

Domestic and international NGO workers report that violence against women, including rape and domestic violence, is common. Although accurate statistics are not available, one local NGO reported 138 incidents of rape and domestic abuse through October. Authorities normally decline to become involved in domestic disputes, and the victims frequently are reluctant to complain. Rape is unlawful, as is assault. Spousal rape and domestic abuse are not recognized as separate crimes.

Prostitution and trafficking in women are serious problems. Due in part to budgetary limitations, the Government has not enforced effectively a 1996 law against prostitution and trafficking in women although the Government devoted greater attention to the problem during the past year and initiated several prosecutions. Despite sporadic government crackdowns on brothel operators in Phnom Penh, prostitution continues to flourish. A survey by a local human rights NGO found that 40 percent of women and girls who work as prostitutes do so voluntarily, while 60 percent have been forced to work as prostitutes or have been deceived into prostitution. The NGO also estimated that there are up to 55,000 sex workers in the country. At year's end, the Government had begun preparation of legislation to decriminalize and regulate prostitution as part of a package of legal measures designed to address the problem of sexual trafficking of women and children.

On March 29, a Poipet brothel owner was sentenced to 12 years in prison for the 1998 beating death of a prostitute; this was regarded widely as the first successful prosecution of a crime against a sex worker.

The Constitution contains explicit language providing for equal rights for women, equal pay for equal work, and equal status in marriage. In practice women have equal property rights with men, have the same status in bringing divorce proceedings, and have equal access to education and some jobs. However, cultural traditions continue to limit the ability of women to reach senior positions in business and other areas.

According to NGO reports, women comprise 52 percent of the population, 60 percent of agricultural workers, 85 percent of the business work force, 70 percent of the industrial work force, and 60 percent of all service sector workers. Women often are concentrated in low-paying jobs in these sectors and largely are excluded from management positions.

There are a large number of active women's NGO's that train poor women and widows and address social problems such as spousal abuse, prostitution, and trafficking. An active women's media center NGO produces and broadcasts programming on women's issues. NGO's provide shelters from women in crisis. 🇰🇲