

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK STUDY OF PEKMI GROUP'S COMEDY PROGRAMS

BACKGROUND

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is supporting the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) to change attitudes and prevent violence so that women and girls can feel safe in their homes, in the workplace and in their communities. Under the DFAT funded Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) Program, The Asia Foundation's (TAF) Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence (PIPV) Program seeks to reduce rates of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by promoting comprehensive primary prevention strategies and interventions that reduce or eliminate specific risk factors and strengthen or establish protective factors for the prevention of IPV. These interventions will directly address known risk and protective factors in two identified areas one of which is negative media exposure.

One component of the PIPV project is to reduce violence towards partners (women) on TV programs that condone violence by producing, purchasing and showing it as entertainment. The project strategy and activities of the program directly support the implementation of primary prevention addressed in Cambodia's second National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women (NAPVAW II), which was endorsed by the Council of Ministers in December 2014. Particularly, outcome 8 "Media and Culture" specifically aims to increase '*media promotion of gender-equitable, non-violent social norms, images, and messages, and the capacity of media to report appropriately and sensitively to prevent violence against women*'. To address negative content that condones IPV, TAF has initiated a Sector Working Group on Media and IPV (SWG on M&IPV) to promote the oversight and regulation of media content among stakeholders through lead Ministries including the Ministry of Information (Molnf), Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA) and three Civil Society Organizations. On 1 July 2016 TAF tabled a media report to the SWG that quantifies and qualifies violence on television and what TV broadcasters and what programs contain violence against women (VAW). In addition, alcohol advertising and when it is aired was also reported.

The Asia Foundation, as part of the PIPV, has coordinated the monitoring of TV content on Cambodia's five largest TV stations (determined by market share), the inclusion of IPV/VAW questions in TV market rating surveys and technical assistance to TV broadcasters to reduce negative content.

This report on audience feedback is part of the technical assistance available from TAF to TV broadcasters and came about through a discussion between TAF and CTN in early January 2016. During that meeting TAF offered to conduct an audience feedback study of Cambodian television content (comedy) to ascertain audience levels of satisfaction with violence towards women. This study focuses on two Pekmi group's comedy shows aired on CTN and aims to answer the question as to whether a comedy show can be liked/enjoyed or is deemed popular **without IPV** content or harsh language.

To answer this question, the study examined 2 specific objectives as follows:

- To examine what aspects of comedy programs are liked and not liked by audiences; and
- To investigate the reasons why the audience likes or does not like the comedy programs.

METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in nature in which focus group discussions and observation were employed. Due to time constraints, only two Pekmi comedy programs were selected and used in this study with selection of the programs to be assessed based on programs considered to contain more IPV content than another. These two programs were purposively selected in order to compare and contrast with each other in order to answer the research question.

The total number of respondents for the study is 31 (17 men and 14 women). The respondents were divided into 6 groups with 5 to 6 members per group. Two groups were university students containing both men and women. The main reason that these students were not grouped based on their sex is that female students were believed to be confident enough to talk [and they did] during focus group discussions as they are young and educated. The other respondents were grouped into 4 groups based on their sex and socio-economic background. Two groups (1 men's group and 1 women's group) were from a lower socio-economic background (determined by occupation and education) and the other two groups (1 men's group and 1 women's group) were from a considerably higher socio-economic background.

Each comedy show was played and watched by 3 different groups of respondents with similar characteristics; university students, a group from lower socio-economic background, and a group from a higher socioeconomic background. Each show was played and watched by each group before a focus group discussion was conducted immediately afterwards. When each show was being played and watched, a researcher and a note-taker observed respondents' reactions to the show and took notes at that particular point in the program. This observation allowed the researcher to identify which points were liked and/or laughed at by the respondents. Before each show was played and watched, each respondent was asked to fill out a questionnaire containing demographic data and TV viewership.

All group discussions and observation results were firstly transcribed in Khmer language to maintain the original meaning of discussions and observation. Each group discussion results were examined for recurring themes in relation to each research objective. Then all focus group discussion results were compared and contrasted to identify common patterns of 'like' and 'dislike', and their 'reasons'. Discussions results were grouped based on sex and the socio-economic background of respondents to investigate whether there were common patterns with each category. Observation results were used to verify and quantify common patterns.

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PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The total number of respondents of the study was 31 (17 men). Almost three-quarters (74.2%) of respondents are between 18 and 35 years old. Among this age group, just above two-fifths (41.9%) of them are between 18 and 25 years old and approximately two-thirds (32.3%) age between 25 to 35 years. Another quarter of respondents are between 36 and 51 years old (Figure 1).

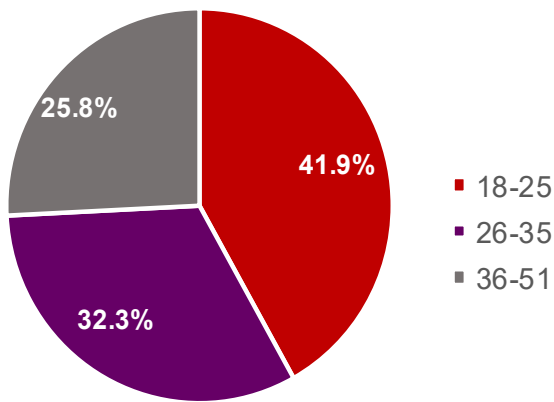


Figure 1: Age range of respondents

The majority (64.5%) of the respondents had higher education, and just above a quarter of them had secondary education (19.4% in lower secondary education, and 6.5% in upper secondary education). The remainder had elementary education (Figure 2).

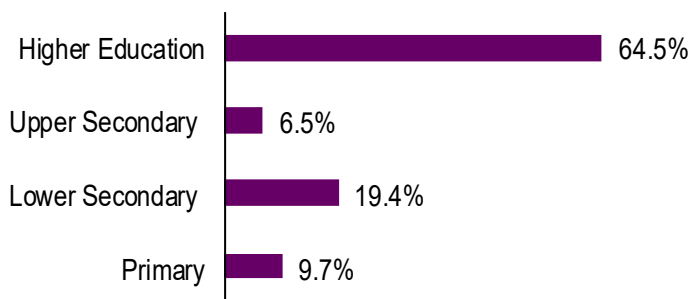


Figure 2: Educational level of respondents

For the occupations of respondents, two groups are students. For the two groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds, all female respondents are cleaners, while male respondents are farmers, TukTuk drivers and Motordup drivers. For another two groups who are from higher socio-economic backgrounds, the vast majority of them are from the private sector including banking, health, accounting, agriculture, and two of them from Non-Government Organizations (NGO).

TELEVISION VIEWSHIP HABITS

As part of the questionnaire asked before each comedy show was played and watched, each respondent was asked about their TV viewership habits. Linked to this aspect, about 80% of them had watched TV last month, and approximately three-quarters had watched TV last week. Approximately two-thirds (32.3%) of respondents watch TV every day and another 22.6% watch TV from 1 to 3 times a week.

PREFERENCE TOWARD COMEDY

On their perspectives towards comedy programs in general, 6.5% of the respondents do not like comedy programs (Figure 3). Some neither like nor dislike comedy (35.5%), others like it (41.9%) and some strongly like comedy programs (16.1%).

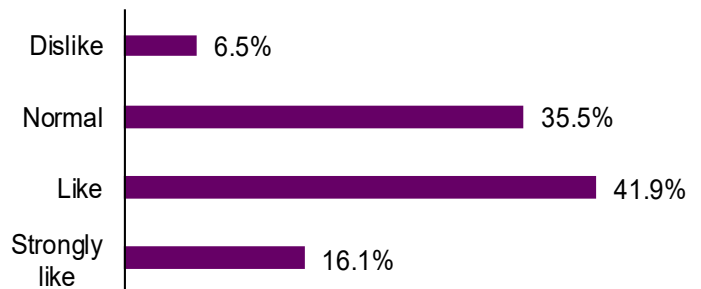


Figure 3: Respondent's preference toward comedy

When asked about the ratings of Khmer comedy more broadly, the vast majority (87.1%) said that they observed more good than bad things, while 12.9% said that they observed more bad than good things in these programs (Figure 4). When asked specifically about the different groups of comedians, 71% of them said that they liked Pekmi Group.

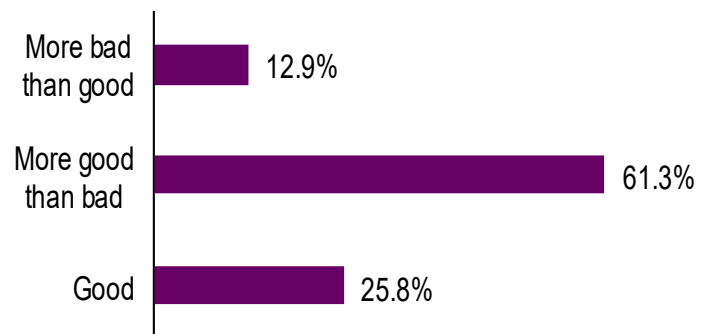


Figure 4: Respondent's feeling toward the content of comedy

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SUMMARY OF EACH COMEDY SHOW

As mentioned in the methodology section, two comedy programs were selected for this study, 'Dak Sruol Dork Sruol' and 'Kom Leng Eth Kith'. The former is translated as 'comfortably inserting and withdrawing' and the second one is translated as 'think before you act'. The summary of the programs is as follows:

DAK SRUOL DORK SRUOL (ដាក់ស្រួល ដកស្រួល)

It is a comedy show that advertises True Money services. It is a money-transfer service by using mobile phone. The comedy starts with a princess who does not speak to any men and boys, even her father. The king and queen really want their princess to speak out, so they ask one security guard to look for talented people who can make their princess speak. The reward for a man who can make the princess speak out is to marry her. The security guard has been to different villages to look for talented people. Finally, he has found two talented people and invited them to come to the royal place. One is a country man and another is a son of an Indian millionaire. The son of the Indian millionaire was the first person who voluntarily tested his talents to make the princess laugh, but he failed to do so although he used all his talents. The country man is successful in making the princess speak out and subsequently married the princess. 'Dak Sruol Dork Sruol' was the phrase that the country man used that made the princess speak. The phrase can be translated as 'comfortably inserting and withdrawing'. This is a sexualized phrase in Khmer, so the princess considered it too rude so that she spoke out. However, the phrase can be referred to also as 'easily depositing and withdrawing' the money, which is the message sent to the audience, a double meaning. The full length of this comedy show can be found online here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yodw3eEbnz4>).

KOM LENG ETH KITH (កុំលេងឥតគិត)

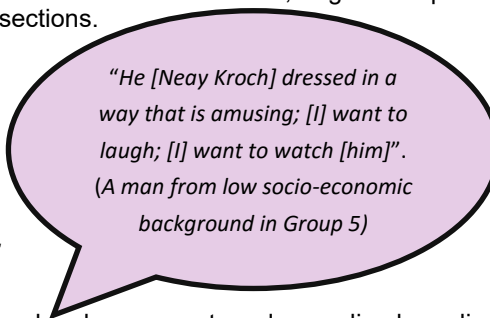
It is a type of comedy who purportedly educates the public about consequences of using an illegal gun. The show starts with a husband and wife who are discussing their reproductive health issues and who believe that the wife is pregnant. They were happy with this belief and then her mother-in-law came. The mother-in-law was also happy with this news. A male nurse came to the house and did a check-up and found that she was not pregnant. This news made the mother-in-law unhappy and she asked her son to marry another girl in order to have a grandchild for her. In the story a group of gangsters came to the house and committed violence against these 4 people: the mother-in-law, husband and wife, and nurse. After this violent incident, 2 of the 4 people told their story to Bang Thom (Neay Pekmi) and wanted to revenge on the gangsters. The 2 people were the husband and nurse. Bang Thom was told this story after he finished singing a song. An idea popped into Bang Thom's mind was to buy a plastic pistol to threaten the gangsters in an upcoming village ceremony to frighten the gangsters. It was intended that the group would beat them and win. Everybody agreed with the idea. The village ceremony started with three young girls who were taking selfies. Then the group of gangsters came in and saw these girls and then sexually harassed them. While the sexual harassment was happening, the 3 people [the husband, nurse and Bang Thom] came in and carried out their plan. Two police officers came to catch Bang Thom because he was using a gun. Educational messages were disseminated at the end of the show cautioning the audience not to use a gun. The full length of this comedy show can be found online here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFmHFwPbFTs>).

COMEDY CONTENT ANALYSIS

Through careful analysis of the comedy programs, this study can draw some patterns of humorous content, negative aspects, and recommendations. The patterns of each aspect are discussed in the following sections.

Humorous Content of the comedy shows

Some respondents felt happy or uplifted when and/or after watching the programs. They indicated these feelings through two ways, one of which is through smiling and laughing when they were watching the programs. Another way of showing their feelings is through focus group discussions. The vast majority of respondents pointed out clearly which aspects or points that made them feel happy or relaxed. The humorous content lies in three aspects: comedian's or comedienne's **gestures and/or facial expressions**, their **actions**, and **wording**.



"He [Neay Kroch] dressed in a way that is amusing; [I] want to laugh; [I] want to watch [him]".
(A man from low socio-economic background in Group 5)

For the **gestures and/or facial expressions**, messages or connotations of VAW, sexual harassment, and sexualized wording are absent, but they are considered funny. A good example of this is a scene when **Neay Kroch** appeared on the stage the first time in 'Dak Sruol Dork Sruol' show. All three groups, especially men's group from lower socio-economic background, watching this scene were laughing and/or smiling when **Neay Kroch** appeared on the stage even without saying a word. He dressed up as an Indian millionaire. The respondents enjoyed **Neay Kroch**'s facial expressions and his dress, and the way that he acted and/or walked.

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In the case of comedian's or comedienne's **actions**, a significant number of the actions making people laugh or smile are absent of negative aspects in terms of reinforcing traditional social norms (gender stereotypes/inequality or violence against women/intimate partner violence), and sexual harassment. One example is a scene in '**Kom Leng Eth Kith**' show. It was when a mother (**Yeay Tory**) and her son (**Neay Boom**) were dancing and singing as they were happy with the information that their daughter-in-law and wife respectively (**Neang Ith**) just conceived a baby. Another example is a scene in '**Dak Sruol Dork Sruol**' show which was when **Neay Kroeun** was sitting and bowing to the king and queen. Almost all respondents [all respondents in group 1 (male and female youth group) and group 4 (men's group from a low socio-economic background), and 2 of respondents in group 5 (women's group with a high educational background)] watching this scene were laughing and smiling while watching this scene. However, some actions showing or condoning sexual harassment also entertained some respondents although they criticized these actions in group discussion time. For instance, a scene in '**Kom Leng Eth Kith**' shows when a doctor used his flashlight to flash at **Neang Ith**'s skirt and her blouse. This action sexually harassed **Neang Ith**, but made about half of all three groups laugh and/smile while they were watching the scene.

Similarly, for **the wording**, a large number of words used by comedians or comediennes without reinforcing traditional gender norms or violence against women made respondents feel refreshed or happy. **Neay Kroch**'s wording in '**Dak Sruol Dork Sruol**' show is a good example of this as it made respondents smile and/or laugh. When he appeared on the stage first time he said that '*I am a child of an Indian millionaire*'. The way he said this word made all respondents in a male group and half of the respondents in a youth group laugh. A young woman from a high socio-economic background with high educational level in group 5 commented that '*the way Neay Kroch talked to Nila (the princess) and acted is hilarious*'. However, some words used by comedians or comediennes that made some respondents smile or laugh are also sexualized, but not necessarily reinforcing traditional gender norms. The title of one show itself (**Dak Sruol Dork Sruol**) is very sexualized and made a minority of respondents smile and/or laugh, especially when it was sung and spoken by **Neay Kroeun**. The word entertained all respondents in group 4.

Other than the humorous feelings, some respondents also raised some positive aspects of the programs that they liked referring to educational messages and humor. For example, at the end of '**Kom Leng Eth Kith**' show, there was a scene where police officers came to stop a fight between two gangster groups. The officers then educated the audience that using a pistol, even a plastic one, to threaten others is a crime. **Neay Pekmi** also acknowledged his fault in using this plastic pistol to threaten others. Respondents liked this message and were happy with the way these police officers and gangsters acted.

Negative Aspects of the comedy shows

Along with humorous content in these programs, a significant number of **negative aspects** of the programs were pointed out by all respondents regardless of sex, socio-economic backgrounds, and level of education albeit of different degrees. These negative aspects are linked to two aspects: **sexualized wording**, and **scenes containing violence and/or disrespect for women and/or sexual harassment**. For the former, they were used or spoken in a number of ways, one of which is in the title of comedy programs. **Dak Sruol Dork Sruol**, which is the title of a show, was seen as attracting the audience to watch this show as it refers to sexual conduct. This phrase was also sung by **Neay Kroeun** when he first appeared on the stage. 'He finally used this phrase when

speaking to the princess to make her speak to him. Although the phrase might refer to an "easy deposit and withdrawal of money" at **True Money**, a significant number of male and female respondents criticized this phrase. They considered that it could cause viewer arousal especially young men which could lead to negative sexual behaviour.

Another unacceptable word for some female and male respondents is **Lith** (licking). This word was used by **Neay Kroeun** when he spoke to the princess in a scene of '**Dak Sruol Dork Sruol**' show. A woman in group 5 said that '*I do not like the word [Lith]. It is referred to issues of men and women in bed [she referred to sexual acts]*'. Similarly, although a men group from a low-socio-economic background seemed to accept sexualized wording to some extent, they also acknowledge that the word 'licking' is sexualized and not appropriate. A young woman in group 1 commented that '*If a man used this word to me, I think that he would be an immoral person... I would not talk to him and I would slap him*'. In addition to that, a number of respondents raised some inappropriate words sung by Pekmi in '**Kom Leng Eth Kith**' show.

To conclude the humorous content, the study indicates that although some sexualized wording and actions sexually harassed women but made some respondents laugh, other significant numbers of non-sexualized words and actions without sexual harassment can also entertain a larger number of respondents. Through the analysis of both observation and focus group discussions, the study shows that respondents who respond positively to the sexualized wording or sexually harassing actions are men and older women from low socio-economic backgrounds with low educational levels. Also, it may be true for male youth groups just starting their university degree.

"I think that this phrase [Dak Sruol Dork Sruol] is not appropriate to use and it is dirty language. I have observed that Khmer comedy groups normally use this dirty language. When children watch this show [Dak Sruol Dork Sruol] or hear this dirty words, sex may pop into their head." (A woman in group 5)

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A scene when a mother (**Yeay Tory**) asked her son (**Neay Boom**) to marry another girl after realizing that her daughter in-law did not conceive a baby is considered as one of the **negative scenes or actions** played by comedienne. This scene was considered as reinforcing traditional gender norms (women's value being tied to her fertility; women are useless if unable to conceive; conception and children are the most important; it is a women's duty to provide a child in marriage and that women must be compliant to the wants of the husband and demands of the family) and may have a negative influence on Cambodian society. Two men in group 6 complemented each other that *'This [referring to the scene that Yeay Tory asked her son to marry another wife] is a big mistake as women are not a factory [to produce babies]'*. They added that *'Neang Ith [a daughter in-law in the show] is also a victim as she wants to have a baby but she does not have one, and she is pressured by her mother in-law'*. Another man from the same group added that *'This woman [Neang Ith] is under pressure from her mother in-law and cannot be independent...this [referring to the scene] reinforces social norms that women need to be under the pressure of family or culture'*. The same man also related this story to the reality and added that men are taught to suppress their wife and women are taught to obey their husband. If these norms are reinforced by comedy programs like this, it may perpetuate these traditional social norms from one generation to another.

Another scene criticized by a significant number of respondents is related to a scene when **a doctor used his flashlight to flash at a comedienne's skirt and blouse** in **'Kom Leng Eth Kith'** show. Men in group number 6 criticized that this scene is not appropriate and may have negative connotations to general doctors in Cambodian society. This criticism was supported by all members of group number 2 that *'The doctor's gesture is immoral and unprofessional'*. Similarly, a young woman in group 3 also commented that the doctor's behavior is immoral and harassed women. She seemed to indicate that women are shy to watch this scene.

A scene when a group of **gangsters sexually harassed three women** was also considered as a negative scene. A young woman in group 3 commented that these gangsters do not value women when they hugged these women and touched their cheeks (unwanted and unprovoked touching). Some women in the same group commented that this scene can have negative impacts on society as some young men may follow this behavior by assuming that it is acceptable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Every respondent consistently and repeatedly viewed that educational elements or messages are crucial in any comedy show. Also, they repeatedly raised some possible consequences of some scenes of the programs on society, especially young people. Therefore, a number of recommendations were suggested by them in order to improve these comedy programs as well as others. The intention of the recommendations is to improve the programs in a way that they achieve their main purposes in entertaining audience without negative effects on society, and in contributing to overall education of society. In addition, as is evident in the discussion above, viewers positively responded to scenes that do not contain negative images, messages or behavior and that comedy script writing without sexual harassment, sexually wording or violence towards women is achievable whilst retaining market share. Therefore, CTN may consider the following;

- ◆ Replicate or strengthen humorous content in a positive way by focusing more on creative gestures and/or facial expressions that are hilarious.
- ◆ Add more educational messages in every comedy show rather than reinforce negativity in society.
- ◆ Remove or reduce sexualized wording and/or wording reinforcing traditional gender norms or sexually harassing women and girls.
- ◆ Minimize general violent scenes and avoid violence against women/intimate partner violent scenes or actions in a show.
- ◆ Remove scenes or actions condoning or with connotations of sexual harassment.