities' discouragement, and political sensitivities. This exclusion hampers their representation in decision-making.

Restrictions on Free Movement:

64% of minority women reported limitations on women's freedom of movement in their communities, impacting personal and professional development. These restrictions, culturally enforced and often justified by concerns about safety, hindered opportunities for women's autonomy.

Citizenship and Identity Rights Issues

Khmer Krom and ethnic minority Vietnamese women encountered difficulties in obtaining legal identity documents, affecting their access to essential services. Nine out of 31 Khmer Krom women faced ongoing legal hardships due to lacking Cambodian national documentation. Among 48 ethnic minority Vietnamese respondents, 41 were born in Cambodia and 68% of them do not possess birth certificates while 63% do not have identity cards. Noticeably, among 23 ethnic minority Vietnamese respondents from the floating villages, 22 were born in Cambodia and have family lived in Cambodia since the 1960s. Only one respondent among the 22 has birth certificate and the rest do not.



HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research holds significant implications for policy and practice, especially at the national level, where the inclusion of minority women in efforts related to gender equality and empowerment is imperative. We encourage readers of this snapshot to examine the full set of recommendations on page 222 of the report.

Embracing the concept of intersectionality provides a nuanced understanding of how various layers of identity intersect to shape individuals' lives. In the case of minority women, the double burden they face, stemming from their gender and minority status, warrants thorough evaluation within policy frameworks and requires specific and urgent action in a range of areas, including education, citizenship administration, and public participation.

Gender-Based Violence

Among Indigenous women in this study, 84.6%, expressed that domestic violence remains a problem in their community. These perceptions remained high among ethnic Vietnamese women (77%), Cham women (93.7%) and Khmer Krom women (87.1%). Ethnic identity-based targeting exacerbated vulnerability to sexual harassment.

Access to Justice and ADR

Minority women survivors faced barriers accessing justice, exacerbated by inadequate guidance and misused of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) practices. Cultural and religious leaders' involvement often retraumatized survivors.

Safe Shelter & GBV services

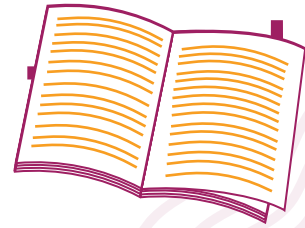
Access to safe shelter for survivors of gender-based violence was limited, forcing many women to endure ongoing abuse due to lack of alternatives. Urgent investment in inclusive emergency accommodation and other GBV services are imperative.

Early/Child Marriage

Disturbingly high rates of early or child marriages were reported across the research areas. In the minority communities studied, 100% of Indigenous women who were interviewed reported having seen recent marriages of community members under 18. For ethnic Vietnamese women this was 79.2%, for Cham women 72.9%, and for Khmer Krom women 45.2%. Early/child marriages were reported to be driven by cultural norms and ineffective interventions, and their continued prevalence underscores the urgency of targeted prevention strategies.

Government Ministries must adopt a more robust intersectional approach in policymaking to ensure that the needs of minority women are explicitly addressed in the pursuit of national development goals. Development partners and INGOs operating in Cambodia as well as the UN agencies must similarly prioritise minority women and girls, particularly within gender initiatives, which often overlook their specific challenges. Furthermore, broader civil society advocacy efforts are essential to raise awareness among the Cambodian public about the issues confronting minority women. These efforts should not only aim to promote their inclusion but also amplify their voices in human rights initiatives.

Together, we can make the space safe, equitable, and inclusive enough for minority women to own their destiny, reach their full potential, and live free from violence and discrimination.



WHO IS LEADING THIS RESEARCH?

Minority women from the target communities, in collaboration with Women Peace Makers' Teams, spearheaded this research initiative with the support of Women's Fund Asia (WFA).

