

**Title:** Living Arrangements and Child Outcomes in Cambodia

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**Short Abstract** (148 words)

Non-marital births and divorce were rare in Cambodia, but growing up without both parents was not. The 1970s mortality crisis left many widowers and, foremost, widows with children. We analyze childhood living arrangements with both nationally representative, cross-sectional data and longitudinal data representative of one-fifth of rural Cambodia. We find over 15% of all children not living with both biological parents, and over 40% among those having experienced parental death. A large majority of children nonetheless live in (intact or step-) nuclear households, or in multigenerational households which are more prevalent when children co-reside with only one, and even more so, neither of their biological parents. Living in household types other than these modal ones is most common among children living with only their biological mother (16%), or living without either biological parent (36%), especially after age 12 (49%), and may indicate weaker kinship availability for these children.

**Extended Abstract** (4 pages, including Table 1)

In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an expansive literature has sought to document the impact on children of the “second demographic transition” (See Cherlin 1999 for a review). A few notable exceptions to the contrary (e.g., Park 2007), most of the evidence to date on the consequences of not growing up in an intact family has originated from Europe, North America (Canada and the United States) and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand). In Asia, however, there are clear signs of a “retreat from marriage and childbearing”—later mean age at marriage and at first birth, and higher proportions never marrying and/or childless (Leete 1994; Jones and Gubhaju 2009). There are also emerging signs of a “divorce of marriage and childrearing”—union formation outside of marriage, possibly contributing to childbearing outside of marriage, and higher proportions of marriages ending in divorce or separation (Raymo, Iwasawa and Bumpass 2004; Heuveline and Poch 2006; Xenos and Kabamalan 2007; Raymo, Iwasawa and Bumpass 2009; Cammack and Heaton 2011; Esara 2012; Gipson et al. 2012).

If these new trends point toward increasing proportions of children that will spend all or part of their childhood away from one of their parents, one should also consider that an intact two-married-parent family from birth to age fifteen or older might have only been the dominant childrearing environment for a transitory period rather than a long-standing norm. *De facto* cohabitation recognized as marriage even in the absence of a formal ceremony is not really a new phenomenon as documented in Thailand for instance (Cherlin and Chamrathirong 1988). Levels of marital disruptions have not been negligible either, averaging about 15 percent after 20 years after marriage (Smith 1981; Knodel, Havanon, and Pramualratana 1984). Contrary to possible expectation, divorce rates might have declined during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century rapid modernization of many Asian societies (Hirschman and

Teerawichitchainan 2003), in particular among Muslim populations (Jones 1994 and 1997), when early marriages were prevalent, but also relatively easy to break—for men at least.

With respect to the likelihood for children to grow up with two biological parents, the final main reason to consider the late 20th-century as a rarity rather than as the end of a long era is simply mortality. While precise past prevalence estimates might be hard to come by, in many countries, the increase in the prevalence of children not growing up in two-parent families induced by recent demographic trends is likely reversing secular, mortality-induced declines first, before new highs might be reached. The country that is the focus of this paper, Cambodia, is clearly still in the first phase of this sequence. Since the early 1990s, the country has enjoyed relatively fast economic growth, in particular in the garment industry (Chea and Sok 2001; Ear 2012). The sector attracts mostly young, unmarried women from the rural areas (Derks 2008). Away from the parental household, in which they would traditionally have remained at least until marriage, these “factory daughters” are feared to be vulnerable to premarital conceptions. The subject of much discussion and comments, such conceptions are still to be detected in demographic data. Divorce rates are easier to track, and rising though they are, they remain relatively low (Heuveline and Poch 2006). Extensive, labour-related migration is not limited to unmarried females, however, and in fact, most of the country’s rural areas experience substantial outmigration (National Committee for Population and Development 2009). However, its potential disruptive influence on traditional family life has not been well documented yet.

In this paper, we will use nationally-representative cross-sectional data (the 2004 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey or CSES 2004), and longitudinal data from the Mekong Integrated Population-Registration Areas of Cambodia (MIPRAoC) project, which is only representative of the rural population of the Mekong River Valley, which itself accounts for about 20% of the rural households in the country. Based on these data, we have been able to

estimate the prevalence of children under age 18 who are not living with both biological parents. Although MIPRAoC was not designed to be fully nationally representative, the estimates obtained from the different sources are relatively close. According to the CSES, 82.5% of children under 18 live with both parents. In MIPRAoC, the estimate is slightly larger and increasing: 83.9% in 2008 and 84.6% in 2010.

Although the results may seem surprising in the context of the expected diffusion of second-demographic-transition trends, we suspect that this opposite trend relates to the decline in adult mortality and that the decline in orphanhood outweighs possible increases in divorce or non-marital childbearing. Further investigation of MIPRAoC Round-1 data shows that 93.3% of children under age 18 still have both parents. On the other hand, 41.5% of children not living with both parents have experienced parental death, and over one-third (34.1%) of children not living with both parents do not have another biological parent living elsewhere.

In this paper, we will further study the living arrangements of children who co-reside with both biological parents, only one of them, or neither of them. In particular, we will analyse whether these arrangements depend on the gender of the child, gender of the co-resident parent (when only one is co-residing), and the age of the child. Table 1 shows our current estimates, showing that a large majority of children nonetheless live in (intact or step-) nuclear households or in multigenerational households, with the latter more prevalent when children co-reside with only one, and even more so, neither of their biological parents. Living in household types other than these modal ones is most common among children living with only their biological mother (16%), or living without either biological parent (36%), especially after age 12 (49%), and may indicate weaker kinship availability for these children. To confirm this, we will analyse how educational status (grade for age), and if out of school, employment status varies across living arrangements.

**Table 1.** Living arrangements of children living with neither biological parent, father only, mother only, or both parents, by age-group, Mekong River Valley, 2008.

	Living arrangement typology <sup>a</sup>			
	1	2	3	All
Age	No co-resident parent (n=1,200, 5.4% of total)			
0-5	20.3%	59.5%	20.3%	100.0%
6-12	12.5%	57.7%	29.8%	100.0%
12-17	10.7%	40.5%	48.8%	100.0%
	Father only (n=269, 1.2% of total)			
0-5	37.2%	48.8%	14.0%	100.0%
6-12	56.3%	35.0%	8.7%	100.0%
12-17	61.0%	25.2%	13.8%	100.0%
	Mother only (n=2,068, 9.4% of total)			
0-5	30.6%	49.9%	19.6%	100.0%
6-12	45.7%	34.2%	20.1%	100.0%
12-17	50.1%	28.7%	21.1%	100.0%
	Both parents (n=22,031, 83.9% of total)			
0-5	61.5%	24.2%	14.4%	100.0%
6-12	69.7%	17.5%	12.8%	100.0%
12-17	67.9%	18.5%	13.6%	100.0%

Source: Authors' calculations from MIPRAoC data.

Note (a): Type-1 households are nuclear-family households consisting only of children and parents, biological, step- or foster. Type-2 households are multi-generational households that include children, parent (biological or not), and grand-parents. All households that do not fit either description are included in Type 3.

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