

# The Unseen Victims Of Sexual Abuse

It is not very hard for misconceptions and myths — such as ideas about child sexual abuse — to spread through a society and are often entrenched into a community's understanding of the issue. This misinformation process is acute when talking about boys who have faced abuse, with little to no discussion on how sexual abuse affects Cambodia's boys.

These myths can take many forms: boys are rarely abused, they can recover faster from the trauma and there is little effect on their honor or reputation in the community. The prevailing consensus on these issues is often incorrect and damaging in Cambodian society and they get supercharged when spread across social media.

Groups like First Step Cambodia are one of the only non-governmental organizations working to support boys who are abused, increase awareness among communities and put in place interventions that can shield boys from abuse.

Vann Sambor is a member of the district training and monitoring training team in Siem Reap province, in northern Cambodia. As a district education officer, she oversees 25 kindergartens in the district with around 625 children.

Having participated in workshops conducted by First Step Cambodia, Sambor says understanding the abuse of boys and how it can affect them is critical for teachers and parents alike.

“In the past, I had never heard of sexual abuse of boys until I attended this workshop. The media often writes and broadcasts issues of sexual abuse of girls, not boys,” she says.

Sambor says the training helped change her perceptions about the sexual abuse of boys and its prevalence and effect on Cambodia's boys.

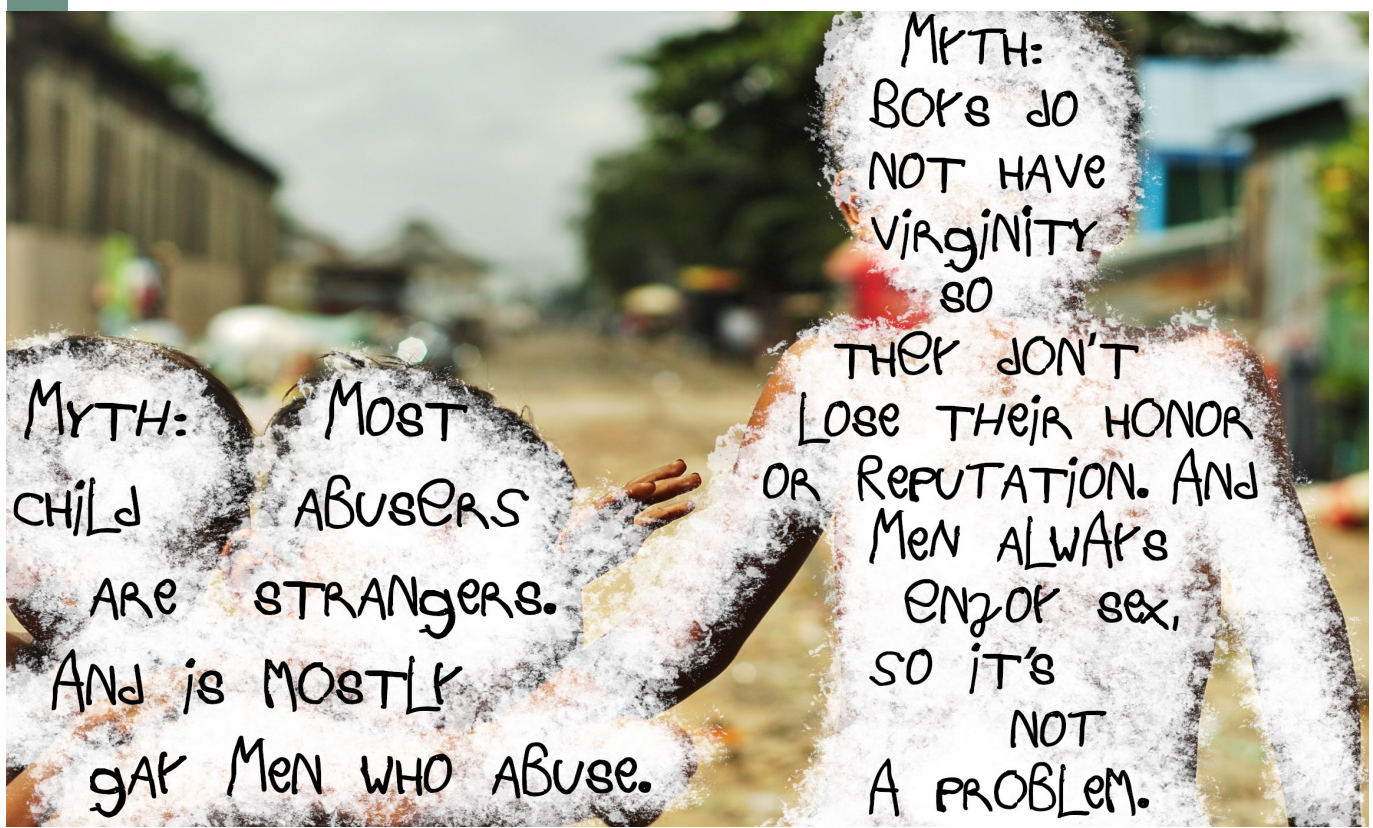
“Often, we think that boys are tough and can't be sex-

ually abused, but this is not true. They can be sexually abused and need support,” Sambor says.

Apart from working on increasing awareness about the abuse of boys, First Step Cambodia also has social workers who work with children by providing counseling and resources to improve their safety and ensure they have a supportive home and community.



Fact: Boys are also victims of child abuse but most boys do not share their experiences. Research in Cambodia shows that 15% of men and boys have experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives. In 2014, the Cambodian government released a study on violence against children that showed that 5.6% of boys had experienced abuse, while a study in Preah Sihanouk province showed that 33% of boys working on the streets reported experiencing abuse.



Fact: In more than 90% of cases, children know the person who abused them. Research in Cambodia shows that boys are often abused by family members, neighbors, other children, monks, police officers, teachers, pastors and other people the boy trusts. In 98% of cases, boys are abused by heterosexual people.

Fact: Also, when girls are abused, Cambodian culture focuses only on the loss of virginity, and its impact on their reputation or the family's honor, while ignoring the suffering of individuals. While boys are expected to think they need to be strong and defend themselves, they can also feel like they have lost their dignity or manhood after being abused.