

LIVED EXPERIENCES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME IN CAMBODIA

**Puangtip Chaiphibalsarisdi. Ph.D. RN^{1*}, Manila Prak . BSN . RN², Narem Yung. BSN. RN³,
Khun Kokma BSN. RN.⁴, Seylak Lon BSN. RN⁵, Thida Yeath BSN. RN⁶, Sokhoeun Nhem. BSN. RN⁷.**

^{1*} School of Nursing, Shinawatra University, 99 Moo 10, Bangtoey, Samkhok, Pathumthani 12160, Thailand.

² Krous Village, Svay Dangcum Commune, Siem Reap Town, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.

³ Srepau village, Srasrussey Commune, Stung Treng town, Stung Treng Province, Cambodia.

⁴ 097, ChroyThmor Village, Boengkok Commune, Kampong Cham Town, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia.

⁵ Prek Village, Stung Treng Commune, Stung Treng Town, Stung Treng Province, Cambodia.

⁶ Village 09, Kampong Cham Commune, Kampong Cham District, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia.

⁷ Leu Village, Srah Rasey Commune, Stung Treng District, Stung Treng Province, Cambodia.

Tel : 081-3399089, 086-3315148 . Email : cpuangti@chula.ac.th

Accepted Date: 17th October, 2013.

ABSTRACT

This in-depth interview with 6 key informants from 4 provinces in Cambodia was conducted in December 2011 in order to describe their feelings before, during, and after the civil war, Khmer Rouge Regime in 1975-1979. Before the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer Empire was one of the most powerful country in Southeast Asia, especially in the arts. People learned how to raise children from the old generation. During the Khmer Rouge, members of the family were separated and communication was very limited. People lived in constant fear of their lives. Moreover, food and other basic supplies were very scarce. Families passed through unbelievably hard times but did not give up despite the hardship. After the Khmer Rouge Regime, people in both families and communities all over the country were reunited, happier with the growth of the social and economy. Education for the children was the main aspiration in every family. The findings suggest that the policy of the government should support education in all sectors including nursing and health.

KEY WORDS: Khmer Rouge Regime , Empire, Education, Family, People.

BACKGROUND: Khmer Empire of Arts, Education, and Society

The Khmer Empire was one of the most powerful countries in Southeast Asia. The golden age of Khmer civilization was the period from the 9th to the 13th centuries, Kampuchea (formerly known as Cambodia) ruled large territories from its capital in the region of Angkor in the west. Under King Jayavarman VII (1181-1218), the Khmer empire reached its zenith of political power and cultural creativity during which it gained power and territory in a series of successful wars. Stone inscriptions the most important of which are seen on the foundation steles of temples. The reports on the political and religious elements are also the everyday lives of the population as they interacted with Chinese diplomats, traders and travelers. A wide range of commodities were traded between Khmer cities and China, including rare woods, elephant tusks, cardamom and other spices, wax, gold, silver and silk. During that time, the kings had constructed many temples such as Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom (Bayon), Ta Prohm, Banteay Srey, Banteay Kdei and Neak Pean. Canals were used for trade, travel and irrigation, and alongside them, an extensive network of streets was laid down which connected every town of the empire. Along the streets, there were 121 rest-houses built for traders, officials and travelers. There were also 102 hospitals and several universities. A number of exquisite works of art can still be found along the areas where Cambodia borders on Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Cambodia is one of the 10 Asian countries which joined the Asian Community on 30th April, 1999, requiring the government to develop many aspects of infrastructure including nursing education. In terms of nursing education, the 2-year General Nursing Course (GNC) started in 1950, and the Nursing Training Curriculum (NTC) was expanded to be a 3-year diploma program in 1960. The 1.5 year psychiatric/mental health nursing course commenced in 1999 and the Curriculum of Bachelor of Science in Nursing 4-year program (BSN) started in 2008 (Cambodian Council of Nurses, 2012). The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was established as an Incorporated Administrative Agency under the Act of the Incorporated Administrative Agency - Japan International Cooperation Agency (Act No. 136, 2002). JICA aims to contribute to the promotion of international cooperation as well as the sound development of Japanese and global economy by supporting the socioeconomic development, recovery or economic stability of developing regions (*Cambodia Nursing History*, 2012). JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) started in Cambodia in August 2000 (Japan International Cooperation Agency. *Study Reports (2002)* Retrieved on March 31, 2012 from <http://www.jica.go.jp/english/publications/reports/study/country/cambodia.html>).

After the civil war in Cambodia, in order to meet the need for health personnel, health policies of the Ministry of Health (MOH) focused on “Quantity” rather than “Quality”. Now, “Quality” is also rising up as an issue in the Cambodia health sector. Reflecting the social demand, the Technical School for Medical Care and some private universities have started programs of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Under the above described circumstances, they are facing the problem of lack of qualified nursing teaching staff. BSN needs qualified teaching staff with Bachelor or higher academic degrees, and to increase the number of qualified teaching staff is one of the urgent issues in Cambodia. In order to solve the problem, the JICA project is launching the bridge course of BSN in cooperation with Saint Louis College, Thailand. The course was originally planned only for teachers of Cambodian RTCs/TSMCs but there are some slots remaining (MOH/JICA Project for Strengthening Human Resources Development System of Co-medicals).

The history of Cambodian nursing will not be complete without understanding the lived experiences of Cambodian families before, during and after the Khmer Rouge Regime. This research study is an important component for establishing quality nursing programs. The response of individuals and families from the time of the Khmer Rouge Regime informs the practice and education of nurses in Cambodia.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: This study is based on 2 conceptual frameworks, the Feetham Family Functioning Survey (FFFS) and the Chaiphibalsarisdi, Family Strengths of Community Survey. The FFFS applies a family ecological framework to examine the relationships of family functioning to the social and physical environments of families. The family ecological model assesses functioning of intra family relationships and also of interfamily relationships, including those with subsystems (e.g., neighborhood) and the broader society. The examination of the family environment in the family ecological model including the physical, social and political environment supports the application of the model in this study (Andrews, Bubolz, & Paolucci, 1980). Bronfenbrenner (1986) reviewed the ecology of the family as a context for human development. The FFFS examines family functions including the importance of the amount of discussion of each family member with their spouse/partner, friends, relatives, neighbors and health professionals about the concerns, problems, time spent, the help, health, emotional support, satisfaction and disagreements with their marriage or partners. FFFS also focused on family functions such as care of children, house repairs, household chores and time they spend with the children and partners in recreational activities. And if their children miss school due to illness, is their or their partner’s work routine disrupted by having to stay home with the children? (Feetham, 2011). The ecological framework and items of the FFFS guided the interviews of this study.

The study of Chaiphibalsarisdi focused on family members, listening to each other’s problems attentively and talking straight to everyone. It also mentions family members’ assigned functions and helping to solve problems by using reason. For example, when someone does not follow the rules, the other members will be dissatisfied; and when family members cooperate, problems will be solved without blames. When someone is disappointed, sad, or lonely, she/he will turn to other members for support in all matters. Family members will help each other with work that is not theirs. All members will be sad if someone in the family is suffering. If one member comes home late, others will be worried. They will tell various stories when they get together. They feel happy when the problem is solved. The senior members will not allow the younger ones to make their own decisions. The family has enough money to cover expenses and they often express their love to each other. They like to do arbitration as they are cheerful to each other (Chaiphibalsarisdi, 2011).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How did lived experiences of Cambodian families change during and after the Civil War?
2. How do Cambodian people feel about family structure and family function?

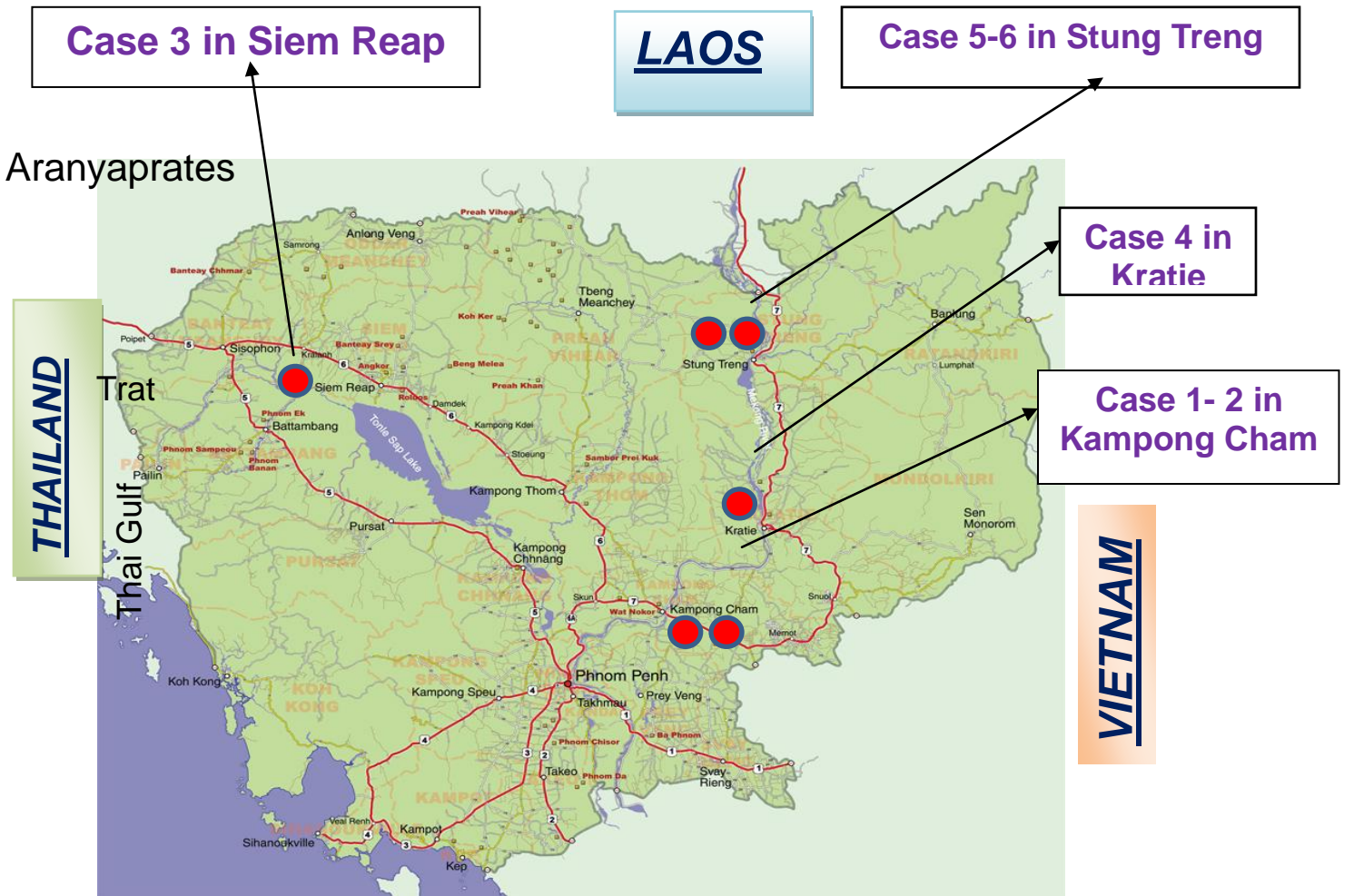
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the changes in the lived experiences of Cambodian families during and after the Khmer Rouge.
2. To explore the positive and negative feelings of their lived experiences.
3. To identify gender roles and assess satisfaction in the families.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach based on 20 in-depth interview items. There were 6 purposive samples from 4 provinces of Cambodia; Kampong Cham, Kratie, Siem Reap, and Stung Treng (Picture 1). Six key informants including 4 women and 2 men, aged between 55-87 years old, participated in the study. One case from Siem Reap, one from Kratie, two from Kampong Cham, and two from Stung Treng were interviewed during December 2011 at their homes in the Cambodian language to better understand the Cambodians’ experiences during the war. The samples were asked several main questions and prompted with further questions to verify their descriptions.

Picture1: Sites of the Study, in Cambodia



Picture 2: In-depth interview of a happy 79 year-old woman in Kratie

The content of the twenty in-depth interview items was validated by three experts. Then the measurement was tested for reliability. The in-depth interviews were conducted between 27 to 80 minutes with tape recorders and verbatim transcription in the Cambodian language and then translated into English by two colleagues. This study was conducted to find out more about their lived experiences and the changes in feelings, family structure and family function of Cambodians before, during and after the Khmer Rouge Regime. The in-depth interviews are especially well suited to the retrospective and present study that relies on the key informants' memories. Therefore, in this study we used in-depth interview to explore their experiences (Wood & Haber, 2006).

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Puangtip Chaiphalsarisdi Ph.D. RN.
School of Nursing, Shinawatra University,
99 Moo 10, Bangtoey, Samkhok,
Pathumthani 12160, Thailand.
EMAIL: cpuangti@chula.ac.th
Tel: 081-3399089, 086-3315148.

ANALYSIS

All the interviews were transcribed in the Cambodian language and translated into English. The interview transcripts were used to interpret how the sample described their meanings and experiences of the war. The content analysis was done from the transcribed English language and cross-checked for accuracy among the Cambodian researchers. Then the analysis was organized into themes.

A. Before the Khmer Rouge Regime

The lives of people before the *Khmer Rouge* Regime during 1975-1979 seemed very positive. A 73-year-old woman from Kampong Cham Province recalled that all her family members were living together in Svay Rieng Province and she was the head of the family. People learned how to raise children from the older generation. Another 79 year old woman from Kratie Province said that her family were farmers. She had nine children but four of them died. Five are still alive: four sons and one daughter. They are good children. She recalled her life before the war, that she made an effort to harvest sesame seeds even though she had just delivered a child three months before.

B. During and after the Khmer Rouge Regime

The results are presented in 3 parts according to the objectives of the study.

Part 1: To describe the lived experiences of Cambodian families under the Khmer Rouge.

Part 2: To explore the positive and negative feelings of their lived experiences.

Part 3: To identify gender roles and assess satisfaction in the families post Khmer Rouge.

Results of Part 1

1) People lived in Fear During the War:

All 6 key informants recalled painful experiences during the war. The 73 year old woman was scared that her husband would be arrested as he was a soldier. Her family was closely observed by different fighting groups. She lived in a combat area and was worried and felt that her family would die one day either in the fighting or bombing. The 79 year old woman told that, when the Khmer Rouge took over, she was responsible for a department that looked after the food supply. If she did something wrong, she was in danger of being killed. But she and her husband were lucky. They took her husband to the Rolum Phnov (the name of a place) to kill him, but fortunately liberation day came first (7 January, 1979). She was extremely concerned about her life and the lives of her family, she said with tears in her eyes. She had actually been threatened with death. Her sons came back to see her but others who had accompanied them were killed. She felt concerned about her family because she did not know what time and what day she would be killed. The Khmer Rouge asked her to prepare five cans of rice and a little salt because they intended to kill her, but liberation day arrived so she survived. The Khmer Rouge Regime did not destroy wild animals, fish, forests, or agricultural land but they destroyed all infrastructures, culture, religion, families and people. She suffered from the killing of human beings, saying that when the Khmer Rouge killed people, they shouted loudly over microphones so that people couldn't hear the screams of the dying people and they closed the road so nobody could go through. They retrained people in Chinese schools then took them to temples where they were beaten and dropped into a hole with thousands of people. The Khmer Rouge was very cruel. She feared them because many people were killed, so she had tried to work hard.

The 87 year-old woman said that she lived in fear during the war. She was threatened by the Khmer Rouge when she didn't complete her responsibility at work as she was assigned to take care of children and cook. She didn't have enough food to eat, so she often ate the bark of banana trees which made her have general edema. She was weak and couldn't hear well because of starvation. Even when a soldier drove his car behind her and almost hit her, she did not hear him

coming. She sometimes ate a little bit of boiled rice so she could have energy for working. Otherwise, she would be under threat of death. She became weak from overwork. She was frightened and thought she would be killed the next day or she would be transferred to another place, to prison and then killed. It was a bad situation. All people who lived under this regime were afraid that something bad would happen to them soon. She wondered why a group of the victims did not kill the Khmer Rouge leader. The Khmer Rouge ordered people to dig holes for storing rice, but actually the holes were for burying the dead bodies instead. The Khmer Rouge usually called her family to dig because they were the newcomers. It was so traumatic.

The 55 year-old man from Stung Treng Province mentioned that during the Khmer Rouge Regime people lived in extreme hardship without enough food to eat.

2) Life Was Interrupted During the War:

The 64-year-old woman in Siem Reap Province said that “there was so much suffering during the Khmer Rouge Regime.” She escaped with her family to Prek Toil by boat to live with her cousin for a year. The Khmer Rouge chased her family far away to “Thepadei” mountain, then to “Kois Krolor” district where they worked in a brick kiln. “I could do it. I never failed to do anything so they couldn’t kill me. I could roof a house with sticky clay. That was the most difficult job”. Sometimes she even dared to argue with the Khmer Rouge. They forced her to work very hard, but she could do whatever they wanted her to do. She was not so afraid of the Khmer Rouge killing her but concerned that she might die because there was no rice to eat. She added, “What could we do? We had nothing to eat! Who could help us?” Vietnamese soldiers who were coming to save them were shot by the Khmer Rouge. Her family was hidden in a water storage place which was very close to the fighting area, but they escaped the bullets.

The 57-year-old man recalled that “people who experienced the Khmer Rouge Regime really hated it, but they had no way to escape”. The life style was changed so much. He recalled that they didn’t chat with each other at night because they would be arrested and then killed in the field. He also recalled that “After five to six years of the war, people lived in a difficult situation, not enough food to eat and they usually felt scared, especially in the area of Kampong Cham, but the people in the city did not face it.”

During the war, the 73-year-old woman recalled that her family was separated and she missed her children so much. She had a poor appetite and became very thin.

Another woman said that her family had no relationship with other families. They woke up early in the morning and left their temporary camp to work in the field and came back late in the evening and went to sleep without any verbal communication. People didn’t trust each other. They could not talk or communicate. They were separated, wives and husbands lived in different places, children lived in the center and young children lived with elderly women.

There was no relationship or unity. People were not allowed to practice religion as there were no monks or temples but they had belief in their hearts. The structure of the country broke down because death could come at any time. It was a very bad life experience. The Khmer Rouge forced them to work very hard in the fields, and even when they got sick they were not allowed to stop working. If someone said “I’m sick and I will not be able to go to work”, the Khmer Rouge would accuse them of being lazy and use it as an excuse to kill them.

3) Marriage in Cambodia:

A wedding process starts by asking for (Dan Doeung) a dowry for the bride, then both families get together to discuss the details and set a date for the wedding. Usually a fortune teller is consulted to ascertain if the marriage will be successful. Chinese people do not arrange weddings during “CHENG MENG”. This is when they go to the family burial ground to pray for their ancestors who already passed away. Chinese do not allow the couple to go outside of the house for 12 days before getting married. Both sides need to share the wedding expenses, and the money gained from the wedding will be given to the married couple. Sometimes the bride’s side will contribute a certain amount of money. The groom’s side will not get involved after the payment of the dowry, but this depends on the people involved. Sometimes they divide the expenses into different parts and cover each part individually. When the date of the wedding arrives, they will arrange either a Cambodian or Chinese ceremony depending on what they have chosen. Some people like to mix both Cambodian and Chinese ceremonies. Khmer traditions for arranging a wedding have to be followed strictly. First, the groom’s parents ask a neighbor or one of the bride’s relatives to investigate. If the bride’s parents agree to discuss with the groom’s relatives, it means that they are open to the proposal. Second, the bride’s relatives and parents have to discuss and consider the proposal. The bride’s parents have to inquire about the groom’s family background, education, manners and health. If the bride’s parents and relatives are satisfied, they will find a good day for an engagement or SISLAR TOM. Then they choose a good day, month and year for the wedding day. The wedding ceremony always starts at the bride’s house. In older generations, the groom had to build a house before the wedding day. Traditional Khmer weddings would be celebrated for three days: The first day is presentation of the dowry, when the groom and his relatives have to travel to the bride’s home with gifts, fruit, and other good things to eat. They are welcomed and introduced, the bride has to give a bouquet of flowers to the groom. The second day is “Hair Cut Ceremony”. This ceremony is to prepare the bride and groom for their life as a married couple. The third day is the last ceremony when the family

members and friends tie the bride and groom's left and right wrists with white silk to symbolize their union. And in the evening they have a big party with dancing and singing to congratulate the new couple. Most wedding parties take place from 4 p.m. until midnight. The wedding ceremony takes place after the engagement between the groom and bride.

One of the informants said that, "children leave their parents after marriage. People get married following our culture, such as the groom's family needs to go to the bride's family to ask for her hand in marriage. Both sides will decide on the wedding after engagement if it is agreeable. They prepare for the wedding ceremony for 3 days. On the final day there will be a big party and everyone has a good time. Normally the wedding in Cambodia focuses on traditional culture and the party. Most Cambodians never skip this ceremony even when they are poor. She believed in the old concept that daughters need to get married after becoming adults. She was afraid that if they get older and are not married, it can badly affect their future. She said "It was silly! With the benefit of hindsight, I would have preferred them to do business instead of forcing marriage on them. It was wrong to arrange the marriage for my first daughter". Ten years before, she had accompanied her to her husband's family, and 10 years after she accompanied her back because she could not accept her daughter to live unhappily for the sake of keeping a marriage. Two of her children had traditional Chinese weddings and one child was married in the traditional Cambodian way. She has one more son to arrange a wedding for; maybe she will make it in Cambodian style.

In Cambodia nowadays, there is no policy about the number of children in the family. Most families have four children, although at present there is a preference for only two. In the past, people had children naturally. Now, people use birth control.

4) Raising Children:

The 87-year-old woman said that during the war, even mothers who had just given birth were expected to work. It was inconvenient to breastfeed so the baby was given boiled rice as a supplement. Mothers had to breastfeed the baby in the morning before they went to the fields, at lunch time and after work.

A woman felt thankful to her mother as follows; "My mother made me work hard, so I could tolerate all the work during the war and not give up. I was not thin like I am now. I could carry water up and down stairs almost a hundred times a day. Every day, I saw Khmer Rouge tie people up with rope and take them to kill."

The 64-year-old woman from Siem Liamp Province felt that one person couldn't be responsible for raising a family. Both the husband and wife had to be able to depend on each other and make decisions together. They both have to help each other. She said, "We came back with nothing after the Khmer Rouge Regime". She raised her children, both daughters and son, strictly so they would know right from wrong. Another 79-year-old woman recalled that after the Khmer Rouge Regime, she lived together with her husband and worked hard to earn money to support her children's education.

After the war, Cambodian people preferred to have only 2 or 3 children. The key informant learned how to raise her children from her parents and grandparents. In the past, women always stayed at home and looked after the children. She raised them at that time by picking the vegetables that she planted to feed them. She just kept food for them to eat. She thought that if she chose the right way to educate them every day, they would grow up to be good people. Even now that they are grown up, she told them to be careful in business and not to be taken advantage of. "A parent has to be a strong person"

The 79-year-old woman recalled that her family members were separated during the Khmer Rouge Regime, but now they're living together. They are farmers; they grow rice and plant tobacco.

After the war, another woman said, only 2 of her children stayed in Cambodia. The other 2 lived far away. One is in the USA and the other one is in Australia. She said that her husband does not help with housework but he helps with the business. He goes out a lot for business. She was afraid that when she gets older she will not have enough money. She wants to have money of her own so she doesn't need to ask for money from her children.

The head of the family is responsible for welfare in the family, such as earning a salary, making decisions, solving problems and mediating when members of the family have an argument with each other. He said "family members should understand and respect older people in the family or in the community". All successes depend on the leader of the family. The members of the family are responsible for their assigned tasks.

The head of the family is strong in mind and play an important role in leading their family. The ability of families to make the necessary changes in family function and structure during and following the Khmer Rouge Regime demonstrates the strengths of the family and shows how families sustain.

Husband and wife have to be able to depend on each other and make decisions together. They both have to help each other. The findings are congruent with other studies (USAID, UNFPA, HSSP-2, UNICEF, JICA, 2011), which report Cambodian women as usually involved in all three specific household decisions depending on the issue being decided. First, they make decisions about their own health care. However, decisions about major household purchases and visits to the wife's family or relatives are usually made jointly by the husband and wife.

After the war, the issue of who would be responsible for caring for elderly people in the family arose. After the war ended, a 73-year-old woman from Kampong Cham said that she started to build a new family structure with limited resources and with the help of all

family members and neighbors supporting each other. She continued by saying that, “I am not sure who will take care of me in the future because my children are very busy with their families and their work. Usually the daughter is the one who is supposed to take care of elderly people in the family. But my daughters have to take responsibility for their family. In my son’s case, the husband is the head of the family but he shares information and discusses matters affecting the family with his wife. He is responsible for the family budget, while his wife is responsible for the expenses”. Happiness and welfare are most important. “If we have a lot of money but our health is not good, then it doesn’t make sense. Some of the factors that can affect family structure are education, economic situation and culture.

Result of Part 2:

The objective 2 was to explore both positive and negative feelings about the Cambodian lived experiences during and after the war. Though the war was happening in 1973-1979, and the interviews were conducted in December 2011. Though the event happened some 30 years ago, still the key informants are traumatized. All the key informants mostly recall on the negative feeling as described in part 1. A 73 year-old woman recalled that “I didn’t have any benefit from the war at all. The war only destroyed everything”. A man recalled that his family was really concerned about the effect of the war on people’s living. For almost five years, they suffered and fled to the east, west, north, south and anywhere to escape. Even though they were not participants in the war, but they were victims. They could not see any advantages of the war because they were normal people. There was no way that the war could lead to the development of culture or economy. The children could not go to school and the people could not work to support the family. In his view, he does not want war; it destroys standard of living. There is no positive effect or benefit from the war. The last comment of the 87 year-old woman said that, “nobody received any benefit from the war because the war had destroyed everything they had”. However, when the new generation looked back at the event, they also have more on the negative feelings due to the slow progression and development of the country. Only few positive feelings about the war, the new generation thought that the war was the important lesson learnt, including the positive and strong mindedness, with family unions.

C. After the Khmer Rouge Regime

Result of part 3:

The objective 3 of the study was to identify gender roles and assess satisfaction in the families, Life and work after the war will be presented into 3 themes; 1) work opportunity and community contributions, 2) family union and support, and 3) improvement of the social and economic.

1) Work Opportunity and Community Contribution:

A man recalled about his youngest son who works in a health center and his job is to take care of people’s health. The other son works in the Department of Education, Youth and Sports in a district. His wife and his youngest son spend most of their time with the community. Now they are not with us. She helps the Cambodian Red Cross. She usually contributes \$50 every month to help children with HIV. She is compassionate towards HIV people who live in one village together outside of Siem Reap Province”. He works on the farm and also polished rice and sold vegetables and fruit so that he could get some money to buy meat and other food. His wife’s duty is accounting, and she manages the income and expenses for the family. Cooking and housework are also her duty. Her children help her in their free time. Her husband did not want the children to help him with farm chores.

Another man said his family’s standard of living has improved steadily since 1979. He said that they were not as poor as they were before and during the war. He was married before the Khmer Rouge, took over and they had four children, two daughters and two sons. He worked as a public employee with a salary which was sufficient to support his family; his wife worked as a dressmaker and did some business such as trading rice or goods. All their children went to school. If anyone in the family had a problem, they talked together. Some own their own businesses and some work in the public sector.

Women helped the community and society a lot. One woman claimed that not one piece of garbage or dirty water was allowed on her neighbors’ land. She would clean and burned it. She said one of her main goals is to maintain a good relationship with her neighbors and take turns working together on the farm alternately which benefit of all.

2) Family Union and Supports:

Beside mother and father, the grandmother or grandmother-in-law may be responsible for taking care of a new baby. An example, for 2-3 days after the first delivery, the grandmother always takes care of her daughter, explaining about breast feeding, body care, the method of caring for a baby and bathing a baby. Family members should understand and pay respect to older people in the family and in the community. Helping and supporting each other are very important in the family. They can help to do housework e.g. when a wife is pregnant, has just delivered or is sick, the husband helps to do housework such as boiling water, cooking, washing clothes, and going to work in the field too. All people living in the community must help each other when their community needs some help, such as building roads and bridges. The community leader often leads people to develop their community in order to meet common needs for good health and welfare.

Housework is not just a woman’s obligation. Other members can help if they are not busy. One woman said that it is good if the man helps to do housework as it can prevent family violence. She supports the idea that men should help women in housework. But the

wife has to help him too. She said, “we have to work together and respect each other. We have never argued and this leads to a happy life”.

When she became a grandma, she helped to take care of the new babies for her sons and daughters. Usually she helps them until the baby is strong and healthy. She mentioned that “in caring for my new baby, I did it myself because my mother lives in a different house but she came to visit for 2-3 days”. Her neighbors also came to visit her after the delivery. Her mother and her husband prepared a bed to warm her by the fire. Taking care of a new baby after delivery is the parent’s obligation to ensure the baby has good health. She saw that many families could take care of their babies well. The 55 year-old man shared his experience of raising children, they learned from older family members (e.g. grandfather, grandmother etc) and neighbors who had experiences taking care of babies.

Her children had a chance to study in good schools. She also shared her idea that parents should be the ones to look after the children. Their mother always helped them do homework because she had much more time than the others. Sometime an aunt or other people in the family can also help them when they have time. She mentioned that she paid for hire teachers to come to teach them at home. Her grandchildren are very good at Khmer language and writing essays, but not so good at mathematics. She told them to study hard. When her children were young they tried to study hard. For her own children, she taught them easy homework, but for higher grades (difficult homework), it was the task for her husband because he studied a higher grade of education and he could speak French”. She said; “ Parents should help their children with their homework”.

But she observed that it was mostly mothers who helped their children because the fathers had to work on farms while most of the time the mothers stayed at home. She added “moreover, a grandmother or grandfather should take care of their grandchildren’s homework too”. Sometimes, older brothers or elder sisters can help when parents are busy working in the field. However, a woman believed that education leads to better opportunities in life so she made a big effort to support her children to study.

A 57 year-old man said that his family members were well educated. He was a monk and had a chance to study until he was 18 years old. They did not have enough time to work and do business. They were threatened by the Lon No I Regime (Khmer Republic). He was the main breadwinner of the family, but income management was the responsibility of his wife. For example, women rarely have a bank account while most of the men do. She said that men should go out to earn money for the family and women should manage the money for the family. In Cambodia, most of the time, the wife has to control the budget for the family, but she does not like to do that. She is bored because her husband controls the business and the budget of the company. While she is responsible for the family budget and welfare. And the person who takes responsibility for the family budget should be both the husband and wife, who earn money and manage it for the family. In fact, it was not quite the same for her generation that the head of the family has to be responsible for the family budget. Now she cannot earn money for the family anymore, and needs some support from her children.

In the man’s family there is no old person. He said, “normally in our country, the family members will look after the elderly people. It is not the same in some countries where the elderly people are looked after at a center”. His family faced some difficulties in living standard when their children were young because he had a low salary. One woman said that, when she has to make big decisions, she consults others because she thinks that two heads are better than one. Her mother is still alive. She is 87 years old. She lives with her younger

sister who is not married. Now her sister has a broken hand so she asked a helper to stay with the mother. At night she will go to visit her. Her younger sister from the United States is with her too. She said “I take care of my mother, and my children will take care of me. It is a circle”. Her parents live alone. Her mother looks after the father. Sometimes the relatives also help to look after them and always come to visit them. She said that her spouse and their children should look after the elderly in the family. She took care of her sons, her daughters, and grandchildren. In general, when parents get older, their sons or daughters must look after them.

3) Improvement of the Social and Economic Environment:

Since the war ended, the social, economic, religious and educational situations have been improved and many people now live in a modern culture. The 57 year old man children got support from his wife’s parents as they owned some land along the river. Their living standard became better when their children grew up. He said “Illiteracy can affect the way of living. If we have knowledge or skill we can improve our living standard, health etc ”. His family places a lot of value on study as all his children went to school and now they can find jobs or run their own business which brightens their future. In Cambodia nowadays, education in the rural areas is a bit different from education in the city. As more roads and bridges were constructed, there was a dramatic change in families’ economic situation compared to 1979. After the war ended, about 50% of Cambodians returned to farming. The living standard is higher. For example almost every family has a motorbike now. On the contrary, “soon after the war we did not have even a bicycle”. Now people who don’t have a business or job have a difficult time.

As a woman said, “after my daughter came back from studying in Thailand, she was like a new person.

In the past she knew nothing, but after studying she improved a lot”. Her Thai teacher said, “you do not just learn about beauty techniques but you also learn how to behave in a good way to people. Before washing hair for the elderly, you need to say sorry first”. Based on the cultural beliefs that the head is sacred and one needs permission before touching an elder’s head.

“My daughter studied in Thailand until she got a certificate. She opened a hair dresser shop in Siem Reap. She thought her daughter might not be a smart girl as she had never been outside the country. But surprisingly, she completed her study in Thailand successfully. Some people have more knowledge than her, like one of her friends. Her friend was a medical worker who had experiences that her daughter never had. People who work outside of the house are stronger. She said, “Staying in the house is like

being the frog in the wheel". Her husband said that sometimes he needs to ask his sons for advice before making any decisions. And he listens to their ideas. Even though the sons are younger, they learned a lot from travelling outside the country.

The family structure is very important, especially in raising children. She thinks she may be a little bit different from others as she was very strict in raising her children. When they were young, they were not allowed to go out with their friends for a walk. If there was a need to go anywhere, someone in her family had to go with them. If someone asks them for help in a wedding ceremony, the parents of the groom or bride had to help. They could not go anywhere without her permission. She said, "Being too strict like that, I made a wrong decision for one of my children that not allow her daughter to continue her studies".

Right after the Khmer Rouge Regime, she did business with the Vietnamese army. At that time, she had one old bicycle and a few grams of gold. She exchanged the gold for rice and traded the rice to buy eggs and cucumbers to sell.

Her elder daughter is in Australia and her youngest son is in the United States. A younger daughter and elder son are in Cambodia. Economic development is progressing, but poor people are still poor and have difficult lives. Religion has developed well; all people, whether rich or poor, respect and support Buddhism. Education is advanced too, but many teachers teach part time to earn extra money so students have to study part time and pay extra for tuition. In the past, the teachers didn't teach part-time outside their schools. Her second son is a teacher. He works in a secondary school. He teaches part time too to get a little bit of money to pay for gasoline, and he is very generous. People live in a peaceful and independent way with respect for each other. Now, there are many motorbikes and cars, so some children go out drinking and sometimes have an accident with hand and leg fractures. They do not follow the old people's advice. In the past her sons and a daughter went to school on foot as there were, no motorbikes or cars. The economy now is progressing and the social situation is stable so people are living with happiness and better welfare. The educational situation is developing and is more modern than before. Knowledge is very important for everyone so they can develop intelligence and occupation. Having an occupation is also very important for everyone. Through work experience, people are able to understand about society, environment and the importance of their job. Their living condition is also getting better in terms of "money". There are temples where older people can go pray and meditate.

For the family status, most of the young people are influenced by foreign cultures. They seem to have less respect for their elders, rules and the law. For example, they do not observe the traffic regulations. Some of the youth get into drug addiction. Now people have jobs and money. There are many schools and other services. People are nicer and happier. They understand better about health care. Everything is much better than before. People have enough food to eat even if they are poor. They can be with their family members such as children, grandchildren and share many good things. Her husband works with the Chinese Association. He is friendly. He made a connection with Chinese people from Taiwan so they supported Siem Reap Province by donating 260,000 dollars for flood victims. When he goes to Taiwan or Shanghai, he tells the people about Cambodia. Family structure is the same as before. The man is still the leader in the family. Many non-governmental organizations are providing support to the government for social development.

All the members in the man's family get on well and never have arguments or any problems because he is the head of the family. But it is actually the wife who takes care of everything. She said, "my husband does not know where a nail is". Everything is her responsibility including home maintenance. He will need to ask her if he needs anything or has any problems. Her husband is the head of the family, but decision making is shared. For example, if the husband wants to buy a car that costs a lot of money, they have to decide together before buying it. If the husband agrees to buy it but the wife doesn't agree, they can't buy it. If there is a parent in the family, they can decide too. Family members are often consulted as their experience is considered valuable. She believes that making decisions together to buy expensive things such as a car will make family life happy. Now the main decision maker in the family is her son-in-law. As the head of family, he resolves problems, mediates when family members argue, and is responsible for the family's welfare. Other families are the same. For example, if they want to buy a boat, a machine, or farm land, the parent is responsible for the budget and welfare of the whole family. If the parent dies, the head of the family could be an older brother or sister. They are responsible for supporting their younger siblings.

Now life is much better than before. There are many modern buildings. Telephone and television are making easy to communicate. Schools provide education from primary school up to bachelor degree. After the Khmer Rouge Regime was defeated, people live with happiness and freedom. They could travel anywhere safely. They have comfortable houses, enough food, good clothes, schools, high knowledge, good relationships, and good communication with other people.

Five years after the war, a man got married. His wife came from the river region and they have four children, two daughters and two sons. After the wedding, he worked as a public employee with a salary which could support the family. His wife worked as a dressmaker and did some business such as trading rice or goods. Since 1979 everything has improved. His family is not as poor as before and during the war. The head of the family makes decisions and he should be honest, confident and trust the family members. His two sons have their own jobs and are married.

CONCLUSION

The family ecological model served as the framework for this research and guided the interviews and interpretation of the data to describe the changes in the structure and function of families in Cambodia. This study provides knowledge about the lived experiences of Cambodian people before, during and after the Khmer Rouge Regime. Before the Khmer Rouge Regime, people lived with their family whether they were poor or

rich. Family structure and relationship is important in any generation, except during the Khmer Rouge Regime. The in-depth interviews show how people felt during the Khmer Rouge time such as sad, threatened, miserable, afraid and frustrated. The Khmer Rouge destroyed the trust relationship between communities. Family members were separated with limited verbal communication under a lot of unreasonable pressures. The Khmer Rouge killed many people cruelly without any consideration or reason. They forced people to work too hard in the fields without providing enough food to eat. People were starving and tried in whatever way they could to get food for survival. The Khmer Rouge treated people as if they were less than human. After January 7th, 1979, everything changed. The survivors of the killing fields came back to their hometowns, reuniting with their families and community. The six key informants understood that education is very important and they have tried very hard to support their children to study. Family structure was re-established; relationships and communication started again. Even though Cambodian people passed through extreme hardship, the family bond still remains. Family members often discuss important issues together such as wedding plans, education and purchasing expensive goods.

The history of Cambodian nursing would not be complete without understanding the lived experiences of Cambodian families before, during and after the Khmer Rouge Regime. This research study is an important component for establishing quality nursing programs. The responses of individuals and families from the time of the Khmer Rouge Regime reflects the needs and concerns for the development of the practice and education of nursing in Cambodia.

The combination of all 6 interviews into one verbatim transcription is a real and beautiful story. It is important that we understand this history and the benefits of the family ecological model to understand family structure and functions in response to changes in the social, physical and political environment.

In the aftermath of the horrors of the war, changes are creating new things and a readiness for the future. The new generation looks for more democratic participation in all levels of organizations. The recognition of the unwanted event, such as the war, will be a lesson learnt for the prevention of the unwanted event in the future. For gender roles in terms of women's status, overall men are likely to be more dominant than women, especially in making important decisions related to the family's finances and the education of the children. Education of people is the main variable related to the power. Even now, women gain power in the family only when they get older. Nursing education is one way to improve women's status.

REFERENCES

- Andrews MP, Bubolz MM & Paolucci B (1980). An ecological approach to the study of the family. *Marriage and Family Review*, 3 (1/2), 29-49.
- Bronfenbrenner U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723-742.
- Cambodian Council of Nurses (2012).
- Cambodia Nursing History (2012). Retrieved on March 23rd 2012 from <http://sites.google.com/site/cambodiancouncil/cambodia-nursing-history>.
- Chaiphibalsaridi P (2011). Thai Families' Strengths: Knowledge for Patient Family Centered Care. In the Main Session, "Innovative Models of Family Centered Care: Implementing into Clinical Practice". Paper presented at The 10th International Family Nursing Conference; Making Family Nursing Visible: From Knowledge Building to Knowledge Translation, June 25-27, Kyoto, Japan.
- Feetham S. (2011) Historical overview of the importance of the relationship of family to health. In Craft-Rosenberg M & Pehler SF (Eds) *Encyclopedia of Family Health Vol 1*, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage .
- Freeman M, Jacques C (2011). *Ancient Angkor*. Bangkok: River Book Limited.
- Green J, Tones K (2010). *Health promotion: Planning and strategies* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Lertsakornsiri M Chaiphibalsaridi P (2011). The relationships between personal factors, health care behavior, family strengths and health belief on cervical cancer. *Thai Journal of Nursing*, 60(4): 45-53.
- Liamputtong P (2011). *Focus group methodology: Principles and practice*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (2011). *Social study (Grade 8)* (2nd ed.). Page: 103, 105.
- Pender N, Murdaugh C, Parsons MA (2011). *Health promotion in nursing practice* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Roberts SL, Feetham SL (1982). Assessing family functioning across three areas of relationships. *31(4): 231-235*.

USAID, UNFPA, HSSP-2, UNICEF, JICA (2011). Cambodia demographic and health survey 2010. Maryland, USA: National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General of Health, and ICF Macro.

Wood GL, Haber J (2006). Nursing research: Methods and critical appraisal for evidence-based practice (7th ed.). New York: Mosby Elsevier.