

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the Cambodian society marriage is nearly universal and the majority of reproduction takes place only within marriage. Both at the 2008 and 1998 Censuses, the proportions of “Never married” (single) and “Married” (currently married) among males have been higher than the corresponding proportions of females. The position had reversed in the other three marital status categories: widowed, divorced and separated.

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. 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. In the higher age groups, males marry much younger women either for the first time or as remarriage once they had lost their spouses or had got divorced or separated. Such a tendency is not prevalent among older women.

The age group 30-34 marks the great divide as the proportion married is higher for females than males in each age group below the age of 30 and the opposite trend is observed in each age group above the age of 34. In the age group 30-34 which is the turning point, the difference between the proportion of males and females is at its minimum (5.2 percentage points).

After this age group more males than females are married and the gap between the proportions becomes wider and wider. At the age group 30-34 about 88 percent of the males are married and by the age group 50-54 the proportion rises to about 96 percent. In the case of females, however the highest proportion of the currently married is observed in the age group 35-39 (85.4 percent). A similar pattern existed in 1998 also.

.Among the adult population (age 15+), the proportion of widows is more than six times that of widowers. In 1998 also a similar situation prevailed with proportions of widowers and widows at 1.6percent and 10.8 percent respectively.

The high proportion of widowhood among women is due to three factors. Firstly, in conformity with the Asian culture, wives are generally younger than their husbands. Secondly, the expectation of life is higher for women than men. Thirdly, men tend to remarry at a proportion very much higher than women. Compared to males, females have a higher proportion of divorced/separated in every age group. It is five times the proportion of divorced/separated males in each of the age groups 45-49, 50-54 and 55-59.

It is observed that the overall marital situation at the national level is reflected in each province albeit some variations in the proportions. The provincial distributions re-confirm the following

conclusions drawn already: (i) higher proportions of women than men do not re marry once they have lost their husbands (ii) men have better chances of remarrying than women and (iii) mortality is higher among men than women.

Taking this in to account, the number of males in the population who are 3 years older than females per hundred females at ages 18, 19, 20 and 21 has been calculated for the year 2008 as 71, 99, 82 and 92 respectively. There is, therefore, a possibility of a deficit of available marriage partners or a marriage squeeze for women in the age group 18-21. Though not immediately, in course of time, one more dimension may be added to the marriage squeeze at the early ages with progress of education and employment among women. More than shortage of required number of males, it may be shortage of equally or better educated men or shortage of better employed men. In cities where sex ratios in the younger age groups are lowered due to predominant female migration this problem is likely to be more acute.

According to CDHS 2005, the median age for women in Cambodia has remained fairly stable at about 20 years over the last two decades. Men have a slightly older median age at first marriage (22 years). The Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) calculated using census data has always been higher for males than females. It has increased during the decade 1998-2008 both in respect of males and females- from 24.2 years to 25.6 years and from 22.5 years to 23.3 years respectively. 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 (1.7years). This shows that over time, men in Cambodia tend to marry women much younger to them.

In general the SMAM for males in Cambodia is lower than the corresponding figures of other countries in the region. In respect of females it is slightly higher than SMAM of Vietnam but lower than that of other countries. This shows that comparatively marriage is less delayed in Cambodia. 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. The SMAM has increased in all the provinces during 1998-2008 for both the sexes except in respect of males in Pailin and females in Prey Veng.

In addition to SMAM, the levels of marital statuses of males and females at crucial ages also yield significant parameters. Study of the marriage pattern in the age groups 20-24, 45-49 and 60 reveal the marriage scenario of an area for the following reasons: early marriage behaviour is reflected by the age group 20-24; the proportion single in the age group 45-49 indicates the general celibacy level; and the extent of widowhood and dissolution of marriage union by divorce or separation can best be studied at ages 60 and over.

At the national level males have a much higher proportion of singles in the age group 20-24. The proportion single has increased by 21.1percent and 24.7percent for males and females respectively in this age group during the decade 1998-2008. As a result the difference in proportions single between the sexes has risen from 19.01 to 21.61 percentage points. About 5 percent of women in the age group 45-49 remain never married.

The proportion widowed among females in the elderly age group of 60 and over though at a high level in 2008(41.81 percent) has declined from 48.09 percent in 1998. This may be due to increased expectation of life of both males and females during the decade and higher expectation

of life women compared to men. The proportion of divorced and separated women (60+) in Cambodia has decreased by about one percentage point during the decade. This may also be attributed to a comparatively lower rate of increase of the number of divorced/separated women (19.1 percent) of this age group.

Variations are noticed in the marital status levels among the provinces. Phnom Penh Municipality has the highest proportion never married among both males (85.89 percent) and females (72.66 percent) of the age group 20-24. The same position existed in 1998 also but with 82.06 percent for males and 58.24 percent for females. A large number of young married women have moved into Phnom Penh from other provinces to work in industries like the garment factories and other establishments. The rapid all round development of Phnom Penh with the consequent increase in the number of new entrants to the labour force and educational institutions, is the main reason for the increase during the decade in the proportion of single males by about 3.83 percentage points and the relatively higher increase in the proportion of single females by 14.42 percentage points during the decade.

The difference between the male and female proportion of the never married in the age group 20-24 indicates the different marital pattern between the two sexes existing in the provinces. The highest gender differential is noted in Mondul Kiri province (36 percentage points) followed by the provinces of Kratie and Koh Kong. The gender gap is the lowest in Phnom Penh (13 percentage points). In the provinces, delay in marriage is caused by different factors depending on various opportunities and constraints existing in each province.

The highest and lowest celibacy levels in 2008 are recorded by Kandal and Otdar Meanchey provinces. The corresponding provinces in 1998 were Kampong Chhnang and Pailin. The provinces in the Plains Region continue to have high celibacy level among women during the decade. The provinces in the Coastal Region have low celibacy levels as per both the censuses. In the Tonle Sap Region the celibacy levels vary widely among the provinces both in 1998 and 2008.

Widowhood is at a high level among older women (60+) in almost all the provinces. The percentage of widows is the lowest in Ratanak Kiri province (35.2 percent). On the other hand, Krong Kep has the highest proportion of widows (47.28percent) followed by Kampong Chhnang (46.6 percent) and Svay Rieng (45.9 percent). The proportion of widowers is much lower than that of widows in all the provinces for reasons stated already.

Both among men and women the proportion single is higher and the proportion married lower in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas. The higher proportion of singles in the urban areas is mainly due to higher age at marriage and migration of unmarried young men and women for the purpose of study or employment.

The tendency of urban males getting married at later years than their rural counterparts continued in the decade with further increase in age at marriage from its level in 1998. The urban-rural gap in proportion single of males was the highest in the age group 20-24 in 1998. The proportion of widows continued to be higher than that of widowers at the age 60 and above both in the urban and rural areas during the decade. There is a small decrease in the difference between the proportions of widows and widowers in both urban and rural areas.

The analysis reveals that with the advancement in educational attainment there is a substantial increase in the proportion single among both males and females belonging to the age group 20-24. The proportion of widowed women also declines with increase in educational level. The impact of education on marriage dissolution by divorce/separation among women aged 60 and more is not considerable as of now. The proportion single among the economically not active persons is higher than that of economically active persons in the age group 20-24. These data should prove useful in the implementation of population policy and policies relating to education, and labour and employment .by the RGC.

Teenage marriage is essentially a problem of female adolescents rather than that of their male counter parts. The problem is more acute in the rural areas with nearly 10 percent of female adolescents in the ever married status. There is a need for special programmes for the welfare and development of teenage brides.

The future marriage scenario is likely to be quite different from what it is now. With the gradual weakening of the system of arranged marriages the motivation for delaying marriages may be that of marriage partners instead of parents. Increased educational attainment and labour force participation in the tertiary sectors by women especially in the urban areas may result in postponement of marriages and marriage squeeze.