

## CHAPTER 3

### SINGULATE MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE

#### 3.1 Estimation of Mean Age at Marriage

There were no direct questions on age at marriage in the census. Hence the mean age at marriage has to be estimated by indirect method from data on marital status by age. The "Singulate Mean Age at Marriage" or SMAM (developed by John Hajnal in 1953) is an estimate of the average number of years lived by a cohort of women or men before their first marriage.

The SMAM is derived from the proportion of single persons of each sex in successive age groups. The main assumption involved in this computation is that change in the proportion single from age  $x$  to  $x+1$  is a measure of the proportion of a birth cohort who married at age  $x$ . The methodology enables computation of mean age at marriage of persons (male or female) aged 15 years and above before they attain the age of 50. In other words it provides an estimate of the average number of years lived in the never married status by those who marry before the age of 50.

#### 3.2 SMAM at the National Level

For Cambodia as a whole SMAM is calculated as 25.6 for males and 23.3 for females (Table 3.1) using the 2008 Census age distribution of persons never married (See Annex Table 1).

**Table 3.1 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex and Residence, Cambodia 2008 and 1998**

Residence	Year	Mean Age at Marriage		Difference
		Males	Females	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Total	1998	24.2	22.5	1.7
	2008	25.6	23.3	2.3
Urban	1998	26.8	23.8	3.0
	2008	28	25.5	2.5
Rural	1998	23.5	22.1	1.4
	2008	24.8	22.5	2.3

In Cambodia SMAM has always been higher for males than females. It has increased during the last decade both in respect of males and females. The rate of increase has been higher for males (5.8 percent) than for females (3.6 percent) leading to an increased gap in SMAM between males and females in 2008 (2.3years) compared to 1998 (1.7 years). This shows that over time, men in Cambodia tend to marry women much younger to them.

#### 3.3 SMAM of Other Selected Countries in Southeast Asia

In general the SMAM for males in Cambodia is lower than the corresponding figures of some of the selected countries in the region (Table 3.2). In respect of females it is slightly higher than SMAM in 2005 of Vietnam but lower than that of other countries. This shows that marriages

(called “Rirpka” in Khmer) take place of spouses of younger ages in Cambodia than in most countries of the region.

**Table 3.2 SMAM for Selected Countries in Southeast Asia**

Name of the Country	Year	SMAM	
		Male	Female
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Malaysia	2000	28.5	24.9
Singapore	2005	30.1	26.9
Thailand	2000	27.4	24.1
Vietnam	2005	26.0	23.1
Indonesia	2005	27.0	23.4
Myanmar	2001	27.6	25.8
Philippines	2000	26.4	23.9
Cambodia	2008	25.6	23.3

Source: Gavin Jones and Bina Gubhaju, 2010

### 3.4 Effect of Urbanisation on SMAM

The SMAM of urban areas has always been higher than that of rural areas both in respect of males and females. The rural-urban difference in SMAM of males has been 3.3 in 1998 and 3.2 in 2008 showing a marginal decrease (Table 3.1). In the case of females, however the difference has increased from 1.7 in 1998 to 3 in 2008. The trend towards later marriage of women is more prominent in urban areas, especially in the cities. It is mainly related to rise in educational attainment and increased labour force participation.

### 3.5 SMAM by Province

The SMAM has increased in all the provinces during 1998-2008 for both the sexes (Table 3.2) except in respect of males in Pailin and females in Prey Veng.

**Table 3.3 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) by Sex in  
Natural Regions and Provinces, 2008 and 1998**

Natural Region /Province	2008					1998				
	Male	Rank	Female	Rank	Difference Between Male and Female	Male	Rank	Female	Rank	Difference Between Male and Female
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
<b>Plain</b>	26.0		23.8		2.2	24.4		22.8		1.5
Kampong Cham	25.0	13	22.4	13	2.6	23.7	15	22.2	8	1.5
Kandal	26.2	3	24.0	2	2.1	24.6	7	23.1	2	1.6
Phnom Penh	28.5	1	26.3	1	2.2	27.5	1	24.7	1	2.8
Prey Veng	24.5	17	22.0	20	2.4	22.9	21	22.4	6	0.5
SvayRieng	24.4	20	22.1	19	2.4	22.5	24	21.9	13	0.6
TaKeo	24.8	15	22.7	9	2.1	22.8	22	22.0	12	0.8
<b>Tonle Sap</b>	25.3		23.0		2.3	24.2		22.3		1.8
Banteay Meanchey	25.3	9	22.9	8	2.4	24.1	11	21.8	17	2.3
Battambang	25.9	4	23.4	4	2.5	25.1	5	22.8	3	2.3
Kampong Chhnang	25.3	8	23.1	7	2.2	23.7	14	22.2	9	1.5
Kampong Thom	24.8	14	22.5	12	2.3	23.6	16	22.4	6	1.2
Pursat	25.2	12	23.3	5	1.9	24.1	9	22.2	10	1.9
Siemreap	25.2	10	23.2	6	2.0	24.1	10	22.7	4	1.4
Otdar Meanchey	24.1	23	21.7	22	2.4	23.0	19	20.3	23	2.7
Pailin	25.7	5	22.6	10	3.1	26.4	2	21.6	19	4.8
<b>Coastal</b>	25.1		22.7		2.4	24.0		21.9		2.1
Kampot	24.4	21	22.4	15	2.0	22.9	20	21.9	15	1.0
Koh Kong	25.6	6	22.2	18	3.4	25.4	4	21.3	20	4.0
Preah Sihanouk	26.5	2	23.6	3	2.8	25.6	3	22.4	5	3.3
Kep	24.5	19	22.4	14	2.0	23.7	13	21.9	14	1.8
<b>Plateau and Mountain</b>	24.7		22.1		2.6	23.7		21.6		2.0
Kampong Speu	24.5	18	22.6	11	1.8	23.1	18	21.9	15	1.3
Kratie	25.5	7	22.1	17	3.4	24.7	6	22.1	11	2.6
Mondul Kiri	24.7	16	20.7	23	4.0	24.0	12	20.6	22	3.3
Preah Vihear	24.2	22	21.7	21	2.5	23.6	17	21.0	21	2.6
Ratanak Kiri	23.9	24	20.7	24	3.3	22.7	23	20.1	24	2.6
Stung Treng	25.3	11	22.3	16	3.0	24.6	8	21.7	18	2.9

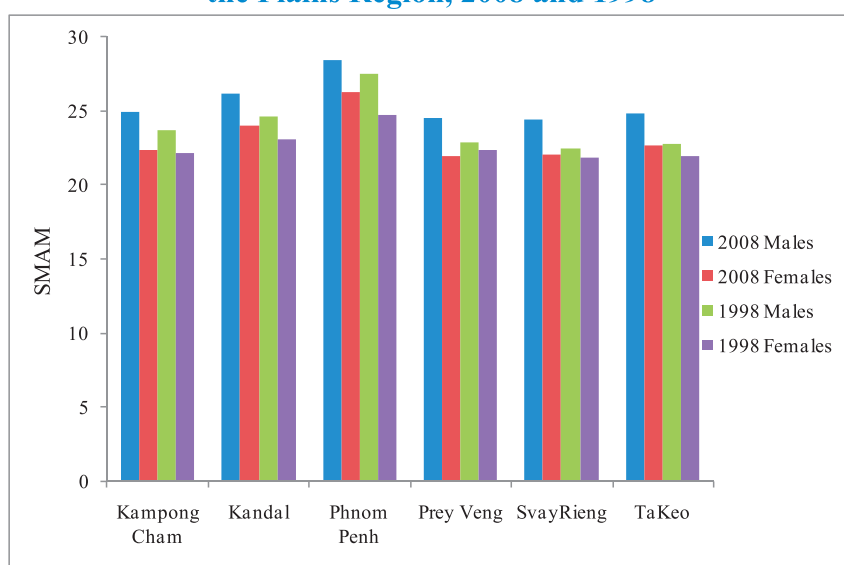
Both in 1998 and 2008 the SMAM of males and females are in the descending order in the Natural Regions of Plains, Tonle Sap, Coastal and Plateau and Mountain. The major variations observed in 2008 both in respect of the natural regions and provinces are described below:

The SMAM of 26.0 of males in the Plains region is higher than the SMAM at the national level (25.6). In the Tonle Sap region (25.3) it is close to the national average and in the other two regions it is less than the national level. Similar differences between the regions are noticed with regard to SMAM of females also compared to the national level. The difference between SMAM of males and females is the lowest in the Plains region (Table 3.2). In this region which is more

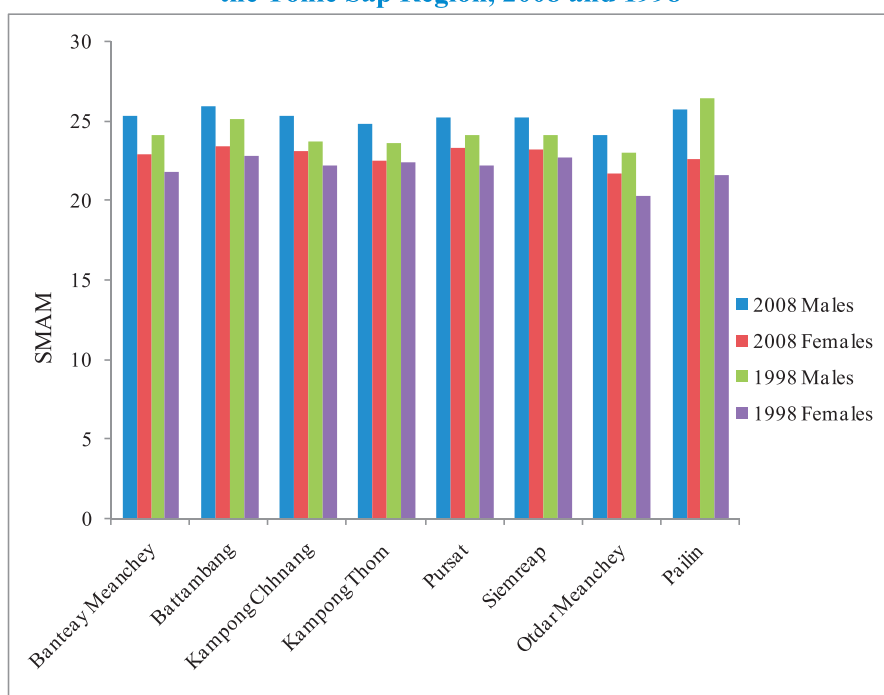
urbanised than others, the trend in favour of late marriage is more pronounced in respect of both males and females.

Among the provinces, the SMAM of males (in 2008) ranges from 23.9 (Ratanak Kiri) to 28.5 (Phnom Penh). The SMAM of females ranges from 20.7 (Ratanak Kiri) to 26.3 (Phnom Penh). The highest difference in SMAM between males and females is observed in Mondul Kiri (4.0). The lowest difference exists in Kompong Speu (1.8). One striking feature is that SMAM for both the sexes is the highest in Phnom Penh Municipality which is the prime city in Cambodia with all urban characteristics. It has also a predominant migrant population. The lowest SMAM of both the sexes is observed in Ratanak Kiri of the comparatively less developed Plateau and Mountain region. In sum, the SMAM seems to be directly related to the level of development of a region or province.

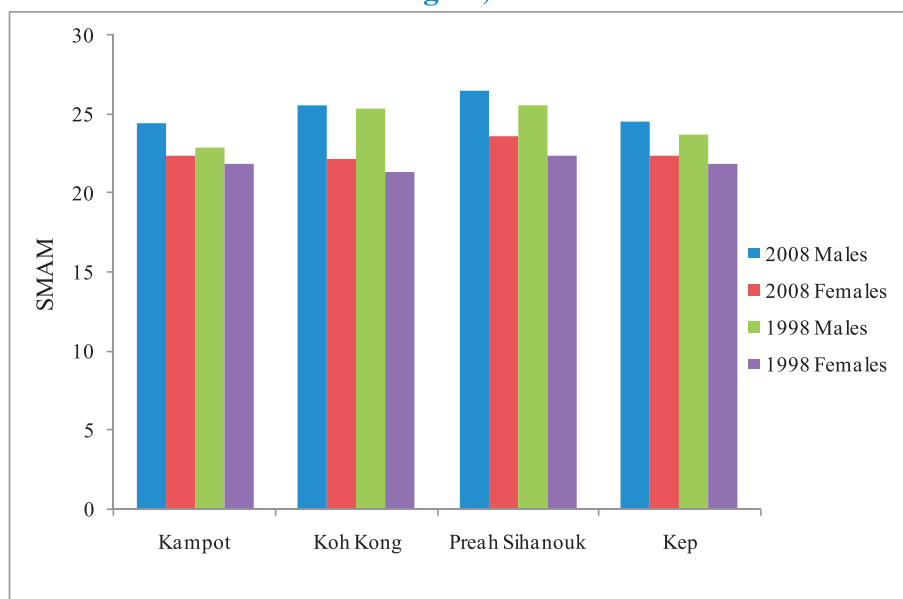
**Figure 3.1 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex in the Provinces of the Plains Region, 2008 and 1998**



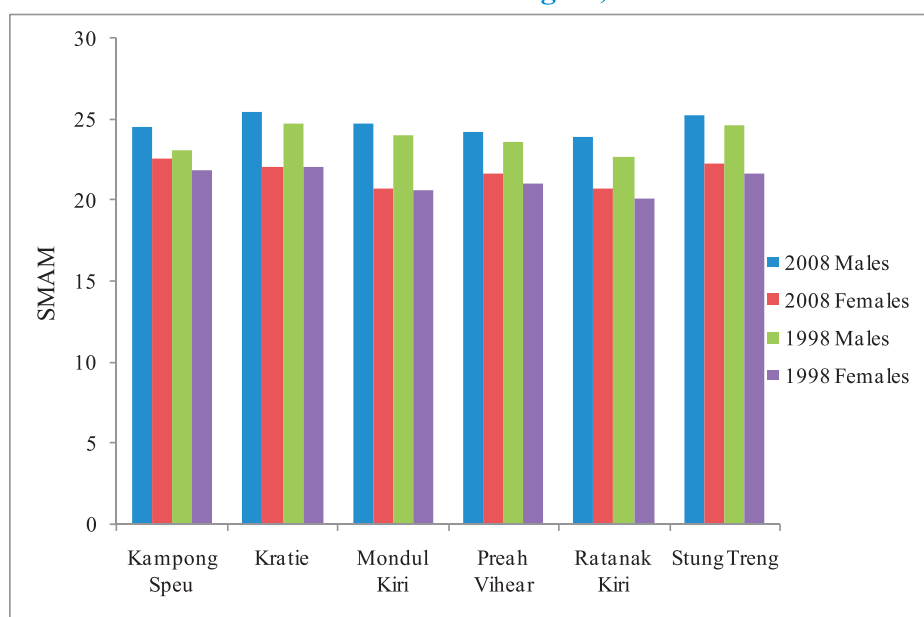
**Figure 3.2 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex in the Provinces of the Tonle Sap Region, 2008 and 1998**



**Figure 3.3 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex in the Provinces of the Coastal Region, 2008 and 1998**



**Figure 3.4 Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Sex in the Provinces of the Plateau and Mountain Region, 2008 and 1998**



### 3.6 Impact of Education and Economic Activity on SMAM

The differentials in SMAM due to education and economic activity are shown in Tables 3.4 and 3.5 respectively. The 1998 Census data are also incorporated in these Tables for comparison. The situations in 1998 and 2008 regarding educational attainment and economic activity vis-a-vis SMAM are not very different. The 2008 scenario is described below: In general SMAM increases with literacy and education. It is the highest for males and females who have an educational level higher than the Secondary level. The SMAM of literate males and females is higher than that of illiterate males and females by about 2 years each.

**Table 3.4 SMAM by Education, Cambodia, 2008 and 1998**

Educational Level	2008			1998		
	Males	Females	Difference	Males	Females	Difference
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Literate	25.9	23.7	2.2	24.4	22.6	1.8
Illiterate	23.8	21.6	2.2	23.0	22.2	0.8
Literate without educational level	25.6	22.8	2.8	24.1	22.7	1.4
Primary not Completed	24.5	22.6	1.9	23.5	22.3	1.2
Primary	25.2	23.5	1.7	24.2	22.7	1.5
Lower Secondary	27.1	25.4	1.7	25.7	23.7	2.0
Secondary/ Tech.Diploma	28.9	26.5	2.4	27.8	25.7	2.1
Beyond Secondary	30.6	27.7	2.9	30.3	28.0	2.3

Source: For 2008: Special tabulation; for 1998: NIS Report, 1999

The SMAM for illiterate males and females is lower than SMAM of primary not completed males and females respectively. As the educational level increases SMAM also increases. It is therefore important to provide not only literacy but also higher education to people to have considerable impact on SMAM.

Economically inactive males have the highest SMAM of 32.5 (Table 3.5). It is higher than the SMAM of economically active males by 6.9 years. In 1998 the difference was almost the same (6.8 years). Marriage is delayed by the economically inactive males. This situation is but natural. In general those who are not participating in labour force have no chance of getting married at the proper age. It is possible that most of these males may have some kind of problem such as ill health, disability and domestic issues which affect the chances of their marriage. The difference in SMAM of economically inactive females is higher than that of their economically active counterparts by only 0.76 year which shows that economically active or not most of the women got married in their early 20s. In 1998 the difference in SMAM between the economically active and economically inactive females was negligible. Presumably an economically inactive woman found it more difficult to find a spouse in 2008 than a woman placed in such a situation 10 years ago or her marriage was postponed due to study or some domestic circumstances.

The SMAM of the unemployed males is higher than that of the employed by 4.9 years in 2008 as against 5.1 years in 1998. The corresponding figures for females are 1.8 years and 4 years. Though this gap has reduced marginally in the case of men and considerably for women during the decade, the fact remains that the unemployed belonging to both the sexes are not keen on marriage at younger ages. In all the three industrial sectors of employment SMAM in 2008 is higher than that in 1998. The secondary and tertiary sectors have registered higher SMAM

compared to the primary or the agricultural sector both in 1998 and 2008. In general women in the secondary sector of employment have a high SMAM (26.5) and those in the urban areas have even a higher SMAM of 27.5 (based on a special tabulation of 2008 Census data). Garment factories and other big industries prefer to have single women on their rolls. The risk of losing factory job may be the motivating factor for these women to postpone their marriage.

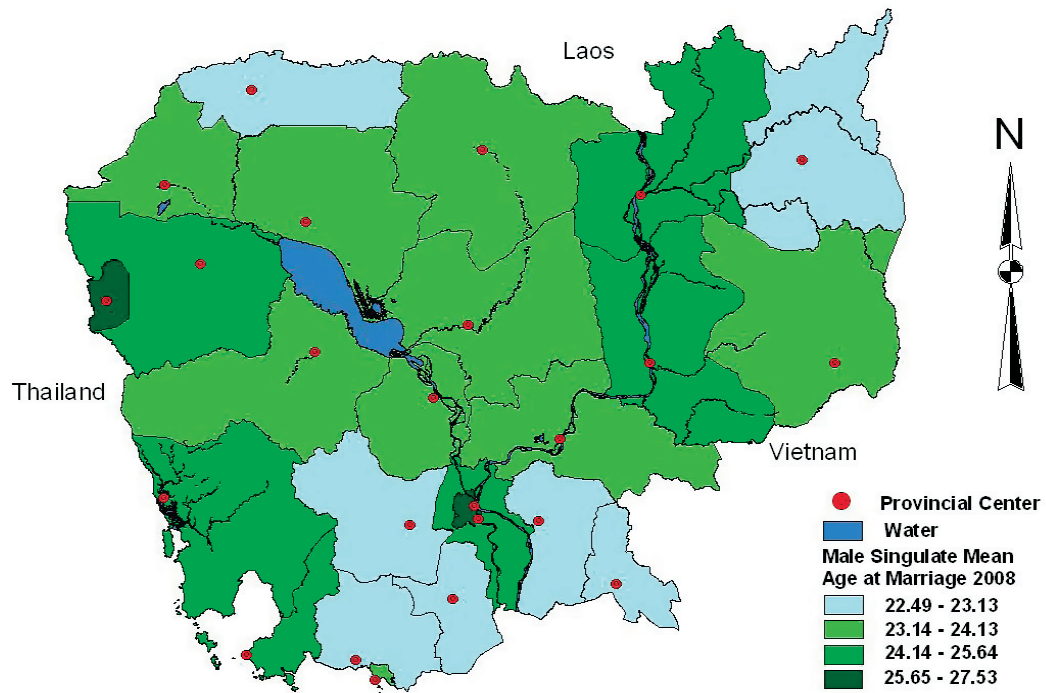
**Table 3.5 SMAM by Economic Activity, Cambodia, 2008 and 1998**

<b>Economic Activity/ Labour Force</b>	<b>2008</b>			<b>1998</b>		
	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>(6)</b>	<b>(7)</b>
Economically Inactive	32.5	24.1	8.4	30.4	22.4	8.0
Economically Active	25.6	23.3	2.3	23.6	22.3	1.3
Employed	24.9	22.8	2.1	23.3	22.0	1.3
Primary Sector	24.0	21.6	2.4	22.4	21.5	0.9
Secondary Sector	26.3	26.5	-0.2	25.8	26.2	-0.4
Tertiary Sector	26.8	24.3	2.5	25.3	23.4	1.9
Unemployed	29.8	24.6	5.1	28.4	26.0	2.4

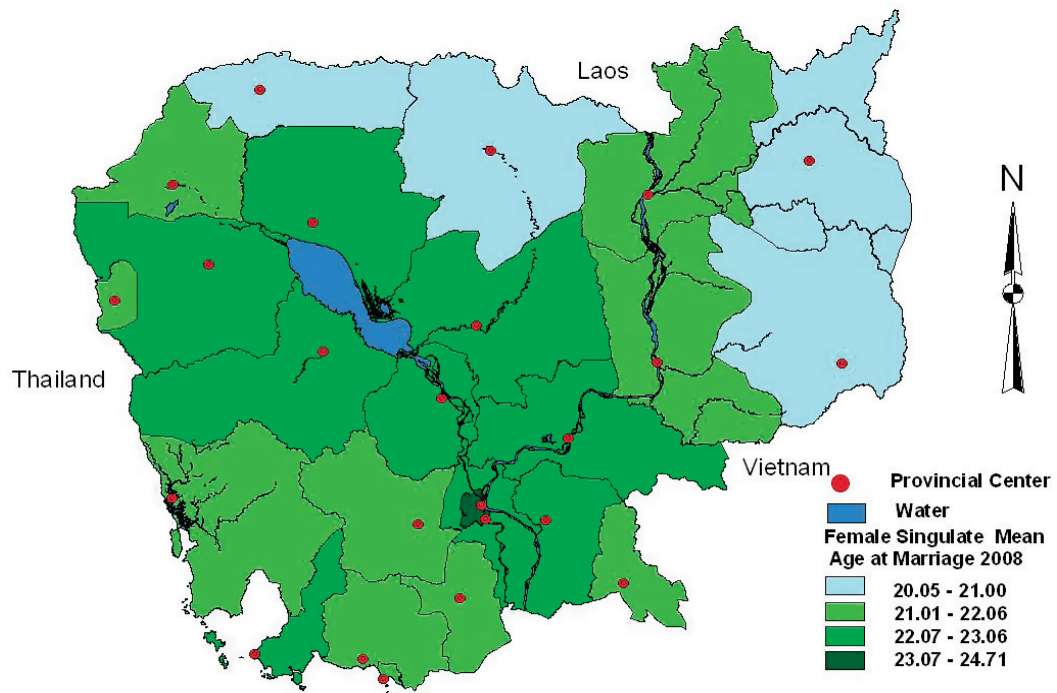
Source: for 2008: Special tabulation; for 1998: NIS Report, 1999



**Map 2 Male Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Province 2008**



**Map 3 Female Singulate Mean Age at Marriage by Province 2008**





### **3.7 Median Age at First Marriage among Women**

Demographic Health Survey provides data on exact age at first marriage which enables assessment of changes in marital timings by age group. According to CDHS 2005, the median age at first marriage for females in Cambodia in the age group 45-49 (20.4 years) is only marginally higher than that for the age group 25-29 (20.1years). Hence the median age at first marriage among women in Cambodia has remained fairly stable at about 20 years over two decades. Men have a slightly older median age at first marriage of 22 years.