

Case study: Oeun Chantha

On 7th October, 2005

I am Oeun Chantha. I am 32 year-old. I was born in Koh Man village, Kompong Chouk Commune, Koh Andeth district, Takeo province. I have one child who is 11 year-old and is in grade 3 in Sothearosh School at Chroy Chanva.

My family was not always in a difficult situation as they are now. Year after year life became harder and the problems started to happen, my parents found it hard to provide for us. Each year we had less rice to eat, but the day to day living became more expensive. Apart from finding it hard to survive, we also found that our family changed.

In 1992-1993, at that time a woman from Phnom Penh came to my house and asked me to go with her to work in Phnom Penh. As my family was so poor and I was uneducated, I decided to stop studying and came to Phnom Penh with her. I thought that I could find job and helped my family. But a dream was lost because she sold me to one brothel owner. The owner tried to persuade me to have sex with clients by buying me beautiful clothes and earring. I was forced to have sex with clients. I was very upset and very angry. I cried almost every day and I pretended to be sick to avoid having sex with clients. Later I was sold to another brothel like animal. Whenever I was sold, I had to take off my dress to let the buyer see my body if I was virginal or not. Once I was consoled by one man to go to abroad with him but I denied because I was afraid of being sold again. I sometime thought that dying is better than aliving with frightening.

In 1993, when I was working with other people on selling drink, one man called Vuth asked me to marry him. He brought me to his house nearby Chhroy Changva Bridge to get marriage with him, but I was afraid of his parents. In Khmer tradition, if the girl is not virgin before marriage, people will think that the girl is not a good girl and they have never thought other reasons that make the girl become like that. Thus I decided to go to Svay Pak to escape from his parents. At last, he could find me and brought me back to his parents' house. Fortunately his parents did not mind me if I was virgin or not and they prepared the wedding ceremony for me. As often happen to many girls in Khmer society, after getting marriage for a few years, my husband began to beat me cruelly by using electronic wire. Moreover, his brother also hit me and sent me away from the house even I tried to beg him and to gain favour. I left the house with pregnancy. When my neighbour told him that I had pregnancy, he did not believe that the baby was his child while I was not with him for a while, but I thought it was just a bad pretext to avoid the responsibility. I wanted to keep my baby but unfortunately I miscarriage because I fell down from the motor dup. Whereas he had another wife. I suffered a lot since I lived with him and I was very miserable as I lost every thing. I felt hopeless and did not want to marry any men, but one man, Tra, tried to follow me and asked me to marry him. At last I decided to live with him. While I was delivering the baby in the hospital, he was getting sick and stayed in another hospital. I went to meet him but when he met me he said that I should not come to meet him because I just delivered the baby and I should stay at home. I waited for him for so long time but he didn't come to see me. I thought that he may abandon me.

In 1994, while I was buying milk for my child, 2 to 3 people brought me to have sex with them at Prek Pra where was completely silent. When I arrived there at dead of the night, there were 10 to 20 people waiting for me. I denied not having sex with them because I was afraid but they still forced me cruelly. They tore my cloth brutally. Some caught my hands and my feet. I felt very scared. They rapped me like I was an animal. They did everything on me nastily. Some wore condom but some did not use condom. Moreover they took my money and my earrings. They were not human being. I walked and run through the frighten forest to find anyone who can help me. Finally one family let me to have a sleep for a night. In the morning they gave me cloth to wear to go home.

When I arrived home to see my child's face, my life was like I was born again. Later one policeman tried to persuade me to go with him by saying sweet word to me and promised not to mistreat me at all. Unfortunately when I went with him to Chak Tomuk School in the evening, he tied my hands to the branch of tree and he forced me to have sex with him. Even I begged him a lot; he still raped me without using condom.

Nowadays I am orange seller at Wat Buttum and I faced many problems happened to me almost everyday like gangsters and policeman who frequently make the orange sellers trouble. Some policemen use this opportunity

to threaten clients by stick a pistol to clients to take money from them. They are also corrupted whenever they arrested the gangsters and they let them free when they were given money. Furthermore, some orange sellers stole money from clients that make clients angry and want to revenge to orange sellers.

Once I was beaten by one man who is a husband of one orange seller who was jealous with me that I had many clients. Her husband used a stick to beat my head until I fainted in the garden. When I was conscious I went to complaint to the police but they did not help me and shout at me that it is not your problem with your friend. I do not know. I can not help you. I came back with worry because I was afraid of revenge if she knew I complaint to the police. Last time other people complaint to the police about her but she was not arrested because she gave \$10.00 to the police.

Even I often report to police about the gangsters, there are still a lot of gangsters in the garden because police are corrupted. Whenever the gangsters pay money to police, they are free. Sometime I scare to tell police about gangsters because they threaten me not to tell police if not I will be in danger.

What I have to say is similar to so many which is why it is wrong, what has happened to me is immoral. Sometimes I think it is the road all women must face in life, misery and hardship and then survival. It is the attempt to survive in a society that provides almost no option for poor women like that causes us the most pain and discrimination.

