CAMBODIA: EXPLORING VULNERABILITY TO SEX TRAFFICKING

OVERVIEW: Cambodia serves as a source, transit, and destination country for regional sex trafficking rings. Within its national boundaries, over 55,000 women and children are currently being exploited in this illegal sex trade which generates $500 million a year. Many are promised legitimate employment opportunities, while others are kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery. As women make up the majority of trafficking victims, this project aims to explore the factors that make women particularly vulnerable to being trafficked. Such factors include education levels, attitudes about gender roles and equality, access to resources, poverty levels, and financial agency.

METHODOLOGY: I conducted a “vulnerability” assessment in order to identify the provinces within Cambodia in which women are most vulnerable to sex trafficking. The indicators that I used are outlined in the table to the left. For each of these indicators, I identified and “flagged” the top 6 out of 24 provinces that displayed the highest “vulnerability”. I added fields for the “flagged” regions and selected those with the greatest number of “flags” (4-5 flags) to include in my composite vulnerability map. These are the provinces that were coded “most vulnerable” in 4 or 5 of the indicators. I identified these provinces as containing women who are most vulnerable to becoming victims of the sex trafficking industry.

CONCLUSION: This project identified the following seven provinces as most vulnerable to sex trafficking: Kratie, Mondul Kiri, Preah Vihear, Ratanak Kiri, Siem Reap, Svay Rieng, and Otdar Meanchey. With the exception of Svay Rieng, these provinces are generally in the northern and northwestern regions of Cambodia. According to this analysis, women living in these provinces are more vulnerable to becoming victims of the sex trafficking industry. The government of Cambodia, local non-governmental organizations, and international organizations must work together to target efforts in regions where vulnerability to trafficking is highest. In addition to directly combating traffickers through law enforcement, efforts can also be made to reduce specific vulnerability factors such as increasing literacy rates through improved educational systems, or implementing programs that help re-define social norms regarding gender equality. Such efforts may help empower women both financially and socially, and reduce their vulnerability to trafficking.

LIMITATIONS: In utilizing the method of “flagging” high vulnerability provinces, I equally weighted each indicator. Perhaps with more comprehensive data on the strength of various indicators (whether certain indicators have larger or smaller effects), I would have been able to more accurately weigh these indicators, which would have given me a more precise interpretation of vulnerability and a more accurate presentation of vulnerable provinces. Moreover, my selection of indicators may have been flawed, as I may have omitted factors that do indeed increase vulnerability to trafficking and included factors that do not increase vulnerability to trafficking.

The criteria used for flagging the provinces are as follows:

- **Financial Agency**: Most vulnerable provinces are those in which women have high levels of unemployment and have the least control over their personal earnings.
- **Gender Attitudes**: Most vulnerable provinces are those in which there are high levels of unequal gender attitudes and more violent male attitudes towards women.
- **Access to Resources**: Most vulnerable provinces are those in which there are fewest schools and health facilities per capita.
- **Poverty**: Most vulnerable provinces are those in which poverty levels are highest.
- **Literacy**: Most vulnerable provinces are those in which female literacy rates are the lowest.

Conclusions can be drawn from the map below, which highlights the provinces identified as most vulnerable.

*Some contain more than 6 provinces due to identical data among some provinces*