

## CHAPTER 2

### PATTERN OF NUPTIALITY IN CAMBODIA

#### 2.1 Overview

Nuptiality is a demographic term that refers to the study of the frequency of marital unions, the characteristics of persons united in marriage and the dissolution of marital unions. For a proper understanding of the mechanisms through which the demographic structure and dynamics react to socio-economic changes, an evaluation of nuptiality trends and patterns is very essential. Nuptiality has also been recognized as an important factor influencing the size and structure of households and families.

Marital status is closely related to biological, social, economic, legal and more often than not to religious aspects. In population dynamics marital status is considered important as it affects fertility greatly and influences mortality and migration to some extent. It has been shown that age at marriage and fertility have an inverse relationship with each other (the higher the age at marriage, the lower the level of fertility) provided marriage occurs within the child-bearing period and not before it. Age at marriage is also significant in reproductive health programmes and in promoting gender equality and empowering women. The effect of marital status on school enrolment, economic activity and other social and economic characteristics is considered important in young adult age groups.

Changes in age at marriage, the rate of marriage in the age groups 20 to 24 (when most of the marriages take place) and the proportion of unmarried at the end of the reproductive span of 15-49 years impact considerably on fertility levels and also affect the social and economic conditions that call for decisions on policy and programmes by the government. An analysis of information on marriage collected at the 2008 Census in conjunction with age, education, economic activity and other related variables may therefore be useful in plans and programmes of socio-economic development.

In the Cambodian society marriage is nearly universal and the majority of reproduction takes place only within marriage. As a prelude to the analysis of census data relating to nuptiality it would be useful to mention some of the general views expressed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs with regard to the system of marriage in Cambodia: Traditional institutions such as marriage are changing. While many marriages are still arranged, more women are choosing their own partners. More young people in both the rural and urban areas report that they have greater freedom to choose their own marriage partners. Some of the youth are marrying without parental approval, and many of the marriages are not formally registered. Most Cambodian marriages, while held in accordance with the Cambodian tradition, do not have formal legal status under Cambodian Law. While marriage is illegal for women under the age of 16 (the Marriage and Family Law sets the legal age of marriage at 18 years) it is still common in some ethnic minority communities. The traditional practice of Khmer married couples living with the wife's family is declining (MOWA, 2008).

## 2.2 The Census Questions on Marital Status

One simple question was asked in the 2008 Census in respect of marital status (Col. 6 of Form B Household Questionnaire- see Annex 2). The enumerator was expected to record the marital status of the respondent using the following codes: Code 1 for Never Married i.e. for those who had never entered into any form of marital union. Code 2 for Married i.e. those who are currently married, Code 3 for widowed, Code 4 for divorced and Code 5 for separated.

The category "Married" included those persons who were contractually married but not living as man and wife. The category "Separated" included both legal and *de facto* separations. Persons who were widowed or divorced but had remarried were recorded as married. A similar question with the same definitions was adopted in the 1998 Census also.

The Post Enumeration Survey (PES) that followed the 2008 Census had revealed that the net under enumeration in the census was in the order of 2.8 percent. Marital status was one of the variables for which the content error was estimated in the PES. It was found that the level of agreement of answers to the question on marital status at the Census and PES was very high (96 percent).

## 2.3 General Trends in Marital Status in 2008 and 1998

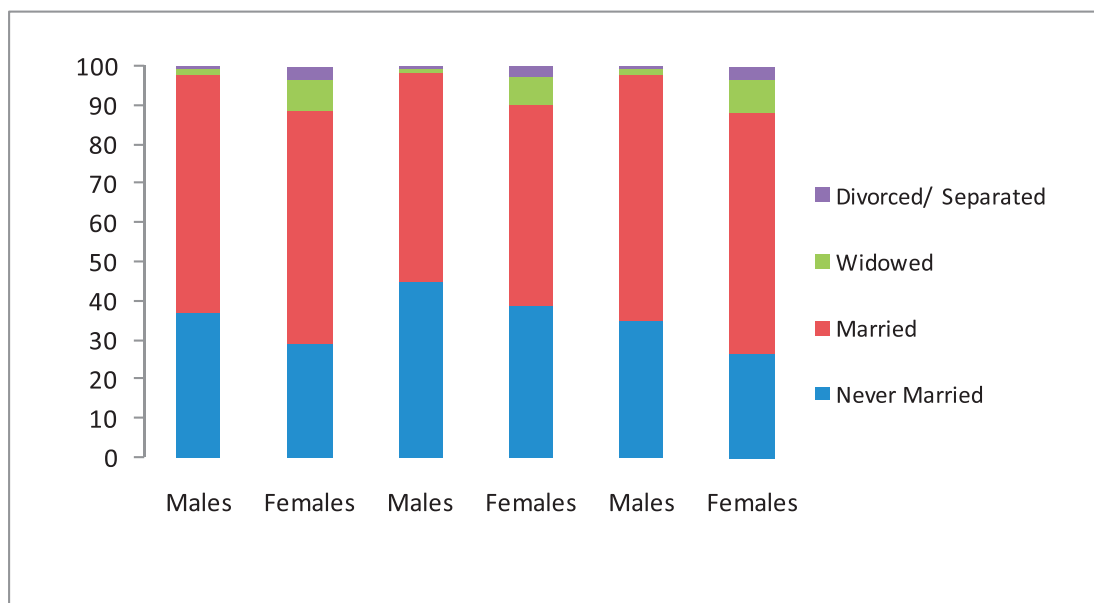
Table 2.1 gives the absolute numbers of persons enumerated at the two censuses classified by marital status categories for total population and for each sex.

**Table 2.1 Total Population by Marital Status and Sex, Cambodia, 2008 and 1998**

Marital Status	Population by Marital Status					
	2008			1998		
	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Total	13,395,682	6,516,054	6,879,628	11,437,656	5,511,408	5,926,248
Never Married	7,414,871	3,867,426	3,547,445	6,821,392	3,489,929	3,331,463
Married	5,346,767	2,555,915	2,790,852	4,009,327	1,944,194	2,065,133
Widowed	444,249	54,550	389,699	428,647	48,336	380,311
Divorced	179,299	35,325	143,974	154,397	24,211	130,186
Separated	10,496	2,838	7,658	23,893	4,738	19,155

While the above table gives the marital status pattern of the total population, the age group 0-14 relating to children has to be omitted in marital status analysis. Fifteen years of age is taken as the lowest age for this purpose. However, a relatively small number of persons (4,197) below that age were reported in the 2008 Census as ever married. They are not taken into account in the present analysis.

**Figure 2.1a Percentage of Population aged 15 and above by Sex, Marital Status and Residence, Cambodia, 2008**



**Figure 2.1b Percentage of Population aged 15 and above by Sex, Marital Status and Residence, Cambodia, 1998**

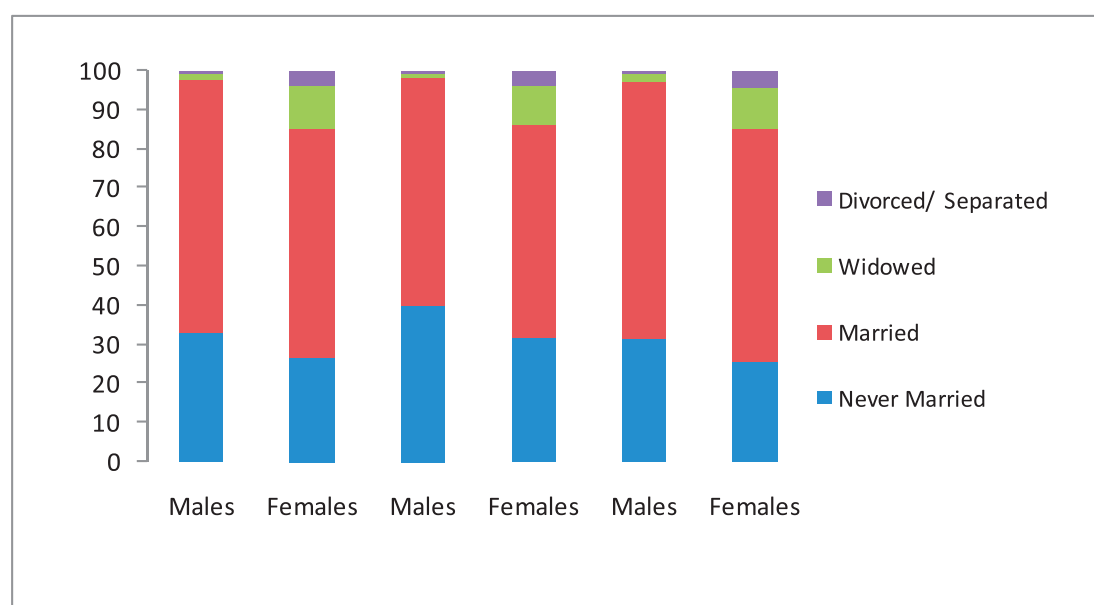


Table 2.2 presents the percentage distribution of adult (aged 15 and above) population by sex and marital status at the national level according to the 2008 and 1998 censuses.

**Table 2.2 Percent distribution of Population Aged 15 and above by Marital Status, Sex and Residence, Cambodia, 2008 and 1998**

Total/ Urban/ Rural	Sex	Number	Marital status of population					
			Total	Never Married	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
<b>2008</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>Both Sexes</b>	<b>8,881,890</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>32.71</b>	<b>60.16</b>	<b>4.99</b>	<b>2.02</b>	<b>0.12</b>
	Males	4,201,248	100	37.00	60.80	1.29	0.84	0.07
	Females	4,680,642	100	28.86	59.59	8.32	3.07	0.16
Urban	Both Sexes	1,949,676	100	41.54	52.38	4.06	1.89	0.13
	Males	915,814	100	44.79	53.38	0.95	0.80	0.08
	Females	1,033,862	100	38.67	51.50	6.81	2.85	0.17
Rural	Both Sexes	6,932,214	100	30.23	62.35	5.26	2.05	0.11
	Males	3,285,434	100	34.83	62.88	1.38	0.85	0.06
	Females	3,646,780	100	26.08	61.87	8.75	3.14	0.16
<b>1998</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>Both Sexes</b>	<b>6,539,848</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>29.46</b>	<b>61.27</b>	<b>6.55</b>	<b>2.36</b>	<b>0.36</b>
	Males	3,009,001	100	32.85	64.59	1.60	0.80	0.16
	Females	3,530,847	100	26.56	58.46	10.76	3.68	0.54
Urban	Both Sexes	1,325,949	100	35.63	56.09	5.70	2.30	0.28
	Males	627,016	100	39.77	58.19	1.10	0.80	0.14
	Females	698,933	100	31.92	54.21	9.82	3.64	0.41
Rural	Both Sexes	5,213,899	100	27.89	62.60	6.76	2.37	0.38
	Males	2,381,985	100	31.03	66.28	1.73	0.80	0.16
	Females	2,831,914	100	25.24	59.49	11.00	3.70	0.57

As may be seen from Table 2.2 and Figures 2.1a and 2.1b, both at the 2008 and 1998 Censuses, the proportions of “Never married” (single) and “Married” (currently married) among males are higher than the corresponding proportions of females. The position is reversed in the other three marital status categories: widowed, divorced and separated. The proportion never married among both males and females has increased during the decade 1998-2008, the increase being higher in the case of males. The increase in the proportion never married at ages 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 and the very high decadal growth rate of population in these age groups (26.5 percent, 83.6 percent and 38.8 percent) could perhaps account for the overall increase in the percentage single. The proportion married has shown a general decline though in the case of females it has slightly increased. Both in respect of males and females the proportions widowed, divorced and separated are lower in 2008 than in 1998. With this general background the marital status may be analysed by age.

#### 2.4 Marital Status by Age

Table 2.3 presents the proportion by each marital status categories for both sexes, males and females. That marriage is nearly universal in Cambodia is obvious as only 3.3 percent of persons in the age group 45-49 remained single.

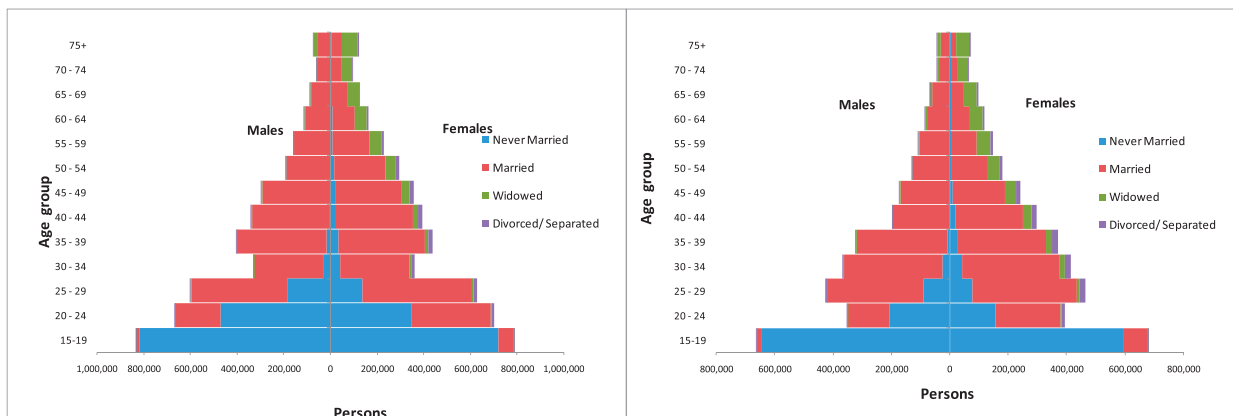
**Table 2.3 Percent distribution of Population Aged 15 and above of Cambodia  
by Marital Status, Sex and Five-year Age Group, 2008**

Age Group	Number	Percentage of				
		Never Married	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>Both Sexes</b>						
15+	8,881,890	32.7	60.2	5	2	0.1
15-19	1,619,290	94.9	4.9	0.1	0.1	0
20 - 24	1,369,202	59.8	38.9	0.3	0.9	0.1
25 - 29	1,233,361	26.2	71.3	0.6	1.8	0.1
30 - 34	693,235	10.7	85.5	1.3	2.4	0.1
35 - 39	844,948	5.8	89.6	2	2.5	0.1
40 - 44	737,451	4.3	89.2	3.5	2.8	0.2
45 - 49	653,650	3.3	88	5.4	3.1	0.2
50 - 54	490,726	3.3	83.5	9.5	3.5	0.2
55 - 59	391,116	2.7	79.8	13.9	3.4	0.2
60 - 64	277,611	2.7	73.7	20.1	3.3	0.2
65 - 69	216,839	2.3	68.7	25.3	3.6	0.1
70 - 74	158,945	2.8	60.4	32.6	4	0.2
75+	195,516	3.6	49.7	41.7	4.8	0.2
<b>Males</b>						
15+	4,201,248	37	60.8	1.3	0.8	0.1
15-19	834,416	98.2	1.7	0	0.1	0
20 - 24	669,343	70.8	28.5	0.1	0.5	0.1
25 - 29	605,706	30.7	68	0.2	1	0.1
30 - 34	335,046	10.1	88.2	0.4	1.2	0.1
35 - 39	408,295	4.3	94	0.5	1.1	0.1
40 - 44	344,275	2.4	95.7	0.8	1	0.1
45 - 49	299,005	1.3	96.5	1.2	0.9	0.1
50 - 54	195,911	1.3	95.8	1.8	1	0.1
55 - 59	162,328	1	95.2	2.7	1	0.1
60 - 64	116,731	1.4	92.5	4.7	1.3	0.1
65 - 69	90,521	1.3	89.9	6.9	1.8	0.1
70 - 74	63,938	2.2	84.1	11.1	2.4	0.2
75+	75,733	3.7	72.1	20.2	3.8	0.2
<b>Females</b>						
15+	4,680,642	28.8	59.6	8.3	3.1	0.2
15-19	784,874	91.3	8.4	0.1	0.2	0
20 - 24	699,859	49.2	48.9	0.4	1.4	0.1
25 - 29	627,655	21.8	74.4	1	2.6	0.2
30 - 34	358,189	11.2	83	2.1	3.5	0.2
35 - 39	436,653	7.2	85.4	3.4	3.8	0.2
40 - 44	393,176	6	83.6	5.8	4.4	0.2
45 - 49	354,645	5	80.9	8.9	5	0.2
50 - 54	294,815	4.7	75.4	14.5	5.1	0.3
55 - 59	228,788	3.9	68.9	21.8	5.2	0.2
60 - 64	160,880	3.6	60.1	31.2	4.9	0.2
65 - 69	126,318	2.9	53.5	38.5	4.9	0.2
70 - 74	95,007	3.2	44.5	47.1	5	0.2
75+	119,783	3.5	35.6	55.4	5.4	0.1

Sex and age differentials in marital status in 2008 and 1998 are clearly seen in the Population Pyramids given as Figures 2.1c and 2.1d respectively.

**Figure 2.1c Population Pyramid (for Ages 15 and above) by Sex, Age group and Marital Status, Cambodia, 2008**

**Figure 2.1d Population Pyramid (for Ages 15 and above) by Sex, Age group and Marital Status, Cambodia, 1998**



Figures 2.2a to 2.5b depict the trends in marital status categories in 2008 and 1998 by sex, age and residence.

### 2.4.1 Persons Never Married

Table 2.3 shows that in 2008, 98.2 percent of males and 91.3 percent of females are single in the age group 15-19. About fifty percent of the Cambodian women are married by the age of 20 and about 78 percent are married by the age of 25. By the age of 30 the proportion of those never married is reduced to about 10 percent in the case of men and 11 percent among women. In other words nearly 90 percent of the adult population get married by that age. Beyond the age of 50 the never married population mostly remained single throughout their life time. The extent of non-marriage in population (celibacy level) is higher for females than males. Among males, the fall in the proportion single from its high level in the age group 15-19 to about 10 percent in the age group 30-34 reveals their tendency not to get married until they are well above 20 years of age. The same tendency is observed in the case of females with the proportion of single falling more steeply around the age of 20. The proportion of single males is very much higher than the corresponding proportion of single females in every age group below 30. From the age group 30-34 onwards the already low proportion of single males in each age group is much lower than the corresponding proportion among females.