

# Impact of School Drop-out on Secondary School Students on Social Development in Pong Tek Commune, Romdoul District, Svay Rieng Province

Mardy Serey<sup>1\*</sup>, Chhun Hong<sup>2</sup>, Sochorda Youk<sup>2</sup>, Sreynoch Mom<sup>2</sup>, and Boren Tham<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> International Relations Office, Svay Rieng University, Cambodia

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Agriculture, Svay Rieng University, Cambodia

Email: <sup>1\*</sup>sereymardy@gmail.com

## Abstract

Cambodia faces a significant challenge in developing a high-quality, capable, and productive workforce to meet the demands of its growing socio-economic development. However, many students dropped out of secondary and high school during the year. This study aims to investigate the impact of school drop-out among secondary school students on social development in Pong Tek commune, Romdoul district, and Svay Rieng province, Cambodia. The research methodology involved conducting interviews with 60 teachers who personally taught students at Hun Sen Pong Teuk High School. The result showed that some secondary school students still struggle with their studies. They have the highest travel expense deficit at 68%, lack study materials at 35%, and struggle to purchase clothes at 21%. The key factors that cause students to drop out include internal factors (health and fitness, carelessness) and external factors (poverty, employment, late enrollment, violence, migration, distance from home to school, and social concerns). These student dropouts have a significant impact on social development, leading to issues such as illiteracy, job challenges, and a shift toward vocational training. In conclusion, many students drop out of school for personal and social reasons, family problems, employment, and learning mismatch problems. After dropping out of school, most of them lack adequate vocational training, which makes it difficult for them to find a job due to their hard work and low income. We recommend encouraging the students to pursue vocational training to enhance their skills, knowledge, and morality.

**Keywords:** Education, secondary school students, school drop-out, social development

## INTRODUCTION

Cambodia faces a significant challenge in developing a high-quality, capable, and productive workforce to meet the demands of its growing socio-economic development (Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, 2014). This skilled workforce is crucial to sustaining Cambodia's economic growth and competitiveness in the near and long term. While Cambodia has achieved high primary education enrollment rates, several challenges remain (Ministry of Planning, 2020). These include: 1) Learning Outcomes: There's a need to improve the quality of education to ensure students are acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills, 2) Secondary Education Completion: Encouraging more students to complete secondary education is essential as it provides the foundation for acquiring further skills and knowledge, and 3) Higher Education Quality: Improving the quality of higher education is crucial to equip graduates with the expertise needed to contribute to Cambodia's development (MoEYS, 2021).

These challenges hinder Cambodia's ability to: 1) Maximize its potential workforce: A skilled workforce is essential for seizing economic opportunities, 2) Address manpower shortages: The lack of skilled labor can limit economic growth, and 3) Promote innovation: A shortage of highly skilled workers can hinder the adoption of new technologies across industries (Kunthor, 2016). A significant issue in Cambodia is the prevalence of human labor. Many students/youth, particularly in rural areas, are forced to work for a living, often in agriculture. These jobs usually lack skill development opportunities and can be exploitative (Ang Sopha, 2014). This leaves youth with little chance to pursue education, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities. Studies show that dropping out of school due to youth labor leads to a lack of skills, making it difficult for these young people to find decent work in adulthood (Serey, 2018). This unskilled workforce can account for a significant portion of the total labor force, hindering overall economic productivity (UNICEF, 2017).

The situation in Pong Teuk Commune exemplifies this problem. Lack of adequate housing or long distances to schools creates additional barriers for students. These factors contribute to a concerning high drop-out rate at the secondary level (Pong Teuk Commune, 2021). Dropping out of school has severe repercussions for both students and families. These include: 1) Limited employment opportunities: Without proper education and skills, students who drop out often face difficulty finding decent jobs, 2) Reduced knowledge and skills: They lack the necessary knowledge base and skills

to navigate a complex world, and 3) Increased vulnerability: Dropping-out can make students more susceptible to exploitation, domestic violence, and other social issues (Pong Teuk Commune, 2022). School drop-outs also hurt Cambodian society: 1) Skilled workforce shortage: A lack of educated individuals hinders national development by creating a shortage of skilled workers critical for various sectors, 2) Social inactivity: School drop-outs might become less active participants in society, and 3) Reduced competitiveness: The nation may struggle to compete with neighboring countries due to a workforce lacking the necessary skills in areas like language, communication, and technology (Dara, 2021).

The objectives of this study are: 1) to understand the current situation of secondary school students in the commune, 2) to identify the key factors causing students to leave secondary school before graduation, and 3) to examine the impact of student dropouts on the social development of the commune.

## METHODOLOGY

### Location of study

The research was conducted at a Hun Sen Pong Teuk High School in Pong Teuk Commune, Romdoul District, Svay Rieng Province. Pong Teuk commune currently has 9 villages with a total population of 7,706 people, and 3,994 females, equivalent to 2,099 families (Pong Teuk Commune, 2022).

In the education sector, there are 3 kindergartens located in 2 primary schools and 2 community kindergartens, each with 7 classrooms and a total of 123 students, 64 of whom are girls. There are 3 primary schools and a total of 869 students, including 411 girls (Pong Teuk Commune, 2022). There is one high school with a total of 23 classrooms and a total of 740 students, 401 of whom are girls. There were 36 high school dropouts, 14 of them female students (Hun Sen Pong Teuk High School, 2022).

### Sampling methods, data collection, and data analysis

The sample size in this study is determined throughout a given period. The only sources of information that will be questioned for this research study are the teachers at Hun Sen Pong Teuk High School and the students who left secondary school in Pong Teuk commune, Romdoul district, Svay Rieng province.

To collect the data, we used a random interview method to select a sample of teachers, students, and 60 students who dropped out. We design questionnaires to meet the information needs of each topic, including live interviews with teachers who teach and are familiar with students' situations, using both closed and open questions. We conducted interviews both during the preparation of the questionnaire and after a test interview to make necessary corrections. The interview sample consisted of a teacher who personally taught 60 students, with no predetermined schedule. The interviews were conducted from July 28, 2022, to August 1, 2022.

The analysis of partially collected data determines the percentage frequency. All analysis requires the use of computer software: Microsoft Excel and Minitab.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The current situation of secondary school students in Pong Teuk commune

#### - *Student family occupation*

About 85% of Cambodia's population is a farmer, despite progress in various fields. People living in rural areas, despite having a primary job, still find secondary occupations, such as farming and trading. Teachers report that up to 100% of the students' families are farmers. Private workers and traders make up 50%, while civil servants make up 41%. According to the 2019 Cambodian Census, 54.7% of Cambodians are farmers, which is lower than the results of our research.

#### - *Student family income*

Although about 85% of the population is a farmer, people still have other jobs to supplement their family income, whether they are primary or secondary. The above results show that the main source of income for students' families is about 83% of their salary, followed by agriculture at about 76%, sales revenue at 30%, and the lowest source of income is the labor force. Labor accounts for 15%.

#### - *Student family livelihood*

Changing the family's standard of living by working part-time and increasing income, health awareness, and contraception make the family economy more difficult. The results show that 61% of students have the highest standard of living, 26% are poor, and only 13% have the lowest standard of living.

#### - *Study expenses*

In life, a multitude of expenses arise, with the cost of family members' education constituting a significant portion of these expenses. However, parents strive to earn money to ensure their children receive a sufficient education. The result of the study shows that up to 90% of students' study expenses are sufficient, while only 10% are insufficient.

#### - *Lack of education*

While many students have sufficient access to education, some still struggle with their studies. According to the survey, students have the highest travel expense deficit at 68%. For part-time study, 35% lacked study materials, 21%, and 10% lacked in purchasing clothes.

- *How to find study materials*

Education requires materials and equipment for teaching and learning, and some rural students face shortages. Therefore, educators have devised strategies to ensure that students have an adequate supply of materials. The aforementioned results indicate that approximately 45% of students obtain their study materials through charitable donations, 20% through scholarships, and 10% through teacher-provided materials.

- *The number of students in each grade*

The number of students in each grade varies from school to school. Most of the student's transition is seen that they transfer from primary to secondary school. The results show that the seventh-grade students have the highest level at 88%, while the 10th-grade students are in the top 10%, the 11th-grade has 3%, and the 8th-grade students have the lowest level at 2%.

- *The dropout rates in each grade*

Most students drop out of high school because they are physically fit enough to work for a living. Studies show that the highest dropout rate is in the 10th grade, at 58%, followed by the ninth grade at 43% and the 11th grade at 11%. Grade 8 has the last 8%, with Grade 7 students having the lowest 2% dropout rate.

- *Implementation of school rules*

Compliance with the school's internal rules is an expression of discipline, good morals, and love and care for the school and the environment. Research indicates that school compliance stands at 92%, followed by dress at 82%, hygiene and environment at 78%, and learning effort at 30%.

- *Consequences of study*

In learning, there are always problems and consequences, such as a lack of study materials due to a lack of family life. Health problems Students do not have the physical or mental strength to study, and travel problems, lack of means, or difficult roads can make them late to school or not go to school at all. Studies show that students had the highest travel complications (67%), followed by health problems (57%), and the lowest (35%).

- *The focus on the study of students*

Individual learning is different; some students study only in class, others go to the library to do more research, and some should study more in class. Studies show that students focus on extracurricular activities, with the highest 85%, followed by libraries at 38%, and self-study at only 27%.

## **The key factors causing students to leave secondary school before graduation**

### **a. Internal factors**

- *Health and fitness*

Health and fitness are the main and most important factors in each person's life. When a person is in poor health or has inadequate fitness, it is difficult to study, work, live, communicate, and so on.

Despite being healthy, some individuals still suffer from the disease, necessitating treatment. In mild cases, individuals can choose to stay at home or purchase medication; if this is not comfortable, they should visit a health center or hospital. Studies show that about 68% of students buy oral medication for medical treatment, 38% for home treatment, and 30% for medical and hospital treatment. About 8% of students have a disability, while 92% of students are physically fit. For students with disabilities, the highest level of copying was 65%, followed by gestures at 23% and tactile learning at only 2%. The result reveals that activities aimed at preventing and eliminating discrimination against students with disabilities, such as creating a communication environment, participation and solidarity, and teamwork, account for about 25% of the total.

- *Carelessness*

Emotions related to the environment outside and inside the school make them less concerned about learning on time, and fewer obstacles keep them away from school. Research indicates that 53% of students arrive at school irregularly due to housework, 47% due to lack of transportation, and 38% due to challenging roads.

Friendship has both positive and negative effects. If a person associates with people who do good, he will be successful, but if he associates with the wrong people, he will become a negative person. Peer pressure can lead to a 70% dropout rate, followed by carelessness at 58%, drug addiction at 25%, and social misconduct.

### **b. External factors**

- *Poverty*

Family poverty factors are a major factor that hinders students' education. Although sometimes students are willing to study, family economic factors cannot support the decision to drop out. Research indicates that 57% of poor students are between 20 and 20%, 32% are between 20 and 30%, 10% are between 0 and 10%, and 2% are between 50 and 60%.

The problem of student poverty makes it possible for them to drop out of school, so there must be the involvement of schools, social organizations, charities, and teachers themselves to help them be able to continue their education. The

results show that the poorest students can continue their education with 88% of the highest scholarship applications, followed by 73% of charitable donations and 33% of the teacher's ability to provide scholarships.

- *Employment*

The reasons for leaving school to work are numerous. In the age of globalization and civility, modern materialism has captivated the interest of young people. Therefore, some young people may be influenced by their neighbors' income, leading them to abandon their studies and seek employment to generate the necessary funds to purchase these materials. Others enter the workforce to provide financial support for their parents or families. According to the graphic above, which illustrates the reasons people drop out of school to work to earn a living, families account for the highest percentage at 80%, followed by individuals who work in the village at about 37%, and those who work to support their parents at about 32%. Only about 32% work to earn money to purchase consumer goods.

What kind of work should the students do when they drop out? The results show that 98% of the highest dropout students are workers, followed by construction workers at 33%, company employees at 23%, and about 12% of traders with lower rates. Regarding housework, the results show that students divide homework and study in their free time by the highest (68%), and on the weekend by about 62%, while helping with light daily chores is only 20%.

Lack of domestic work affects education. Students spend their time helping with household chores that some of their families need. Therefore, it affects their studies. According to the graphical results, the shortage of domestic workers affects education, leaving students dropping out with the highest rate of 60%, followed by a lack of compulsory work at 38% and a low rate of illiteracy at 27%.

- *Late enrollment*

Despite the current media coverage and notifications of student enrollment time and age, some students are still late for school. This is because some parents either lack the time or the financial means to send their children to school, while others may not be well-informed about their children's school age. Being late for school makes them feel ashamed, humiliated, and uneducated, causing them to drop out of school. The results indicate that parents not knowing their children's age, a lack of financial resources, and a lack of time to send their children to school account for the highest rate of late arrivals at 70%. At 35%, the school has the lowest rate. Late enrollment has an impact. The results demonstrate that shyness is more common among students who arrive late to school, with a higher rate of 87% and a classmate rate of 50%, followed by a large group rate of 35% and a classmate rate of 10%. The lowest rate is 10%. Prevention of late enrollment through outreach has the highest rate of 95%, followed by information through senior students at 18% while making the effort to learn about 22% and 3% increase kindergarten.

- *Violence*

Violence also persists in the families of students, leading them to lose their sense of warmth, feel ashamed to study, and not want to attend school. Guardianship, alcoholism, inconsistent living conditions, and the family economy continue to be factors that contribute to violence. Reducing and eliminating violence requires the involvement of student families (primary causes), local authorities, and community support. Studies show that about 13% of students' teachers have domestic violence, and 87% are non-violent.

The factors that lead to the highest rate of violence are 22% with less education, followed by 17% of poor families and 13% of disparate family members, while parents with alcohol have the lowest rate of about 13%. The results indicate that violence impacts approximately 70% of students, which is followed by a dropout rate of approximately 33%, a dropout rate of 20%, and a final factor of 13%. Below 13%, they feel ashamed of their classmates.

- *Migration*

There are approximately 28.33% of students who migrate and 71.67% who do not migrate. The highest migration factor, at 72%, was migration to work, followed by family living at 52% and continuing education at the lowest 7%.

- *Distance from home to school*

The distance to school with the highest rate is between 5 and 10 km, or about 70%, and the distance between 2 and 5 km is about 53%. The lowest distance, at 13%, is between 0 and 2 km. The results show that approximately 85% of students have access to bicycles, 82% ride motorcycles to school, and only 15% walk to school for the students that the house is near the school.

Lack of transportation results in students arriving late to school at a rate of 100%, feeling exhausted at 47%, and feeling unsafe at a rate of about 25% (Serey et al., 2022).

- *Social concerns (Covid-19)*

The results show that problems encountered during the 19-year-old disease make it difficult for students to study online at the highest rate of 87%, while the number of underprivileged and poor students is about 62%. About 18% of students failed the exam, and about 15% did not study. During the teacher's coverage period, the dropout rate ranged from 20 to 30%, with the highest rate being about 70%. Following this, students dropped out between 0 and 10%, accounting for about 18%, and between 10 and 20%, accounting for about 17%.

## **The impact of student dropouts on the social development of the commune**

- *Illiteracy*

The study reveals that the consequences of illiteracy lead to a higher rate of people working with force (75%), a higher vulnerability to cheating (72%), and a lower rate for others (33% of them) who find it difficult to communicate.

- *Job challenges*

Studies show that the challenges of low-paying jobs are about 83%, followed by a lack of employment capacity of about 72% and a narrow labor market of about 42%. The problem they face while working is low pay, which has the highest rate at 68%, followed by hard work at 63%, overtime at 38%, and similar rates. This accounts for 37% of people who work without days off, while the problem of late pay has the lowest rate at only 23%.

- *Trend to vocational training*

The results indicate that approximately 37% of students who studied agricultural techniques acquired skills in cutting clothes, 13% in repairing machinery, 10% in repairing mobile phones, and 8% in embellishment. In addition, 3% have electronics repair skills, and the lowest 2% have electrical wiring skills. In vocational schools, approximately 27% of students pursued vocational training, with the community following closely behind at about 22%. Learning in shops or services is about 17% while learning in departments is about 13%. Learning at the regional center is 5% while learning at the lowest repair garage is only about 2%.

Those who have learned the most professional skills earn between 80 and 120 thousand rials per month, or about 32%; between 40 and 80 thousand rials per month, about 13%; and between 120 and 160 thousand rials per month, about 7%. The lowest income ranges from about 3% to less than 400,000 rials per month. The highest income for those who did not study professional skills is between 40 and 800 thousand rials per month (55%), followed by between 80 and 120 thousand rials per month (about 23%), and less than 400,000 rials per month (about 18%).

## CONCLUSION

After conducting the research, we can conclude that the majority of students are middle-class and affluent, according to teachers' observation, teaching, and learning. Students drop out of school for personal and social reasons (Covid-19). The main reasons for students dropping out of school are family problems, wanting to work for their own money, learning mismatches, depression, lack of labor in the family, students, road problems, and transportation. Delays in school attendance and incidents of violence against students often lead to feelings of shame and a high rate of dropouts. Covid-19 also has consequences for online learning; some students lack access to study materials, resulting in a 20–30% reduction in the gap between students and teachers and between students and schools. There is a lack of facilities, resources, and career and life councils that possess diverse skills to serve as a foundation for work and offer feedback on students' lives. The majority of students who drop out of school find employment as factory workers, construction workers, or agricultural workers, as they have not yet reached working age. In particular, after dropping out of school, most of them lack adequate vocational training, which makes it difficult for them to find a job due to hard work and low income. Conversely, those who have learned their vocational skills can find a decent job and earn money.

Based on the results of previous research, our team recommends the following: After ninth grade, students should encourage their parents to continue their education. This is because a lack of education can hinder their ability to find employment, contribute to society, and provide them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and income. Less thinking is limited, susceptible to deception, and can lead to inactivity in the family and society, resulting in a shortage of human resources to contribute to national development. Schools should establish career and career counseling councils that allow people to discuss life lessons from teachers in their lives. In addition, schools should increase the attractiveness of the environment, student work, sports competitions, and discussion forums on various topics so that students can participate in joint activities, and joint research, and increase solidarity. Institutions within the Royal Government and non-governmental organizations create projects to teach life and career skills to students that make them want to come to school and apply in their free time. The Royal Government should increase the provision of additional scholarships to students who cannot continue their studies and should encourage and increase the salaries of teachers to the current situation in society so that they are encouraged to teach students. The next generation of scholars should examine the effects and studies within the framework of COVID-19 to further their research with greater clarity and detail.

## REFERENCES

1. Ang Sopha, C. S. and G. C. (2014). The right to education in Cambodia on community-level education. *Educational Partnership of NGOs*, 38.
2. Dara, V. (2021, January 28). Adult literacy in Cambodia has increased over the past 11 years. *Phnom Penh Post*, 1.
3. Hun Sen Pong Teuk High School. (2022). *First-semester summary report*.
4. Kunthor, S. (2016). *ASEAN Community* (Vol. 1). Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
5. Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training. (2014). *Strategic Plan for Labor and Vocational Training Development*. MLVT.
6. Ministry of Planning. (2020). *General census of the population of the Kingdom of Cambodia*. National Institute of Statistics.
7. MoEYS. (2021). *Meeting report on the review of Education, Youth, and Sport work Progressive 2020*.



8. Pong Teuk Commune. (2021). *Work summary report 2021*.
9. Pong Teuk Commune. (2022). *Work summary report 2022*.
10. Serey, M. (2018). *Agricultural Economics*. Svay Rieng University.
11. UNICEF. (2017). *Brief research report on the impact on children of migration in the target provinces in Cambodia*.