

# Gender differences in mental health and well-being among Cambodian university students.

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# Cambodia

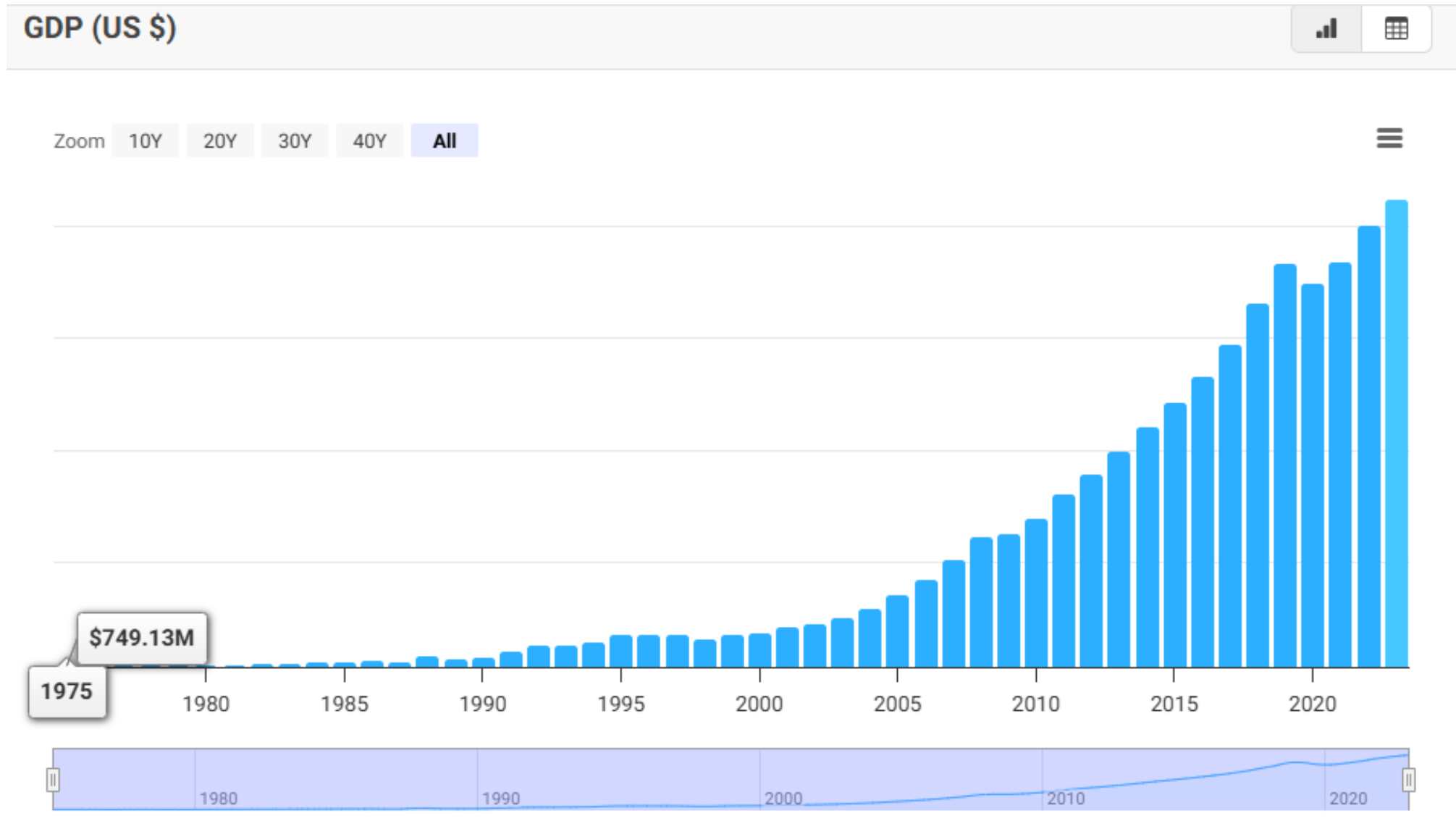


The cities circled by the red oval are the fields of the study. Phnom Penh is the capital and the largest city in Cambodia, and Battambang is the third largest city.

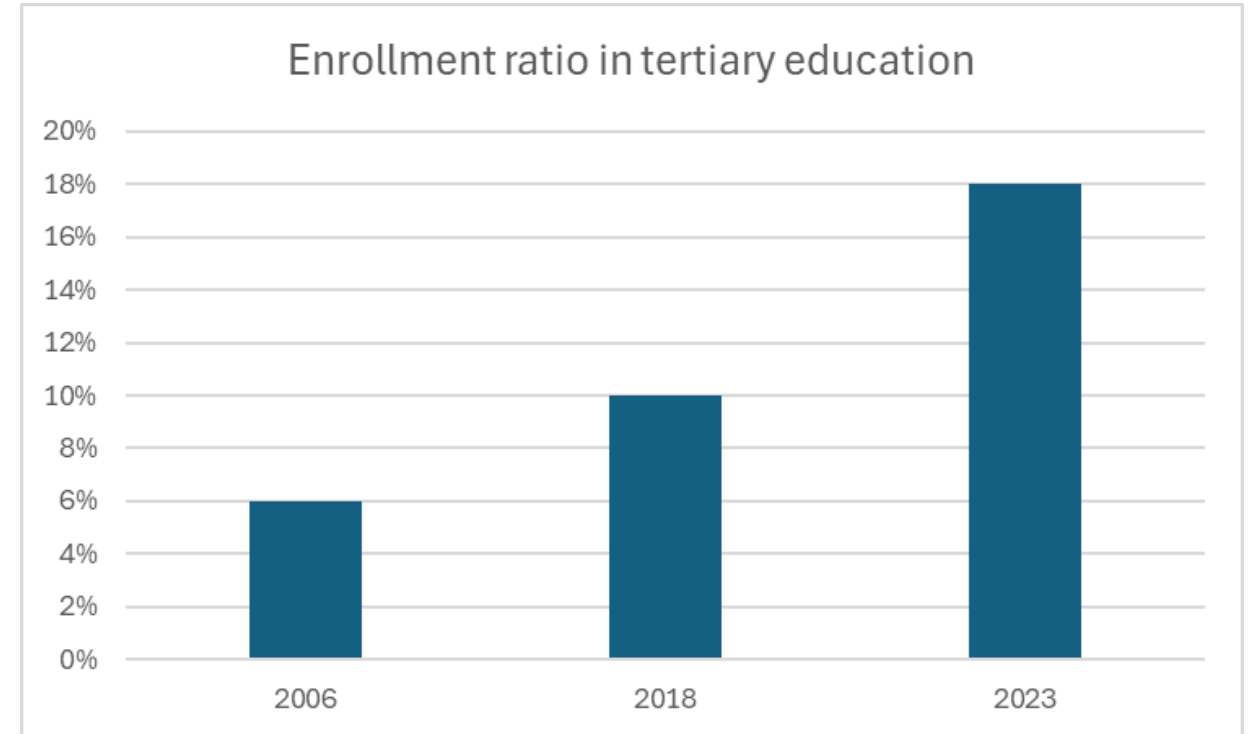
More than 95% of the population believes in Buddhism, 90% of the population is ethnic Khmer.

The Pol Pot Party took control of the country and imposed a proto-communist dictatorship between 1976 and 1979, killing an estimated 2 million people, including the educated classes.

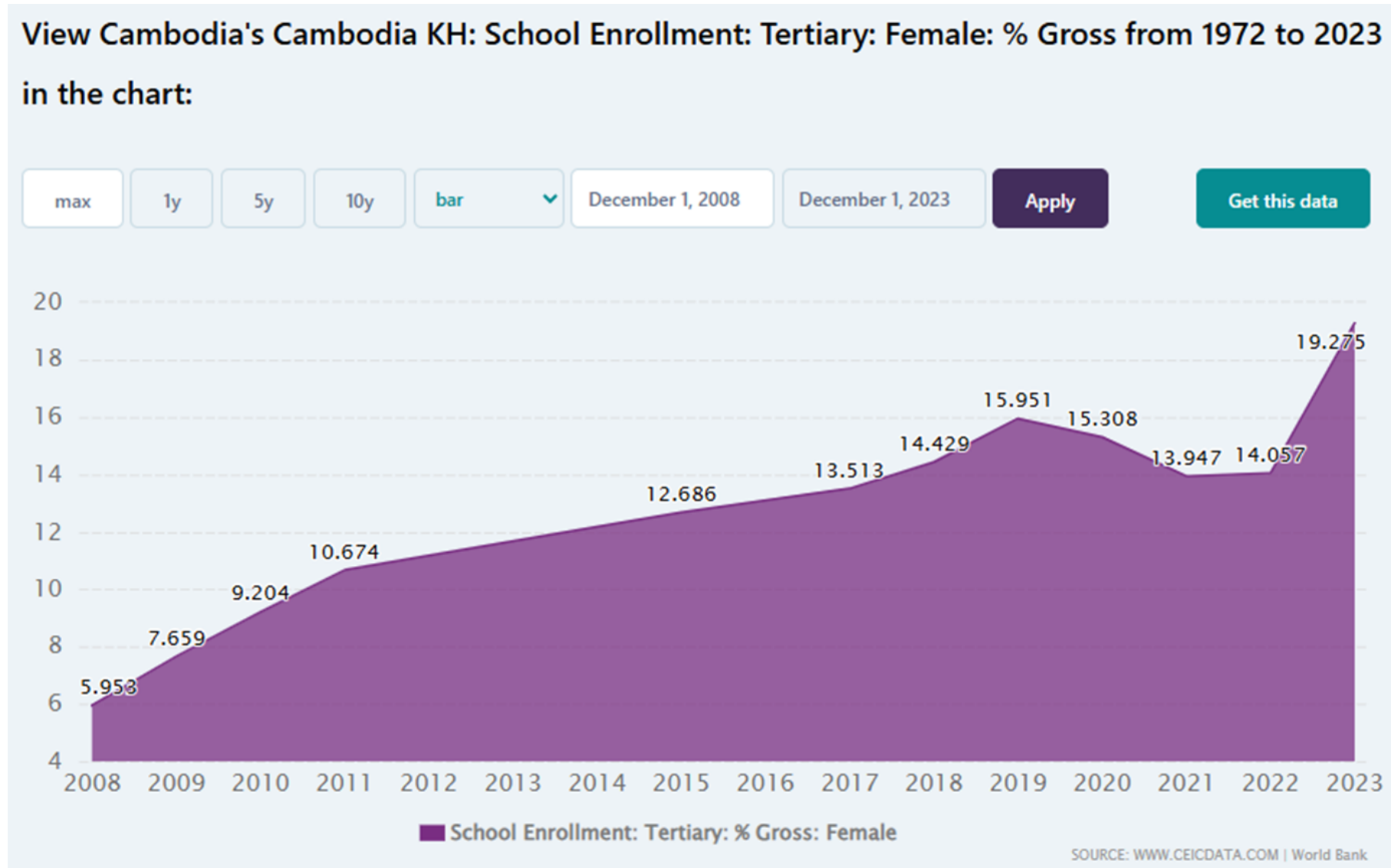
# Cambodia GDP



- Cambodia 2025 population is estimated at 17,847,982.
- According to the World Bank, while university enrollment in Cambodia is still limited to a small number of students, the (gross) percentage of students enrolled in tertiary education in Cambodia is increasing rapidly from 6% in 2006 to 18% in 2023.

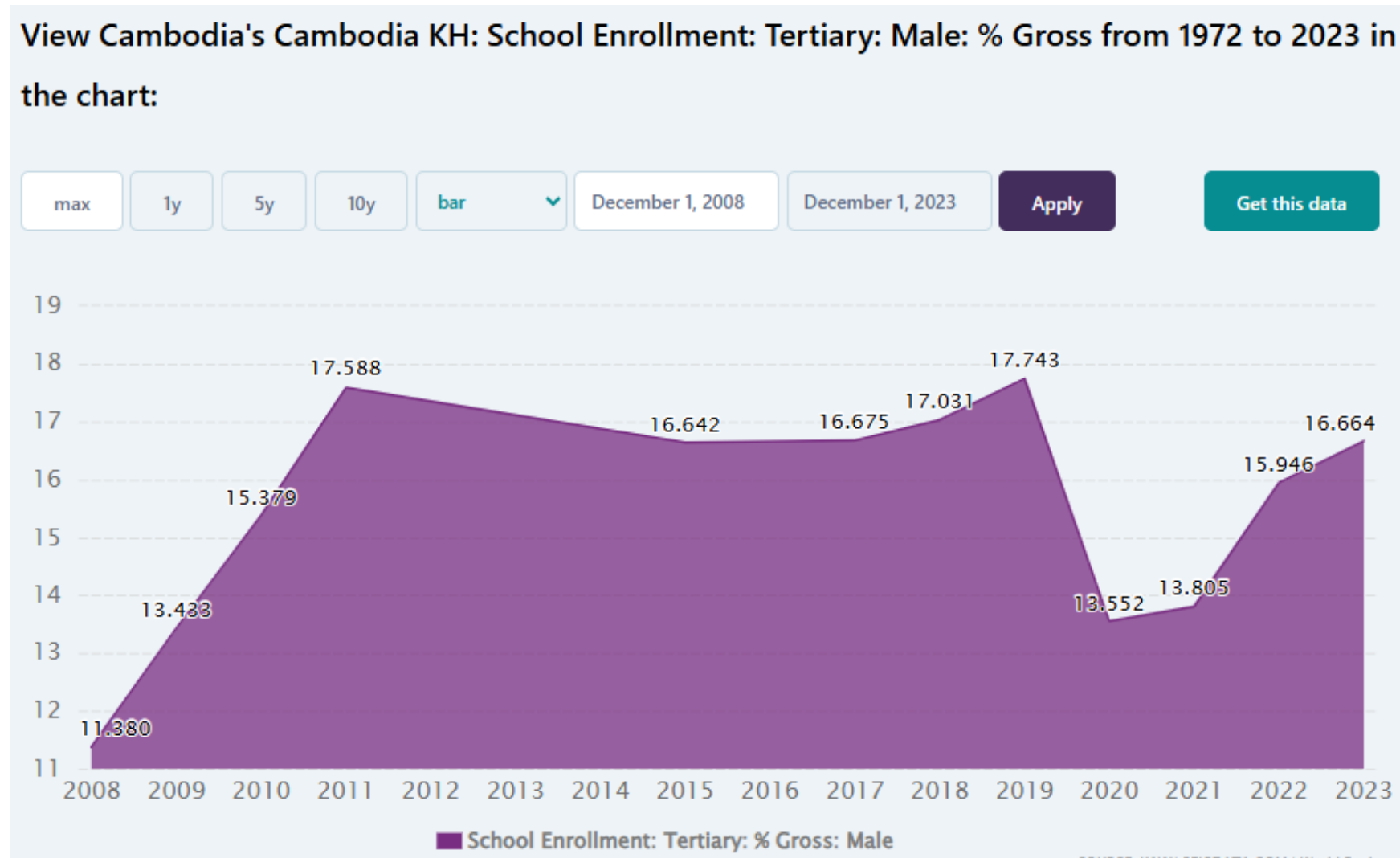


Female enrollment in tertiary education is reported at 19.275% in 2023.



(<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/cambodia/social-education-statistics/kh-school-enrollment-tertiary-female--gross>)

Male enrollment in tertiary education is reported at 16.664% in 2023.



<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/cambodia/social-education-statistics/kh-school-enrollment-tertiary-male--gross>

# Gender gap reversal in higher education

- The dramatic increase in educational attainment over the past decades was accompanied by a striking and puzzling phenomenon. As individuals stayed longer in school over time, females not only caught up with males' education levels, but progressively attained higher levels of schooling. This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as **the gender gap reversal in education**, already took place in virtually all high-income countries. It is also observed in a growing majority of low and middle-income countries. Although the reversal is becoming close to universal, its origins are not well understood.

(cited from Bossavie L and Kanninen O: What Explains the Gender Gap Reversal in Educational Attainment? Policy Research Working Paper 8303. World Bank Group 2018)



# Traditional sexual norms in Cambodia

- Chbab Srey – literally “Rules for Girls” which outlines the expected behaviours of Cambodian women.

“As acknowledged by the Parliament Institute of Cambodia, societal norms make women responsible for taking care of family and for performing domestic tasks like shopping, cooking and cleaning.

In the context of the garment sector, the largest employer of women in Cambodia, such attitudes have resulted in the unacceptable outcomes of over-representation in low-skilled roles, unequal pay and sexual harassment (CARE, 2017).”

(cited from The Phnom Penh Post.

<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/opinion/addressing-stereotypes-harmful-gender-norms-cambodia> 18 August 2019 )



Chbab Pros: On the other hand, men too are constrained by gender norms.

- They are expected to be well educated, high earners and the leader of their families. The chbab pros, in contrast, is much less strict and barely refers to a man's role as a husband. Rather, it promotes values such as courage, leadership, strength and respect towards elders.

Changes in Cambodian society due to economic growth and globalization have promoted women's participation in higher education and expanded their role in the market economy. On the other hand, there is also pressure to maintain the values and norms of pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodian society. Therefore, it is assumed that women receiving higher education are under multiple burdens.

- Evans-Lacko S, Thornicroft G: Viewpoint: WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student initiative: Implementation issues in low-and middle-income countries. Int J Methods Psychiatr Res. 2019;28:e1756. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1756>

Higher education is also widespread in LMICs. However, most college students in LMICs come from families whose parents have never attended college. Therefore, they expect their higher-educated children to elevate the socioeconomic positions of their entire families and relatives. This situation creates unique pressures for many college students in LMICs.

The SDGs include equality of access to higher education in target 4.3, and the realization of this target will ensure that university education is not limited to a few wealthy elites, but that more students from families with socioeconomic difficulties, and more women, will go on to higher education.

At least these three points are important when considering the mental health of Cambodian university students.

- Pressure to be expected to elevate the economic status of family and relatives.
- Economic difficulties
- Being a woman

<https://www.gallup.com/education/509231/college-students-experience-high-levels-worry-stress.aspx>

AUGUST 10, 2023

### U.S. College Students' Daily Emotions, by Gender

Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday?

% Yes

	Female students	Male students	Difference (pct. pts.)
Stress	72	56	16
Worry	56	40	16
Sadness	40	28	12
Enjoyment	72	83	11
Loneliness	41	35	6
Anger	26	24	2

Due to low sample sizes, results for students who identify as nonbinary or another gender are suppressed.  
March 13-30, 2023

GALLUP®

Demographics	n=827
Age	(%)
18 years old	2.4
19 years old	9.1
20 years old	19.8
21 years old	22.0
22 years old	16.6
23 years old	12.5
24 years old	8.2
25 years old or older	9.4
Gender	
Male	31.2
Female	68.6
Missing (excluded)	0.2
Religion	
Buddhism	94.9
Christianity	3.5
Muslim	1.1
Other	0.1
None	0.4

Financial difficulty in Family	(%)
Quite poor (1)	3.4
Not very well-off (2)	28.3
Neither well-off nor poor (moderate) (3)	66.5
Well-off (4)	1.6
Very well-off (5)	0.1
missing	0.1

Gender Differences in Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being -A survey of students at five universities in Cambodia			
Mental health and psychological well-being	Female	Male	Difference (statistical test)
K6 score: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale– 6 items (Higher scores indicate more depressed or anxious.)	8.54	7.39	1.15**
The SWEMWB score: Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (High scores indicate better mental health.)	22.72	23.49	-0.77*
In the past 30 days, how often have you felt <b>lonely</b> ? (Often/ always)	24.3%	13.5%	10.8%**
In the past 30 days, how often have you been so <b>worried</b> about something that you could not sleep at night? (Often/ always)	24.4%	14.7%	9.7%**
In the past 30 days, how often have you been <b>"thinking too much" or "thinking a lot"</b> ? (Often/ always)	30.9%	22.5%	8.4%**
At any time in the past 12 months, did you seriously think about <b>trying to kill yourself</b> . (Yes)	10.8%	3.5%	7.3%**
Do you agree that most people can be <b>trusted</b> ? (Strongly disagree/Disagree)	57.4%	60.6%	-3.2
How much <b>stress or pressure</b> are you experiencing in your current college life? (Slightly agree/Agree/Extremely agree)	68.2%	53.5%	14.7%**
How would you rate your overall <b>mental health</b> ? (Very poor /poor)	13.6%	3.9%	9.7%**
How <b>satisfied</b> are you with your overall present life? (Extremely dissatisfied /Dissatisfied /Slightly dissatisfied)	8.6%	4.3%	4.3%**

# Conclusion and implication

- Rapid economic growth and associated social changes have led to an increase in the percentage of females going to college and a reversal of the gender gap in higher education.
- However, according to various indicators, the mental health of females attending college is poorer than that of males.
- Women with higher education may be burdened with new earning responsibilities, college academic stress, and other burdens in addition to the responsibility for family support and behavioral constraints due to traditional gender roles.

Thank you very much for your attention.