Dependence for Independence: Economic Transformation and Its Implications for Women’s Perceptions of Autonomy in Cambodia

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For Female Garment Workers
Author’s Declaration

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my original work. It contains no material that has been presented for a degree or diploma of any university. To my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where duly acknowledged in the text.

Signature:

Name: Soheang PAK

Date: 21st February 2019
Acknowledgement

Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with it is a toy and amusement. Then it becomes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling him to the public.

Winston Churchill

How right Winston Churchill was. Writing this thesis has been all these things and more, a process that was already like fighting a monster of confusion when my three-year-old son’s pediatrician told me, “He has an incurable disease: Autism”. My world turned upside down. A new set of arrangements had to be made, and I moved to Melbourne so I could live closer to my two brothers who could help me at this difficult point in my life. I continued my studies at The University of Sydney by distance, while my marriage struggled and we had to learn how best to care for our son. I could not have dealt with these issues while completing this thesis without the support of others. It would simply have been impossible. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation for help and encouragement to a number of people and organisations. First, I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Dinesh Wadiwel and Dr. Elisabeth Valiente-Riedl, who patiently and thoughtfully supervised my candidature from start to completion. They have guided me not only by providing invaluable academic advice, but a strong sense of understanding, constant encouragement and care. It is my good fortune to have had both of them as my supervisors. I owe Dr. Wadiwel a great deal. He has been not just an academic supervisor, but often felt like a big brother to whom I could tell anything, and from whom I could seek advice any time I felt despair. Dr. Wadiwel – it is due to your support and understanding that I am now able to write these acknowledgments and express my sincere thanks to both you and Dr. Valiente-Riedl for helping me to finish this thesis. I also wish to express my deepest appreciation to Nikki Savvides for her great work editing the whole thesis.

I wish to thank my participants in Cambodia who not only gave me their time for the interviews, but who put their trust in me, allowing me access to the valuable information I obtained conducting this research by meeting with me not just once but two times. Thank you for taking part in the interviews and sharing so much fascinating
information about your lives and experiences. This thesis is dedicated to you. Likewise, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to CARE International, especially Ms. Pysal Eart, Ms. Kalyan Rath and Ms. Sokharany Koeut, who helped me to approach the participants. The participants’ trust in CARE meant they did not hesitate to participate in my research. I also would like to extend my sincere thanks to Ms. Bophana Ros, a female judge who has agreed to consider any issues the participants might want to raise both about their working in factories and their concerns getting involved with this study.

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Abstract

Economic empowerment is a potential strategy to improve women’s autonomy in the Global South. The emergence of export-oriented factories in urban areas, such as Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia, have created forms of low wage labour, such as garment work, as drivers of social, political and economic change. This study documents the experiences and perceptions of female workers in the low wage garment industry in Cambodia. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with a cohort of low wage garment workers, using a longitudinal methodology, this project examines how rural women’s migration to the city to engage in paid employment contributes to perceptions of autonomy in their personal lives as well as in their workplaces. The study utilizes the capability approach framework suggested by Amarty Sen (1985) as an analytical tool to understand whether female rural-urban migrants achieve capabilities and experience flourishing as a result of paid employment.

This study finds, in agreement with at least some current research, that women’s access to low wage employment does not necessarily contribute to their improved autonomy in the workplace. However, factory work contributes much to a transformation in women’s future work potentialities and personal lives. The women interviewed in this study gained autonomy in identifiable areas, such as opportunities for self-improvement by acquiring new skills. In relation to women’s personal lives, this study shows work in the garment sector can create a space for women where they can challenge traditional social and cultural norms by asserting their autonomy in choosing partners/husbands, renegotiating parental expectations, and reorganizing the gendered patterns of domestic labour within their households. This study also notes that strong social and cultural norms persist as forms of social protection, and therefore female rural-urban migrant workers cannot fully experience life outside those norms. This can compromise the potential of economic transformation to completely change patriarchal social norms and their impacts on the lives of Khmer women.
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**Abbreviations and Acronyms**

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFLI</td>
<td>Asian American Free Labour Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBHI</td>
<td>Community-Based Health Insurance</td>
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<td>CCHR</td>
<td>Citizens Commission on Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNRP</td>
<td>Cambodia National Rescue Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>Cambodian People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td>Contraceptive Prevalence Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEF</td>
<td>Health Equity Funds</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFC</td>
<td>International Finance Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPV</td>
<td>Intimate Partner Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japan International Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEF</td>
<td>Ministry of Economy and Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoEYS</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoLVT</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training</td>
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<td>MoP</td>
<td>Ministry of Planning</td>
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<td>MoWA</td>
<td>Ministry of Women Affaires</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCDs</td>
<td>Non-Communicable Diseases</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD-DAC</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGC</td>
<td>Royal Government of Cambodia</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>TATA</td>
<td>Trade Agreement on Textile and Apparel</td>
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<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN WOMEN</td>
<td>United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund, formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIAP</td>
<td>United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Steung Meanchey district, Phnom Penh. Lunch break – 11:15 am to 12:00 pm: The factory gates open, and thousands of female workers exit through them. They talk straight to the food stalls that line the streets surrounding the factory, their sheer number often leading to traffic congestion in the area. The food stalls are mainly mobile shops serving noodle soup, bread with meat, porridge, rice, sweet desserts, and various kind of fruits – both fresh and sour/spicy – and many other snacks the workers can purchase and take back into the factory. The workers make quick decisions on what they want to eat; they only have 30 minutes for lunch, and the food stalls can only park outside the factory for 10 to 15 minutes before they move on to factories elsewhere. The factories set the lunch breaks at different 10-minute intervals, and the owners of the mobile food stalls know the best time to sell their products at the various factories in the area. The female workers wear the headscarves required by their respective factories and dress in a specific way. The most commonly identifiable clothes worn are wide trousers or jeans, and blouses or colourful T-shirts. In these uniforms, the factory workers are not easily confused with other city workers. After 12:00 pm, the factory workers crowd back inside the walls of the factories, and the busy street empties.

Scenes similar to that described above can be witnessed in various places around Phnom Penh where export-oriented factories are situated. The existence of these factories is the product of almost three decades of the integration of Cambodia’s economy into global market-oriented manufacturing industries. As a result, the number of garment factories in Cambodia has been rapidly increasing with a number of problems such as poor, and harsh working conditions, labour rights violations, governance issues surrounding how Cambodian government tries to keep an existence of garment factories, striving period of female workers during global economic retrenchment, and current events of a number of factories shut down (ADB, 2013; Asuyama, Chhun, Fukunishi, Neou, & Yamagata, 2012; CARE, 2012, 2016; CCHR, 2014; Derks, 2008; Ear, 2011, 2013b; Eric, 2017; MoP, 2013; Sineat & Daphne, 2018). The number of garment workers in the country has increased from 600,000 workers in
2010 to 800,000 workers in 2017; around 85 percent of these workers are female rural-urban-migrants (ILO, 2010; ILO & IFC, 2017).

In Cambodia, where women, especially those from rural areas, traditionally must live according to strict social and cultural norms, with their mobility almost prohibited, women’s rural-urban-migration to work in the city represents a large-scale transformation. It reflects a deep economic and structural change that challenges and contests those social and cultural norms, which, as a result, impacts how women perceive their own autonomy. In trying to understand the phenomenon, this study aims to present a dynamic representation of this change based on the life stories of female workers who have undergone the processes of economic transformation and social norm adaptation. It also aims to show the ways the change has affected their sense of autonomy as Cambodian – or Khmer1 – women.

Srey Touch2’s story

“‘My family is not very poor. I didn’t need to migrate to work in the city to survive. But I defied my mother when I decided to work in a garment factory because it is a way to prove I am capable of earning money and managing my own life. I don’t want my peers to view me as ‘a frog in a well’3. That makes me feel inferior. My family doesn’t need my support as they are well off, but I don’t want to ask for money from them; I would value their money less than having my income. I heard of how tedious factory work could be before I decided to drop out of school and migrate here to work. My father asked me not to leave, but he couldn’t stop me. His worry that I might become a “rotten girl”4 wasn’t enough. I believe that being good or bad is up to the person, and cannot be the product of working in a factory. I told my mother I wanted to work because I knew I was not good at studying, and working could prove I’m mature, and that I can take good care of myself. So, I asked her to trust me. I also

1 Cambodian and Khmer are interchangeable. The work ‘Khmer’ is used to describe ethnicity, people, language, and nationality, while the word ‘Cambodia’ is used to present the country.
2 “Srey Touch” is a fictional name given to this participant in the study to protect her identity. All participants’ names in this study have been given to protect their anonymity.
3 Living like ‘a frog in a well’ is a traditional expression that metaphorically refer to a person who never exposes oneself to outside world, who is gullible, and who has less experience in life.
4 In the Cambodian context, a woman who loses their virginity or lives in a romantic relationship without marriage is considered a “rotten girl”, implying she has lost value and reputation, and cannot be considered as a virtuous woman.
promised my mother that I would not do anything that would ruin the family’s image or reputation.

I have savings because I don’t need to send all of my wage home, and have spent some of those savings on short courses on weekends so I can train to be a hairdresser and beautician. I plan to open my own shop back home when I tire of the factory work. I’ve discussed my plan with my mother, and she’s happy with it. My parents seem to be less worried about me now and allow me to make up my own mind when I’m faced with any decision. They just keep reminding me not to travel at night or to befriend unfamiliar people for my own safety. After working in the factory for a couple of years, I’ve realised I cannot depend on it for a better future because the on-the-job skills I’ve earned working in there hold no potential to earn income outside the factory. So, I view factory work as more like ‘a bamboo bridge’ that should be used temporarily only. I need to look for alternatives if I am to have a better future.”

Srey Touch is just one of the hundreds of thousands of factory workers in Cambodia, and her story but one amongst them. This story of rural-urban-migration and its implications for social change is worth examining. More than half of participants in this study who took migration to work in order to improve their economic status (the story of those female workers whose main reason to work is to escape from poverty will be illustrated in Chapter 5, 6 and 7). However, enhanced material well-being is only one outcome of this work. Srey Touch’s case demonstrates that factory work offers more than just the possibility of earning money. Her story suggests that engaging in factory work might not only be a strategy to escape poverty, but also a way to build self-worth and to realise self-autonomy. This sense of self-worth appears to have empowered Srey Touch to ignore her father’s objections to her migration. Thereby, it also contests cultural norms that have been imposed on Khmer women for decades, whereby their mobility and ability to earn an income are restricted. The phrase ‘when I tire of the factory work’ and her vision of having a business of her own in the future shows that Srey Touch recognises there are employment opportunities

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5 In rural areas in Cambodia where there are floods, bamboo bridges have been built to connect the roads when they are destroyed by water. Normally those bridges would be temporary. Thus, the phrase ‘a bamboo bridge’ refers metaphorically in a Cambodian context to a support that should be used as a transition, and should not be depended upon.
beyond the harsh working conditions of the garment sector. Thus while a range of structural factors – inequality, family responsibilities, gender roles – push her to take on factory work, Srey Touch’s choice to endure long, tedious hours working in a factory is at least partly to prove to herself that she will not be simply be ‘a frog in a well.’ The factory work might be temporary; however, it might provide great potential for her to find other opportunities for a better future outside the walls of the factory. Further, it is interesting that Srey Touch’s parents, whether they need her financial support or not, have changed their perception of her and her own sense of autonomy due to the factory work and her life in the city.

1.1 Rationales and research questions

The story of Srey Touch shows how gendered norms of ‘being a virtuous woman’ in Cambodia have been renegotiated and contested in the context of the emergence of paid employment and rural-urban-migration. Opportunities to work and live in the city, while undoubtably exploitative, also potentially allow women to access other opportunities for their future flourishing. These additional opportunities – such as experiences of living independently, learning new skills, and saving for a future to sustain their well-being after they cease to be employed in factories, and facilitate their ability to exercise autonomy in their personal lives.

This study will explore in detail the stories of young, rural Khmer women working in the garment sector in Phnom Penh in order to understand the factors and conditions that have shaped their perceptions of their autonomy within workplaces and in their personal lives. The central research question of this thesis is: ‘To what extent does Khmer women’s economic empowerment in the low-waged garment sector in Cambodia lead to a change in their experiences of autonomy?’ By framing this question regarding the extent to which this phenomenon occurs, this study does not seek to provide quantitative measurement of such causal relationships, but rather to capture identifiable areas of change in women’s lives as a result of paid employment

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6 This is a cultural norm that refers to a shy, obedient, resigned and stoic woman who most of the time stays home, focuses on house chores and caring duties and complies to the code of women known as ‘Chbab Srey’, I shall discuss this code further in later chapters 2 and finding chapters 5,6 and 7.
in the garment sector. In order to answer the central research question, five sub-questions are proposed, namely:

1. How do young rural Khmer women perceive their autonomy before making decisions to migrate to the city to work?
2. How has paid employment in the city influenced rural Khmer’s women’s decision to migrate?
3. To what extent does rural Khmer women’s participation in the labour force contribute to their experience of autonomy in the workplace?
4. To what extent does rural Khmer women’s participation in the labour force change their experiences of their autonomy at individual, household and community levels, both in their rural homes and in the city?
5. What are the associated factors, besides paid employment in the garment sector, that have contributed to rural Khmer women’s changing perceptions of their autonomy in the workplace and in the home?

The first sub-question intends to explore rural Khmer women’s perceptions of their autonomy before they engage in paid employment in the low-wage garment sector. It is essential to understand these perceptions at this early stage in order to trace the changes that occur after they take up factory work. In many developing countries, and certainly in Cambodia, living without or out of sights from their families’ support and protection conflicts with prevailing cultural and traditional norms, as it is considered preferable for women to have this support and protection (Ledgerwood, 1995). However, as this study will show, any reluctant women might have to leave their families is overcome by the economic necessity of escaping poverty through work, and the inter-related prospect of enhanced autonomy.

The second question assesses the impact of paid employment on women’s autonomy within workplaces. In answering this question, this study defines this form of women’s autonomy as women’s ability to stand up for their rights and dignity in accordance

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7 This study defines ‘young women’ as the participants whose age is between 18-25. This setting is derived from the United Nations on the youth population in Cambodia which is 15-25 (UNFPA, 2016). However, the age of employment is 18 in Cambodia, thus I have assumed 18-25 as a relevant descriptor for the garment workers I have interviewed, and this understanding of “young women”: is applied for the whole thesis.
with existing laws and regulations. In addition, the study will consider other factors that might affect women’s living situations in different environments, including the possibility of accessing new opportunities outside their workplaces.

The third sub-question, which relates to the implications of paid employment on women’s autonomy at individual, household and community levels, responds to an ongoing debate in literature. A number of scholars have claimed that the labour participation of women is an instrumental tool to accelerate women’s autonomy within their households, loosening pressure generated from patriarchal social arrangements (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Gage & Thomas, 2017; Ghose et al., 2017; Hussain & Smith, 1999; Koggel, 2003). For example, Anderson and Eswaran (2009, p.179) argue that: …a woman's access to employment outside the home increases her domestic decision-making power and control over resources.

Existing research tends to focus on the changes in power relations between women and their partners after women gain access to paid employment (Islam & Jannat, 2016; Leung, 2016; Sangappa & Kavle, 2010; Swaminathan, 2004; Vyas, Mbwambo, & Heise, 2015; Vyas & Watts, 2009). This study, however, shifts the attention to changes in the processes by which women make decisions. This study argues that although paid employment and opportunities to live independently, at least in some cases, might not be strong enough to offer comprehensive freedoms and equality; for example, full control over their own decision-making, and equal treatment inside and outside the home, it has surely influenced the processes by which they achieve those outcomes. Increased engagement in decision-making processes might appear as a marginal improvement, but it is in fact the tipping point of such changes that possibly signals further substantive changes may lie ahead.

1.2 The case study

As I shall explore in Chapter 2, Cambodia has faced a substantial economic transformation over the period of 1979 and 1993 and after the global economic crisis in 2008 and 2009. Cambodia shifted from central planned economy to a market economy in 1993. This coincided with Cambodia orienting itself to become a labour-intensive exporter of garments and textiles. While the sector was impacted by the
global financial crisis in late 2000s, it has since recovered becoming a backbone for the Cambodian (Ear, 2013b). The emergence of the export-oriented industry has attracted thousands of rural women into the sector since that period (ILO, 2016). As such, Cambodia, and particularly its garment and textile industries, provide an interesting case study for understanding how social norms that shape the lives of women might change as a result of such economic transformation. Khmer women have long been living under strict social and cultural norms that are patriarchal in nature. It has only been in the last three decades that Khmer women from rural areas have had the chance to access paid employment in the formal sector, predominantly in garment factories. Their situation illustrates how paid employment affects women’s autonomy and how other conversion factors such as cultural norms, characteristics of work, living in the city, and availabilities of support from government and relevant institutions might hinder or foster women’s autonomy.

Cambodia is a patriarchal society in which women are systematically awarded inferior status and power in comparison to men (Pou, 1998; Derks 2008, p.40). While different kinds of gender norms exist across many cultures and locations, Cambodia’s gender norms are unique in the way they are guided by certain laws or moral codes known as ‘Chbab’, to which men and women are strongly advised to comply. These codes are formally taught in an education context. Women’s behaviour is guided by the code of women’s behaviour, known as ‘Chbab Srey’, while men are guided by the code for men’s behaviour, known as ‘Chbab Pros’. The two codes are part of a series of moral codes or normative poems (Chandler, 1996, p.45), the best-known of which were composed by a former monk named Meun Mai between the late 18th or early 19th century, whose versions of the Chbab Srey and Chbab Pros are taught in secondary schools. Meun Mai’s version of the Chbab Srey consists of 227 verses written in rhythm or melodic form. The significant part of the code is devoted to how a woman should serve and respect her husband, and how she should behave in a specific way to maintain the relationship and peace within the household. The code strongly advises women to be silent, patient and resigned, and to show fortitude regardless of men’s behaviour. In contrast, the Chbab Pros, as the code of men’s behaviour8, is devoted to

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8 The Chbab Pros has not been extensively discussed in research or reports on gender issues in Cambodia (Brickell, 2007, p.99). Further, the content of the code for men’s behaviour is rarely quoted or referenced when men go against the code; this has arguably led to high gender inequality in Cambodia
how a man should behave as the head of the family. He is advised to avoid committing adultery, as well as activities such as gambling and alcohol; however, the *Chbab Pros* is briefer and arguably less rigorous in its nature and recommendations than the *Chbab Srey*.

To a certain extent, these gender norms have limited women’s opportunities to access education. The results of this can be seen in literacy rates, which among adult males is 84 percent, but only 76 percent among adult females. Women in rural areas, particularly those from ethnic minorities, are generally more disadvantaged than those in urban areas as they are kept from accessing education due to cultural norms and poverty; their literacy rate is roughly 45 percent (MoEYS, 2013). Gender norms say that young women are needed at home to take care of younger siblings, to perform household duties, and to support the heads of households; these norms thereby remain a major barrier to girls and women expanding their access to education and training opportunities. And it is not just young women who experience these barriers; low literacy rates and large gaps in education between women and men in older age groups can also be tied to the same norms, showing the persistence of the gender issue, which continues to present challenges to the development of Cambodia (MoWA, 2008, 2014a, 2014b).

Despite the persistence of restrictive gender norms, Khmer women’s lives are slowly changing. One unprecedented change began when Cambodia’s economic system was liberalised in the early 1990s; since then, Cambodia has increasingly become part of global market-oriented manufacturing industries that have created a large number of jobs for women in the country (Ear, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). However, in order to access those jobs, young women need to migrate from rural areas to urban areas – mainly the capital, Phnom Penh, on the outskirts of which the majority of factories are located (Derks, 2008; MoP, 2013). Garment work is frequently seen as a way of helping family members in the household of origin (Heintz, 2007), but as this study will show, it can also offer female workers in Cambodia personal autonomy.

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because men feel they can do whatever they want to women, and women, according to the code, are not supposed to challenge them. To do so can place women in risky situations, and they may face violence from men if they challenge their authority.
Over the last few decades, Cambodia has made some progress in improving gender equality. Since the 1991 Paris Peace Accord, the country has undergone profound changes, with its socio-economic indicators showing improvements both in terms of economic growth and human rights, with the exception of downturns in 2008 and 2009\(^9\) (Ear, 2013a). The Cambodian Constitution, adopted in 1993, affirms full protection of the fundamental rights of the Khmer people, including an emphasis on the protection of women’s rights. These include the right to equality before the law (Art. 31) and the prohibition of all forms of discrimination against women (Art. 46). Cambodia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 and International Labour Organization (ILO) core labour standards and conventions, including Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

After almost three decades of gaining access to paid employment, and substantial changes in legal protections guaranteeing the legal protection of their rights, Khmer women’s autonomy is still low. Cambodian society is still male-dominated, and Cambodia still has the lowest level of gender equity in Asia as measured by the Gender-related Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Index (UN, 2010). Cambodian women are also still vulnerable to different kinds of gender-based violence (MoWA, 2008). Few studies explain the relationship between paid employment and women’s autonomy in Cambodia, and this study aims to improve this understanding by using empirical evidence.

1.3 Research Methodology

As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4, this research utilises a single case study approach to understand the changing perceptions Khmer women who work in factories have of their autonomy, with a specific focus on rural-urban-migrants. While of low

\(^9\) The global financial crisis of 2008 affected Cambodia’s economy enormously. The immediate effects were that exports fell and about 71,000 workers were laid off from the textile, garment and footwear sectors; about 90 percent of employees in this sector were women, and the number of workers fell from 353,000 in 2007 to 282,000 in 2009, thereafter rebounding to 319,000 in 2010 (Dasgupta, Poutiainen, & Williams, 2011). There is evidence that the sector has continued to grow: recent data suggests that total employed persons in the sector in 2016 is 750,000 and about 80 percent are women (ILO, 2016).
explanatory power in terms of its generalizability and measurement of causality, a single case study is more promising than other approaches in capturing causal mechanisms among observed phenomena, i.e., how and why relationships take place (Gerring, 2007). Therefore, this methodology is helpful in answering the specific question of how paid employment affects Khmer women’s perceptions of their autonomy.

This study adopts the ‘capability approach’ as its main analytical framework, the detailed elaboration on the framework will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. The capability approach has been acknowledged as an approach to justice that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person’s achievements and freedoms to do the things they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2003; Sen, 2003). The concept of reasons to value is critical in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, since different people value different things, and this in turn effects how justice is integrated. This study argues that the capability framework offers compelling arguments as to how and why a person chooses to do or not to do certain things that may benefit themselves. The framework also allows for in-depth questioning of certain causal relationships without losing sight of why such inquiries are relevant to the broader question of how paid employment can impact an experience of change in women’s autonomy (Robeyns, 2003), with Khmer women being the specific women in question.

In order to make the best of a single case approach and the capability approach framework, this study also employs a longitudinal approach, whereby a cohort of women were interviewed twice over a period of one year. In order to examine the research problem, variables associated with measuring women’s perception towards autonomy are measured by making a comparison between female workers’ different stages of life. These stages include life living in rural setting, processes of engaging with factory work, life working and living in the city, and the implications of changes associated with working and living in the city. These variables are chosen based on the existing literature. There are many studies that explore these stages, but few that link the different stages to form an understanding of the issue. Further, there are limited studies of Cambodia: this study aims to understand the inter-relations of these variables in the Cambodian context. This approach was useful for tracking change, but perhaps more importantly, as I shall discuss in the Chapter 4, the approach was
immensely valuable in building trust with participants in order to collect in-depth and accurate information.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2 focuses on the socio-economic profile of Cambodia and the situation of female workers within the garment sector. This chapter briefly reviews the background of the country, gender relations that operate within the Cambodian context, and the changing situation of women in contemporary society in the country.

Chapter 3 analytically reviews current literature on the theoretical model of the capability approach framework, women’s autonomy and its determinants, and women’s economic empowerment and its implications for women’s autonomy. The key output of this chapter is an analytical framework that will be then used to guide the whole thesis.

Chapter 4 discusses the use of the single-country case study approach, and its pros and cons. This chapter also offers a description of the setting, research sample and methods of data analysis. Further, this chapter provides a rationale for the longitudinal approach employed, and how it was used in the research.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the main findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings of how young women in rural areas view their autonomy, and the indirect implications of the emergence of garment factory work in the city for young women’s decision-making.

Chapter 6 explores women’s autonomy and the conditions inside garment factories. Rather than focusing solely on how paid employment contributes to women’s autonomy within workplaces, this chapter also analyses related conditions or other accessible opportunities that attached with living in the city that may offer female workers other alternatives beside garment work to exercise their autonomy.

Chapter 7 analyses the implications of paid employment on women’s autonomy at individual, household and community levels, both in their rural homes and in the city.
This chapter focuses on specific decision-making processes that include: choosing partners, managing household finances, the household division of labour, female workers’ attitudes towards domestic violence, and the changing perceptions women have of themselves and how other people view them. Furthermore, this chapter will explore the social stigma that has arisen regarding rural-urban-migrants, why it is of concern, and how this stigma aligns with changes in women’s self-perception.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by recapitulating the findings from the previous chapters and offering responses to the main questions of this study. It then seeks to discuss its specific conceptual contributions to the specific context of Cambodia, as well as the wider literature on paid employment and women’s autonomy. Lastly, it proposes some topics for further research that may contribute to a better understanding of women’s autonomy.
Chapter 2: Contextual Understanding on Cambodia and Gender Norms

2.1 Introduction

Weiner (1976) argues that it is almost impossible to obtain any insightful understanding of the oppression of women in a specific context “until we first reckon with the power women do [and did] have, even if this power appears limited and seems outside the political field” (p.229). This chapter, in agreement with Weiner’s argument, takes a historical, social-cultural, political, and economic perspective to better understand why and how Khmer women have been relegated in Cambodian society. The main objective of the chapter is to provide background information on what are described as “conversion factors” by Ingrid Robeyns (2005, 2008). Robeyns in her analysis of Sen’s capability approach argues that there are at least three types of conversion factors: personal, social and environmental (refer to chapter 3 for more detailed explanation of those factors). This study gives a lot of weight to these conversion factors because, as my study demonstrates, it is the circumstances and material environments that facilitate or inhibit flourishing and affect Khmer women’s journeys towards autonomy. Further, this chapter aims to set out what is already known about Cambodia and Khmer women, and how the following chapters will fill in the gaps in that knowledge based on the primary data collected in this study.

2.2 Brief background on Cambodia

Cambodia is a South East Asian country situated in the Mekong Delta region, with nearly 16 million inhabitants and a total area of 181,035 square kilometres. It shares borders with Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Phnom Penh is the capital city. Cambodians are also known as Khmer people, and comprise more than 90 percent of the country’s population. The remaining 10 percent consists of Chinese, Vietnamese and other ethnicities. Khmer is the official language, with more young people increasingly also speaking English (Derks, 2008). 95 percent of the population consider themselves Theravada Buddhist (Marston & Guthrie, 2004).
Cambodia is considered a ‘post-conflict’ society given its history of violence and genocide after the French colonial era of 1863-1953 (Hughes, 2012; Ear, 2013a; Hughes, 2013; Biddulph, 2014; Milne & Mahanty, 2015). In the political arena, a major turning point in Cambodia’s history was the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), known as ‘year zero’ by Cambodians (Mydans, 2000). The devastation, the ruin and the mass killings during the Khmer Rouge regime were beyond imagination, with millions of Cambodians confronted with the death or murder of family members. More than three million people were killed, and Cambodia was isolated from the region and the rest of the world during that era (Stamme, 2013; Ear, 2013a). During the recovery period from 1979 to 1983, Cambodia’s economic system operated through Soviet-style central planning. However, in 1993, Cambodia transformed into a market economy. This transition was at least in part a result of pressure from international governance organisations such as IMF and the development banks (WB and ADB), in concessions made in exchange for foreign aid and technical assistances. In order to receive the assistance, Cambodia was required to shift its economic system from a centrally planned economy to market economy (Ishikawa, 2006, p.1). The change led to growth in the textile, tourism, and construction industries (Ear 2011; Ear 2013a).

According to a recent report by the World Bank, Cambodia is still considered a developing country, with an annual income per capita of around USD 1,000. Many social and governance challenges still persist in Cambodia, namely inequality, uneven spatial development, weak institutions and high levels of corruption (Hill & Menon, 2013; Hill & Menon, 2014). Its Human Development Index (HDI) is 143rd of 188 countries and territories. And, Cambodia has been ranked as having a high level of corruption: its ranking is 156th of 176 countries as per Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index report (TI, 2016) Based on reports by Cambodia’s Ministry of Health (MoH) and WHO (2016), in 2012 the poverty rate was 17.7 percent, with almost 3 million poor people and over 8.1 million who are defined as “near poor”, approximately 80 percent of these people live in rural areas, and the majority of this population are women (MoH & WHO, 2016, p.1).

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10 Please refer to Appendix 8 for more detailed information regarding Cambodia’s history.
2.3 Political, economic and social structure

In theory, contemporary Cambodia is a liberal democratic and pluralist political system according to its Constitution (RGC, 1993, p.18). The first national election was held in 1993 after the country had reverted back to monarchy under the second reign of King Sihanouk. The Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), although having lost the election, rejected the results and managed to co-lead a coalition government with Prince Ranaridh, the son of King Sihanouk (Mehta & Mehta, 1999). In July 1997, the CPP committed what has been described as an outright coup (Roberts, 2001). Since then, the CPP has stayed in power, and has constantly sought to weaken opposition parties. The CPP had its biggest election victory in 2008, taking control of 90 of 123 parliamentary seats. In the same year, King Sihanouk abdicated and named his 50-year-old son as King (Thayer, 2009). Until 2012, when a newly established opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), was formed, the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) was the only notable opposition party.

The fifth national election in 2013 heralded a downturn for the CPP, which won only 68 of 123 seats, with the remaining controlled by the CNRP. It was an alarming result for the ruling party. The CNRP gained more popularity as more Cambodians started to express their discontent with the ‘entrenched corruption, nepotism, and cronyism whose associated ills are social inequality, land grabbing, depletion of national resources, and the presence of illegal Vietnamese immigrants’ (UN, 2015). In response to these concerns, the CPP has initiated many reforms in all sectors, including public administration reform, improving the quality of health and education sectors, and increasing public servant salaries (Ear, 2013), while at the same time seeking to weaken opposition NGOs, trade unions and political activists through criminal charges of incitement, defamation and insurrection, including members of the CNRP (Rhona, 2017; Ellis & Handley, 2018). As the tension before the 2018 election built, the president of CNRP, Mr. Kim Sokha, was arrested at his home in late 2017 and the CNRP dissolved, leaving the ruling CPP with no significant competitor, and an easy election victory (BBC, 2017).

Despite these political tensions, Cambodia’s economic growth has been impressive. Since the shift from a planned to a free-market economy in the early 1990s (Ward &
Mouyly, 2016), the main economic reforms have been the narrowing of the size of the public sector through the privatisation of state enterprises, opening up the economy to international trade, and promoting domestic and foreign investment through liberal investment laws (World Bank 1999; UNDP, 2014). In addition, the Cambodian government has attracted domestic as well as foreign investors in the labour-intensive and export-oriented manufacturing sector (Lee, 2011). Direct foreign investment has concentrated predominantly in the garment sector; this is not unique to Cambodia, but is the case in a few countries in the region, including Bangladesh, Thailand and China. Investors target these developing countries due to the ready provision of cheap labour, as well as the unorganised nature of laws and regulations (Porpora, Lim, & Prommas, 1989; Wolf, 1992; Afsar, 2004; Alam & Blanch, 2011; Ear, 2013b). The Cambodian government has created incentives for investment through the provision of tax holidays for up to eight years, full import duty exemptions, no export taxes, free repatriation of profits, land leases up to seventy years, and no price controls or threat of nationalisations (Ear, 2011; Ear, 2013b). In addition, in 1994 Cambodia successfully integrated with the international trade regime known as Trade Agreement on Textiles and Apparel (TATA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Lee, 2011). In these ways, Cambodia has positioned itself as offering a cheap workforce in the region to attract investors (MoC, 2000), and investors are drawn to the garment sector, which relies heavily on a low-skilled labour force and, therefore, relatively low levels of capital investment (Derks, 2008).

Because of Cambodia’s poor physical infrastructure, including its railroads, ports and electricity supply, the majority of garment factories are situated in and around the capital city, Phnom Penh, where there is stronger central infrastructure (JICA, 2007; Kaoru, Kenta, & John, 2010). According to Ministry of Commerce data, in 2011, the majority of Cambodia’s 375 factories were located in Phnom Penh, a significant increase from the seven factories that existed in the city in 1994, providing increasing opportunities for female workers from rural areas (Sok, Chea & Silk, 2001; Sok, 2005). The gendered nature of garment factory work is clearly seen in the statistics: in 2012,
the sector employed 372,988 workers, with women comprising 91 percent of the total (ILO, 2012)\textsuperscript{11}.

Despite trade liberalisation and neoliberal restructuring, Cambodia maintains labour laws that should, in theory, protect workers. The current Labour Law\textsuperscript{12} provides the legal framework for the protection of workers and employees, which includes:

- \textit{Employment injury benefits:} Article 242 states that employers are liable for the medical costs and financial compensation of workers injured during workplace accidents. Benefits include a monthly pension in the case where a worker sustains a severe disability.

- \textit{Maternity leave:} Female employees are entitled to paid maternity leave at 50 percent of their salary for 90 days, provided they have been employed for at least 12 months prior to having a baby.

- \textit{Sick leave:} The Labour Law stipulates the entitlement of workers to be paid sick leave, but does not specify a minimum benefit. Enforcement is ensured through internal company regulations that are subject to endorsement by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (ILO & EU, 2012).

- \textit{Severance pay:} Employees dismissed by their employer are entitled to a cash allowance (indemnity of dismissal), the amount of which is equal to 15 days of salary per year of seniority.

While these laws exist, it is not clear how they are enforced. As I shall discuss in Chapter 6, many female workers interviewed for this study indicated that they didn’t

\textsuperscript{11} Besides moving to the city to undertake garment work, women also migrate to work as traders, in the service/entertainment sector and in the domestic sector (CPS, 2017). Women employed in domestic work are considered the most vulnerable workers. The women interviewed in this study who had experience as domestic workers emphasised the lack of mobility and freedom associated with the work, with some employers being very strict, prohibiting women from going out after 6pm; others described having no days off or break time except for special occasions such as Khmer New Year and Pchum Ben, when they were allowed to travel home and see their families. The women described their wages as sub-standard, and explained that their mothers would usually take their wages from their employers in advance, meaning the young domestic workers rarely received their income directly. Women also described situations where they needed to stay alert around male bosses, and explained that sexual harassment often happened because young workers were gullible and easily scared.

\textsuperscript{12} The 1997 Labour Law promulgated by Decree No. CS/RKM/0397/01 of March 1997 with the assistance of the ILO, the French Ministry of Labour, and the AAFLI was made based on the 1992 Labour Law and the 1993 Constitution.
receive the full benefits as provided by law\textsuperscript{13}.

\section*{2.4 Labour relations in Cambodia}

As discussed above since the early 1990s the export-oriented manufacturing sector has become a main backbone of economic growth in Cambodia. As in other countries in south east Asia, the rise of the manufacturing sector in Cambodia has come into conflict with labour rights (Arnold and Toh, 2010; DiCaprio, 2013; Oka, 2015; Polaski, 2006). Economic restructuring or democracy driven mainly by international pressure, such as in the case of Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste, has created friction with labour rights in those domestic contexts. (Ford & Gillan, 2016). In order to fully understand labour relations in those countries, historical patterns of economic and political development, the positioning of states in the region over time within regional and global geo-politics, international trade relations and global production networks which constrain the capacity of citizens, including workers, to mobilise, must all be taken into consideration (Ford, 2014).

Theoretically the government’s primary role is in regulation of competition and implementation of standards, which include worker rights, to meet with the expectation of being part of global market networks (Coe & Yeung, 2015, p.70). Gereffi (2018, pp.21-48) further adds that governments play a much more interventionist role in policy setting and non-governmental organizations, activists, trade unions have a role to make sure that the government policies, laws and regulations are complied by the foreign investors for the well-being of the workers. Yet, in the specific case of Cambodia, Ward (2016) has argued that labour relations in Cambodia are influenced by the political situation, uneven systems of governance, constraints on political activism and the politics of donors. The political transition in Cambodia has happened in the context of context of collective anxiety over stability

\textsuperscript{13} To deny them their legal entitlements, many factories hire workers part time or on a temporary basis. Workers often have no choice but to agree to these conditions because they need the jobs to survive. During 2016 and 2017, many factories closed, and jobs became scarcer, a situation that discouraged workers from challenging or demanding fair treatment in accordance with the laws. According to recent local news in the \textit{Phnom Penh Post}, in 2016, 70 factories were closed and 20 new factories opened, but no reasons were given as to the close down besides the factories were facing tense regional competition and have been operated at a loss, and no report is available on the number of jobs lost (Kali & Kimsay, 2016; Kun, 2016).
and order (Kent, 2011) and the regime’s attempts to stiffen economic and political power (Kent, 2011; Hughes & Un, 2011). The shifting political terrain means that the Cambodian government can only develop the laws and other relevant regulations in response to the external pressure when there is an environment lacking strong contestation within government.

While the government has arguably tended towards autocratic forms of rule, this has also occurred at a time of the flourishing of liberal rights in Cambodia. The changing regime from socialism to liberal democracy led to enabling opportunity structures for activism, NGOs, trade unions and community-based associations. Liberal democracy has played a role in mobilizing, monitoring, and pressuring government to comply with laws, regulations in protecting labour rights, often with the support of transnational social movement networks (Henke, 2011; Un, 2006). This has led to tensions within Cambodia. Activists, workers and unions have challenged illegal labour practices through demonstration action and other means of controvertible action; whilst the Cambodian government has taken action to accommodate foreign investors’ interests (Ward, 2016). The courts have also been used to pressure change, often in defence of private interests or those of the State. Employers and the state respond with threats of legal action against unions and workers or utilize physical intimidation (Arnold, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2015). As the result, conflict over political and labour in Cambodia, particularly in the case of the garment manufacturing sector where strikes are frequent, and sometimes violent.

Giving the above situation, labour relations in Cambodia are managed the government through semi-authoritarian modes of government with the aim of serving the political and wealth accumulation interests of ruling elites and complying with demands from the IMF (Ward, 2016). It is true that the flourishing of liberal democracy and labour activism has generated strong expectations of labour protection; however, implementation and enforcement cannot be guaranteed. Cheap labour and loose implementation of laws and regulations provides more flexibilities to those who invest in garment industries at the cost of labour rights.
2.5 Health and social support in Cambodia

The Cambodian government has made significant recent progress in improving the country’s healthcare system. Service availability and the utilisation of certain services such as women’s and maternal health and preventive activities such as immunisation, testing for tuberculosis (De Silva, Lipscomb & Ostbye, 2011) and HIV/AIDS prevention and control had improved remarkably (MoH & WHO, 2016). Despite these improvements, Cambodians, especially children and women, are still extremely vulnerable to poor health. ILO and EU (2012) indicate that Cambodia’s health status is still amongst the poorest in South East Asia. Based on the latest data from the MoH and WHO (2016), about 35 percent of Cambodians do not have access to improved drinking water, 52 percent do not have access to improved sanitation, 41 percent of children under five years are of short stature and 29 percent underweight, 14 percent of women between 15 and 49 years of age are underweight, and 45 percent of women are anaemic. The report further shows that Cambodia is also facing the burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases (MoH & WHO, 2016). In terms of the social protection for labour rights, government under support from international donors such as the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), and Global Fun have initiated social protection schemes for workers (Dicapio, 2013); for instance World Bank lending for social protection tripled from 1998 to 2011 (Andrews, Das, Elder, Ovediya, & Zampaglione, 2012) and the ADB’s lending for social protection has increased from 1.2% of the total loan portfolio in 1996 to 6% in 2008 (ADB, 2011).

Women normally seek treatment more often than men after getting married because of the greater healthcare needs associated with reproduction (ILO & EU, 2012). The Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) (2010) also emphasises that compared to those in urban areas, rural women are three times more likely to give birth at home; as the result those women face acute respiratory infections that lead to morbidity and mortality.

Government expenditure on health is still low by international standards. NGOs contribute about 30 percent of total health cover (ILO & EU, 2012). Out-of-pocket payments by patients comprise more than 62 percent of total health expenditures (MoH
Private health insurance only marginally contributes to healthcare costs, given the fact that the market has only recently emerged (MEF, 2009), and 84 percent of women and 87 percent of men do not have health insurance (MoP & MoH, 2014).

Although the Cambodian government has initiated mechanisms such as social health protection programs\(^{14}\), social assistance programs\(^{15}\), and vocational training\(^{16}\) to help its people, the current coverage and duration of these mechanisms is limited (ILO & EU, 2012). Fiscal constraints and the limited capacity of national institutions and government agencies to provide health services has led to a dependency on donor-funded programs needed to operate social protection policies, but such support has no timeframe, so the reliability of any services that may be provided cannot be sustained (ILO & EU, 2012).

### 2.6 Gender relations in Cambodia

Gender relations within a specific society need to be understood within their historical context, which can illuminate the development of local practices that shape men’s and women’s behaviour. Derks (2008) argues that the historical development of these relations shapes the different roles of men and women in society, while also illustrating how concepts of gender have been created, used, contested and altered over a period of time. Any discussion about gender in the Cambodian context must examine both its predominantly male characteristics and how matrilineal principles have shaped the way Cambodian society has been organised (Ledgerwood, 1995). To follow Ledgerwood (1995), there are aspects of Cambodian society that would be suggestive of the existence of matriarchal forms of family relations. Khmer women are viewed as having power in a bilateral kinship system, with a preference for uxorilocal residence after marriage; a bride-price being charged from men to the bride’s family; the

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\(^{14}\) Social health protection programs, including those of national scope or relevance, include health equity funds (HEF), community-based health insurance schemes (CBHI) and the Health Insurance Programme for Garment Workers.

\(^{15}\) Social assistance programs on the government budget include social welfare services provided through the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSVY) and other line ministries or public agencies.

\(^{16}\) Vocational training is provided under the technical and vocational education and training programme (TVET) of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT).
existence of a complementarity type of sexual labour division where both men and women work together and share family planning; and where relatively equal decision-making responsibilities are held within households.

According to legend, in a distant past Cambodia was ruled by an unmarried queen known as ‘Liu Yie’ (in Chinese) or ‘Soma’ (in Sanskrit). Other preclassical women known as ‘Absara’ were perceived as autonomous and independent from male counterparts (Jacobsen, 2008). Historical accounts of this ancient Cambodian matriarchy often refer to the writings of a thirteenth-century Chinese visitor to Cambodia, Chou Ta-Kuan (Zhou & Siam, 1992). This account describes Khmer women as highly sexual, and as occupying positions of public authority, such as court astrologers and traders. Today, Cambodians still acknowledge the traditional high status or potency of women (Ledgerwood, 1990). When asked about gender relations in Cambodia, senior people often make reference to an old-saying ‘សំបេងដី សីេង’ translated as ‘the (rice) seedlings lifts up the soil, women lift up their men’. This saying implies that in order to prosper, men need women to take care of household finances, including savings and investments, and to generally look out for the family’s interests.

While there is a strong tradition of according women power and status in Cambodian society, there is a simultaneous patriarchal tradition that denigrates the status of women. The role of Khmer women is to serve men and other members within families (Brickell, 2014; 2011; Brickell & Chant, 2010; Muong, 2015), meaning perhaps that societal gender relations are not as balanced as might be imagined. For example, there is a proverb that says ‘having a daughter is having a jar of fermented fishes’. It means daughters are considered a long-term financial liability for their families; implying that parents need to invest a lot of resources to raise them, and support them till they are married. According to this view of daughters, there is a little hope or expectation that they can earn and give back to their parental families.

There are strong cultural traditions or “codes” which confirm such patriarchal norms relating to the status of women and girls in Khmer society. There are at least two main didactic codes advising women to play inferior roles to men. These are the Chbab Srey, originally written by King Ang Duong in 1837 and rewritten by Meun Mai in the 18th
or 19th century. As discussed in the Introduction, these codes, written by Krom Ngoy during the French colonisation of 1863-1953, provide guidance for the behaviour of men and women. Both codes are worth exploring because of their strong presence in shaping social and cultural norms in Cambodian society. They have been integrated into the school curriculum with the intention of teaching the younger generations to understand their respective roles as Khmer men and women (Walsh, 2007). The codes are thereby disseminated nationwide, and their influence is considerable. While the codes do focus on men’s behaviour, the main focus of both is the behaviour of women, who appear to have the most to lose. In Cambodian society, women protect the family’s reputation, and when the behaviour of those women goes against the codes, they are seen as ruining their own image as well as their family’s reputation (Mary, 2014). In this way the codes restrict women’s behaviour through strict social and cultural norms.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Chbab Srey is an important code amongst a whole series moral codes and normative poems (Chandler, 1996), and in all versions, women’s proper behaviour is seen as necessary for maintaining order and peace within the family and society as a whole (Derks, 2008). Meun Mai’s version of the Chbab Srey, with a length of 227 verses, encapsulates the normative advice given by a mother to her daughter who is newly wedded and about to start her own family. The important messages within the codes are devoted to how a woman should serve and respect her husband regardless of his intellectual ability, physical appearance, family background and behaviour. The code’s advice also includes recommendations for how women should manage their daily activities and properly communicate with and behave around people. It asks them to lead a tranquil life by keeping family as well as broader society united, and even explains how they should manage the family’s income. Challenging a husband’s authority is strongly prohibited. One belief common in Cambodian society that can be attributed to the Chbab Srey is that the violent behaviour of a husband towards a wife who disrespects him can be justified; this belief pervades different aspects of society, including law enforcement, thereby influencing officials who are charged with eliminating violence against women (MoWA, 2009). These codes frequently condemn women for behaviour outside of social norms. For example, Chbab Lbeuk Thmey (1922), emphasises that:
Premarital sexual intercourse by women should be condemned by society, and is a curse for women not only in this life, but also in the next. Pregnancy before marriage is considered a sin. Abortion is also forbidden, women who have an abortion and those associated with it will go to hell and be reborn as a homosexual or as a person with a disability.

This code therefore also affects the ways women are viewed in Cambodian society with respect to their sexual relations and reproductive decisions. I shall explore the impact of the Chhab Srey on my study participants in Chapter 7.

While Cambodia has strong hierarchical gender relations, it is described as a country that adopts a bilateral gender pattern, as previously discussed (Lee, 2006). Bilateral gender patterns are those in which both husbands and wives have power over decisions about household spending, with women viewed as the managers of the family’s finances, responsible for how money is spent. While men are involved in some financial decisions, women manage petty cash they use for their daily activities and do not solely depend on men to support them (Frieson, 2001; Lee, 2006). In a bilateral system, according to Errington (1990, p.4), ‘instead of doling out spending money to their wives, men tend to receive it from their wives’, and husbands and wives in such a system may substitute one of their tasks for the other’s whenever they need to. In this sense, allowing women to manage the family’s finances is evidence of the ‘structural importance of women’ (Van Esterik, 1996, p.249). Managing the family’s finances has arguably given women a sense of power and familiarity with economic activities (Lee, 2006). The result from my study also claims this fact, managing the family’s finance is a wife’s value and married participants in this study feel empowered by this role.

In Cambodia’s agricultural sector, men and women have an almost equal participation in the labour force. According to the 2009 Cambodian Socioeconomic Survey (CSES) of the rural working population aged between 15 and 64, 79.2 percent of rural women are engaged in the workforce, compared to 89.7 percent of men (NIS, 2016). Of this number, about 55 percent of both men and women work in agriculture specifically (NIS, 2016).
Women can also be employed as merchants, a role that does not really confer prestige or power upon them, but allows them access to outside world by travelling long distances to trade goods without violating traditional gender norms. For agricultural and trade activities, women have freedom of movement and interaction with people within their villages and towns (Lee, 2006). According to Ledgerwood (1995), for their own businesses, Cambodian women make decisions about lending and borrowing money through informal channels.

The Cambodian government’s Gender Analysis (MoP, 2014) report suggests young rural women aged 15-59 work much more than young women of the same age who live in Phnom Penh. This reflects the demand for women’s work to tackle poverty in rural areas while women in the city enjoy greater educational opportunities. Young rural women under the age of 18 often engage in agricultural labour, while rural women over 18 migrate to the city and work in low-wage sectors including the garment and footwear sectors. Women benefit less than men in terms of wages, with women’s average monthly wages averaging less than 81 percent of men’s earnings. The Ministry of Planning (MoP) and Ministry of Health (MoH) indicate that one in four women working in the agricultural sector are paid in-kind or through a combination of cash and in-kind, 68 percent are paid in cash only, and eight percent are unpaid (MoP & MoH, 2014). Women who work in non-agricultural sectors are more likely to be paid in cash only (MoP & MoH, 2014).¹⁷

The above suggests that while Khmer women are restricted in terms of deeply embedded social and cultural norms, they simultaneously play a strong role in managing money, and in their involvement in labour in households and the public sphere. However, the important role women in Cambodia play in terms of managing finances does not necessarily indicate social control or power. In fact, in exercising their financial power, women may be revealing ‘a lack of spiritual power and effective potency, [which] consequently diminishes prestige’ (Errington, 1990, p.5). To follow Lee (2006, p.15), in some respects, women’s money management lowers women’s

¹⁷ The report also shows that in 2014, 56 percent of employed women were self-employed, and nine percent were employed by a family member. 35 percent of employed women worked for someone outside the family. In the agricultural sector, women commonly work for themselves, and 81 percent were seasonal workers, compared with only 10 percent of those working in non-agricultural sectors.
prestige rather than raising it, since ‘in conditions of scarcity, the family money manager’s task is to scrape together resources and stretch them to enable the family to have something to eat’. Khmer women are only given the role of the household’s financial manager when their husbands cannot support the family alone, and thus women work as part of their role as good housewives. As Van Esterik (1996, p.ix) observes: “Women hold the purse strings only when the purse is empty”.

The economic role women play in Cambodian households is in many ways contradictory, because gaining power over their husbands is considered in defiance of the code for their conduct. It may be undesirable for a Khmer woman to hold power over her husband, because such a position means she may not be accepted in society according to traditional norms. Ledgerwood (1990) and Derks (2008) suggest that being ‘strong’ or ‘powerful’ are not qualities valued by and encouraged of women in Khmer society, where the epitome of being a woman is as the ‘virtuous woman’. Such virtuousness is not only for her own well-being, but also that of her husband and her entire family. As I shall discuss later in this study, money management for Khmer women may be associated less with power and authority, and more with the symbolism of being providers for their families.

2.7 Women, marriage and family support

Marriage is a complex issue for Khmer women because legal regulations are entangled with traditional norms and laws. The Cambodian Civil Code of 2007 regulates most concerns about marriage, including requirements for marriage, the nullity and annulment of marriage, and the matrimonial property system (RGC, 2007). Certainly, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, participants in this study have confirmed that the traditional marriage ceremony is more important to them than legal registration. Indeed, based on this study some women use the strength of traditional marriage and poverty as an excuse not to register their marriage legally. This is significant because the lack of legal regulation for marriages may have consequences for the rights of Khmer women. Without proper registration, bigamy and desertion cannot be prevented by law, and in cases of separation, child custody frequently becomes the responsibility of women (Dorine, 2014).
It is also worth noting that in Cambodia there is no government social assistance available for single parents and no childcare subsidy provided. Childcare and care of the elderly is culturally provided by extended family, and normally it is the women in the family who hold these responsibilities. These responsibilities can prevent women from taking on full time employment, and women must be very selective in choosing income activities to be involved with (Ward, 2017). The entry of women into the workforce has arguably shifted childcare responsibilities (Ward, 2017): for example, grandparents from the maternal side take on this role when women migrate to work in the city, something that I observe in Chapter 7.18

Newly married couples normally reside uxorilocally – with or near the bride’s parents (Lee, 2006). There are strong cultural factors that explain this, and two Khmer proverbs reflect this practice and the perceived importance of mothers: ‘A father is worth a thousand friends and a mother is worth a thousand fathers’ or ‘Better to be deprived of a father than a mother, better to drown than to be burned.’; while these proverbs highlight the importance of mothers in Cambodian society, they also simultaneously allow men to evade their childcare responsibilities. Ebihara (1974) argues that there is strong bond between mother and daughter throughout the daughter’s life, which suggests young brides still need their mother’s help, advice and support into adulthood, and young women in Cambodia are often viewed as shy and lacking in confidence, requiring parental support. Cultural traditions that accompany women’s reproductive roles are further reasons why young women are seen to need support from their own family, especially their mothers. Traditionally, the postpartum period lasts from one to three months after childbirth, there are many procedures recommended for women during this period, including ‘getting roasted’19 for three to seven days: drinking hot Khmer medicinal tea, putting hot rocks or salt on their abdomen, steaming with medicinal herbs20, and for wealthier families, injecting

18 The most recent report on childcare conducted by the World Food Program shows that out of 2,341 migrant households, 26.4 percent of migrants migrated with their children, 34.7 percent left the children with the other non-migrant parents, and 36.8 percent left them in the care of grandparents (WFP 2017).
19 During bed rest, the woman lies on a bamboo bed under which is a fire fuelled by charcoal or wood. This is known as ‘Ang Plerng’.
20 Steaming causes the mother to perspire which removes impurities. The steam is made by the boiling a mixture of herbs, usually in a clay pot. During or after the steaming, some women apply a pounded mixture of galangal root and/or turmeric root all over their bodies. After applying the galangal root, the women cover themselves with a thick blanket and put the clay pot with boiling water inside. These practices are believed to prevent illnesses and improve the skin.
medicine to keep the body warm (White, 2004). In addition, women are prohibited from eating specific types of food, from walking in the rain or dew, working too hard, having coitus too soon and from being emotionally upset (White, 2002). Failure to follow these practices is believed to lead to chronic health symptoms called ‘toas’\(^{21}\) which can be temporary or lifelong. With the strong belief of the need to adhere to these practices, Khmer women know that only their own mothers can offer such support.

In many ways, the uxorilocal marital residence provides a protective shield for Khmer women. The family home is the place where women can return to any time they encounter financial or other problems. Families can also be a haven away from violence. As violence against Khmer women is still considered a private concern, many women seek help from their family in cases of partner abuse (Heak, 2013).

**2.8 Changing gender roles in Cambodia**

Political upheaval, economic changes and foreign influence have transformed and challenged traditional practices in Cambodia. The *Chbab Srey* has been vigorously criticised by the public and by government and international organisations. It has also attracted international attention. In 2006 the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) observed that:

> While noting the value of the cultural heritage of Cambodia, the Committee is concerned about strong gender-role stereotyping, in particular that reflected in the traditional code of conduct known as *Chbab Srey*, which legitimizes discrimination against women and impedes women’s full enjoyment of their human rights and the achievement of equality between men and women in Cambodian society. (UN, 2006, p.4)

The Cambodian government has acknowledged in its own reports submitted to the CEDAW in 2003 that the *Chbab Srey* is a barrier to women achieving the full potential

\(^{21}\) ‘Toas’ refers to a downturn in women’s health when women fail to apply traditional beliefs during the postpartum period. *Toas* consists of symptoms such as abdominal pain, weakness, headache, diarrhea, palpitations, weight loss and poor appetite (White, 2002).
for their development (NGO-CEDAW 2013). Since then, further calls for its removal from the school curriculum have been heard. In 2007, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs suggested to the government that the Chbab Srey be withdrawn from the school curriculum because the inferior roles of women encouraged in the code make women vulnerable to men, and therefore should not be taught (Eng & Grace, 2015).

The economic transition that encourages Khmer people to become increasing mobile and connected and the growing demand for female labour has influenced the social norms that affect women, and in doing so can complicate familial arrangements for caring responsibilities within households (Derks, 2008; Ward, 2017). Rural women are migrating to the city in increasing numbers, where they live out of their parents’ sight, and are influenced by the city lifestyle and modernity in terms of their dress and behaviour (Derks, 2008; Brickell, 2011).

Social perceptions have changed over time with regard to women working in garment factories. Given that the majority of factories are situated in Phnom Penh, and that the number of factories has risen so sharply since the 1990s, increasing numbers of young women now leave their villages a masse to find jobs and live in the city away from the guardianship of their parents. When these movements first began, many of the older generation questioned the virtue of the migrating women against the concept of ‘virtuous women’ (Derks, 2008). The participants in this study confirmed that this was certainly once the case, but also explained that rural-urban migration and working at garment factories have become so common that no one now questions their virtue or the nature of the work they undertake.

2.9 Women in contemporary Cambodia

Cultural norms influence people to believe that education is a tool that subverts the traditional roles of women. Gender roles in Cambodia are very structured and unyielding, and both unspoken and spoken rules encourage women to play inferior roles and focus on domestic duties rather than obtaining higher education qualifications and finding work outside the house (Mary, 2014). Cultural norms in accordance with the Chbab Srey value women who behave demurely, respect their
husbands and parents, and manage the household budget well, and are less appreciative of women who are successful in business or education.

Poverty is significant obstacle for rural women in terms of their access and progress toward a high level of education. Absenteeism from school is common in rural areas where the majority of households live below the poverty line, in large part due to parents’ need for children’s labour to help on the farm and at home (MoP, 2013). Poverty also forces a family to choose between sons and daughters to send to school; when the decision comes, it is more likely that the oldest daughter will be the first child to drop out of school, and sons will be given higher priority to stay on and progress to higher levels of education because parents expect their male children to get good jobs to support their families, and to become good heads of their own families in the future (Bredenberg, 2003).

Cultural norms and poverty often mean girls and women marry early, not long after puberty (Thon, 2017). When girls reach the age of marriage and suitors approach their parents, the temptation for girls and women to drop out of school significantly increases (UNFPA, 2015). Marrying-off daughters in Cambodia is considered helpful both in terms of relieving some of the family’s financial burden and improving the daughter’s personal safety and security. Consequently, women in the labour force hold low levels of education because of the need to fulfil the needs of daily life for themselves and their families. A report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) entitled ‘Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment in Cambodia’ expresses the concern that in 2013, up to 84 percent of female workers aged 15 years and older had only a primary school education or less. The gender gap at the lower and secondary school levels are viewed as having a negative impact on the quality of the future female workforce: the low level of education and skills of Khmer women prevents them from gaining access to industries requiring higher level skills and the higher reasonable wages that accompany those industries (ADB, 2015).

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the context for understanding the place of women in contemporary Cambodian society. Klugman, Hanner, and Twigg (2014) argue that:
Women are often at a systematic disadvantage in their ability to make effective choices in a range of spheres, from making decisions at home, to deciding what kind of work to do, to choosing whether or when to get married and how many children to have, to becoming politically active. (Klugman, Hanner & Twigg, 2014, p.3)

This conclusion holds true in the Cambodian context, where cultural norms, social insecurity, poverty and limited education play critical roles in influencing the capacity of women to make choices and exercise autonomy. Although the Cambodian government has regulated a number of laws to narrow the gender gap, those laws are not enforceable in practice, and cultural norms and traditions surrounding the position and roles of women in society persist. Khmer women are viewed as needing strong support from their family throughout their adult lives, especially after marriage, during postpartum periods and for matters relating to childcare. Their reliance on their family and other interrelated factors shape how these women enter the paid workforce, and impact women’s experiences of autonomy, a phenomenon I will unpack in the following chapters.
Chapter 3: Unpacking the Conceptual Background to Women’s Autonomy and Economic Empowerment

3.1 Introduction

Understanding autonomy is challenging, because it is a subjective experience, and context specific. In this study I treat ‘autonomy’ as the ability of a person to make choices that she/he and society values for these choices to provide benefit and contribute to one’s well-being. As I shall outline in this chapter, there are numerous ways we can understand autonomy, and the application of this concept to the economic empowerment of women. However, as I shall discuss, “capabilities” approaches offer a useful way to distil an understanding of how autonomy connects with individual flourishing.

This chapter has two main aims: firstly, it reviews the existing literature on the concepts of women’s autonomy and women’s economic empowerment, and linkages between the two, and secondly, it explores the capability approach framework used in this study. The chapter is divided into five main parts:

- Section 3.2 discusses key concepts relating to women’s autonomy.
- Section 3.3 reviews existing literature on women’s economic empowerment.
- Sections 3.4 and 3.5 provide a set of explanations found in existing literature on the implications of access to paid employment for women’s autonomy within the context of developing countries.
- Section 3.6 explains the characteristics of the capability approach framework employed in this thesis, and how it best suits the study.
- Section 3.7 explains how the capability approach has been applied as a framework for the whole study.

\[22\] To minimize confusion, this study uses the term ‘autonomy’ in an interchangeable way terms such as ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ because they share similar core characteristics in referring to self-determination, self-governance or self-reliance, the ability to make rational and free choices, and the pursuit of one’s own best interests (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Petegem, Beyers, & Ryan, 2017).
With regard to the concepts, the literature review focuses on Cambodia and also key relevant countries in South Asia and Africa. These countries belong to what is known as the ‘Global South’, and the cultures of those countries share some common characteristics in terms of traditions and norms that are potentially at odds with economic transformation. Based on the review, this study makes use of and finds gaps within the broad range of existing literature on the Global South and the matters of women’s autonomy and economic empowerment.

3.2 Autonomy

In a study of adolescent development, Goossens (2006, p.137) defines ‘autonomy’ as “self-independence or self-reliance which refers how a person behaves, decides, or thinks without interference from others”. In a similar way, Christman (2005, p.278) refers ‘autonomy’ as “the ability of the person to guide her life from her own perspective, rather than be manipulated by others or be forced into a particular path by surreptitious or irresistible forces”. Both perspectives treat autonomy as the individual exercise of independence, free from constraining interference from others. We can sense of this form of autonomy through reference to the influential study of ‘freedom’ conducted by Isaiah Berlin in 1969, who bifurcated the concept in terms of negative and positive liberty (Berlin, 1969, pp. 166-217). In his words, what he termed ‘the “negative” sense of freedom:

is involved in the answer to the question “What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?”.

Berlin (1969) explicates the notion of negative freedom as the idea that a person can be free only when he or she is unobstructed by inference from others: put simply, ‘freedom from’. Berlin (1969) uses political freedom as an example to explain the concept of negative freedom, describing freedom as a lack of interference with political rights. On the other hand, Berlin elaborates the concept of ‘positive freedom’ as related to a person’s ability to achieve his or her own goals regardless of interference:
The second, which I shall call the “positive” sense, is involved in the answer to the question “What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?” The two questions are clearly different, even though the answers to them may overlap. (Berlin, 1969, p. 169)

Berlin goes on to argue:

I may be coerced for my own good, which I am too blind to see: this may, on occasion, be for my benefit; indeed it may enlarge the scope of my liberty. It is another to say that if it is my good, then I am not being coerced, for I have willed it, whether I know this or not, and am free (or ‘truly’ free) … even while my poor earthly body and foolish mind bitterly reject it, and struggle with the greatest. (Berlin, 1969, p. 180)

To follow, the positive freedom Berlin (1969) describes is more a type of freedom that may involve some interventions from external agents in order to expand a person’s well-being, rather than a complete freedom free from obstacles, barriers, constraints or interference by others. From the perspective of positive freedom, given that individuals within communities and societies enjoy different level of well-being, one’s freedom should not cause any harm to the freedom of others, and intervention by the state may be needed to ensure that the freedom of an individual is protected and even expanded upon (Berlin, 1969). One relevant example that illustrates this point is the freedom of people with disabilities. In order to expand the freedom of movement of these people, the state builds facilities that can accommodate their needs and flourishing. This is one form of positive freedom that can lead to equality and the ability of people with disability to exercise control on an equal basis with others; but it is one that needs outside support from governments to succeed in the form of public services, laws and regulations formed to narrow gaps of inequality and ameliorate the impacts of one person’s freedom encroaching on the freedom of others (Berlin, 1969). Based on Berlin’s explanation, I regard ‘positive freedom’ as a kind of freedom that is different from natural laws in which the weak are subjugated by the strong; rather, people who have power in societies where positive freedom exists can execute their
power only in accordance with laws or regulations. If they do otherwise, they will face sanctions (Berlin, 1969).

While positive concepts of freedom are important in understanding autonomy, analysing negative freedom as a form of non-interference can also inform that understanding. To an extent, the classical English political philosophers Mill and Collini (1989) agree with Berlin’s views on freedom; for example, Mill agrees that one definition of ‘liberty’ could be understood as implying that:

First, … the individual is not accountable to society for his actions, in so far as these concern the interests of no person but himself … Secondly, that for such actions as are prejudicial to the interests of others, the individual is accountable, and may be subjected either to social or to legal punishments, if society is of opinion that the one or the other is requisite for its protection. (Mill, 1989, p. 114)

This idea suggests that ‘autonomy’ is a person’s ability to operate within a certain sphere where no one else interferes with his or her interests. In terms of ‘negative freedom’, Mill is inclined to believe that a person can do anything as long as he or she doesn’t hurt anyone else (Mill, 1989). Here we see that autonomy reflects a kind of freedom through self-governance, whereby individuals are free to act without experiencing interference, as long they do not curtail the freedom of others (Mill, 1989). Veltman (2014) also presents a similar theory, suggesting that personal autonomy is the process of making choices: the product of an interconnection between self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorisation. In speaking of self-determination, Veltman (2014) refers to freedom from social and political constraints and the availability of opportunities provided by society that allow agents to make choices that are important to their lives. Self-governance, on the other hand, is more concerned with the internal factors that allow one person to exercise their right to choose, and involves the skills and capacities of agents to make choices and execute those choices. The final element – self-authorisation – refers to being accountable for one’s own actions (Veltman, 2014, pp. 16-17). Veltman (2014) further adds that the three elements of personal autonomy not only reinforce one another, but in some cases also conflict with each other. This means that autonomy in one element can strengthen
or weaken autonomy in other elements. This theory emphasises that individuals should have the right to do whatever they value in life, but that they need to be accountable for those actions (Veltman, 2014).

Christman (1991) explains that although autonomy can be understood in various ways, it is essentially about self-governing. He argues that it is an inescapable fact that a person will be exposed to coercion, manipulation and deception as the result of living in society; in that environment, personal autonomy is about the ability to identify one’s own desires or preferences outside of said coercion, manipulation and deception (Christman, 1991). Another interesting perspective on autonomy is offered by Alkire and Ibrahim (2007), who argue that a person is autonomous when their behaviour is experienced as willingly enacted, and when they endorse the actions in which they are engaged and/or the value expressed by them. This theory emphasises the ability of an agent to act as a choice-maker. In Alkire and Ibrahim’s (2007) conception, it is not necessary for everyone to obtain the same level of autonomy to be considered as autonomous; rather, the autonomy of an individual is based on the way they operationalise their rights within a particular context23.

Arguably, various theories and conceptions of autonomy are viewed differently within Western cultures where individualism is valued, in comparison to non-Western cultures where forms of collectivism operate (Shweder, 1987). Shweder (1987) further claims that in individualistic societies, such as those in Canada, the USA and countries in Western Europe, it is believed that the individual is detached from their social context in such a way that being autonomous means being completely self-governing. In contrast, to follow Shweder (1982), in collectivistic societies throughout Asia, Africa and South America, autonomy is viewed as what he terms ‘social interaction’, in which a person exercises their rights based on their role within a family or community and society. The concept of social interaction presented by Shweder (1987, 23

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23 Kahneman and Tversky (1984, p. 341) similarly argue that individuals normally make either normative or descriptive decisions. Normative decisions are based on logic and rationality, while descriptive decisions are based on beliefs and preferences. Normative decisions require skills and capacities to obtain relevant information to understand the consequences of one’s actions; descriptive decisions, on the other hand, made based on subjective experiences, sometimes ignore the potential consequences of those decisions. Shweder and Bourne (1982) elaborate on this idea, noting that in some places where cultural norms play important roles in shaping the way people behave, normative decision-making is less influential than descriptive.
1982) is similar to the concept of relational autonomy posited by Brison (2000), whereby an individual can autonomously choose not to participate in an activity they are capable of participating in because of their relationships with others. One example of this might be a person choosing to fast when the option to eat is available in order to align with their religious beliefs.

There are different ways we might understand autonomy as relational. Communitarian thinkers have arguably put forward one version of a relational autonomy for whom human beings are self-interpreting animals whose identities are defined by concepts and standards derived from practices and traditions (see for example MacIntyre, 1981, 1999; Mulhall, 1992; Taylor, 1983, 1985). As Evans (2002, p. 56) explains:

In practice, my ability to choose the life I have reason to value often hangs on the possibility of my acting together with others who have reason to value similar things. The capability of choosing (and acting) itself may be, in essence, a collective rather than an individual capability.

What this means is that people, born into and nurtured by their particular surroundings, to a certain extent make choices in life not solely based on their will, but by what is valued and praised by their communities. This kind of autonomy is considered as ‘relational autonomy’ (Evans, 2002).

3.2.1 Gender and Autonomy

Autonomy is mediated by gender, and as such it is worth exploring the idea of ‘female autonomy’, as it is described by a number of theorists. Tim and Mick (1983, p.45) argue that:

Attitudes toward women on the part of men (esteem) should be clearly separated from the concept we wish to discuss here: female autonomy, the capacity to manipulate one's personal environment. Autonomy indicates the ability, technical, social, and psychological to obtain information and to use it as the basis for making decisions about one's private concerns and those of
one's intimates. Thus, equality of autonomy between the sexes in the present sense implies equal decision-making ability with regard to personal affairs.

Focusing on women’s household roles in Bangladesh, Anderson and Eswaran (2009) present female autonomy as a form of self-sufficiency that is connected to decision-making within household dynamics, which includes outside mobility, access to resources, decisions made about those resources, and other related concerns. Kabeer (1999, p.435) posits female autonomy as agency, i.e. ‘processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability’. Abadian (1996, p.1795) defines female autonomy as a woman’s ‘ability to make her own decisions, to summon resources, and her ability to meet her requirement and of those she chooses (on her own)’. For Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001, p.688), female autonomy is the extent to which women have control over their own lives, a voice equal to that of their husband in matters affecting themselves and their families, control over material and other resources, access to knowledge and information, the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraints on physical mobility, and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families.

Derived from certain feminist understandings, Freeman (2011) claims that a person’s autonomy needs to be understood as relational, because a person’s identity as an agent is shaped by a complex web of social interactions which includes race, class, gender and ethnicity, and both men and women form their sense of autonomy based on contexts, traditions, culture, society and histories. They come to understand themselves through that autonomy, and their identity and self-understanding are formed by the relationships they have built with others, their desires, the goals they value, and the roles they play that have been set by their communities, families, friends and colleagues (Freeman, 2011). Here, the concept of autonomy is understood not as a single unified conception, but in terms of the implications of intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood, and all socially related perspectives need to be taken into account before defining personal autonomy (Stoljar & Mackenzie, 2000, p.288). Sherwin (2002), in her work on relational theory, also argues that:

Relational theory requires us to supplant the familiar ideal of the independent, rational, self-interested deliberator of liberal individualism with a relational
subject who is (at least partially) constituted by social interactions. Rather than understanding persons as ontologically prior to society, a relational account envisions persons as beings who are created – in large part – through their social relations.

When talking about social interaction, patriarchal society has been a key factor that shapes women’s perception towards autonomy. Ebila (2015, p. 146) argues that in patriarchal society in order to become a virtuous woman, she needs to attain the high value of being altruistic, from a very young age women are encouraged to stay mute and patient and they are not recommended to take a stand that challenge male superiority. Gatwiri and Mumbi (2016, p. 14) also indicate that in Africa, being altruistic and submissive is benefit women in the sense that those qualities enhance women’s romantic attractiveness to men and being accepted by the society which leads to better choice of marriage and personal well-being. This kind of concept has been considered as a privilege and an identity of being women. In order to keep their own identities, security and prevent future guilt of not taking a good care of husband, parents, and children, women most of the cases choose to do for the benefits of others at their own expense.

From the above studies it can be concluded that social interactions shape the way people exercise their autonomy. In some cases, people are satisfied with lessening their decision-making powers in order to be accepted by society, or in others, they may choose not to do things they value in order to appease other people important to them, such as family members.

It is also worth noting that within relational autonomy, there is also gender bias. For example, when it comes to women’s issues, rather than assessing (in)equality between men and women, more indications that address women’s vulnerabilities need to be taken into account (Friedman, 2000). Friedman (2000) raises the concern that the concept of autonomy, in practice, is antithetical to women’s interests because culture favours men, allowing them to enjoy different social relationships and more opportunities. She further adds that:
Men are supposed to “stand up like a man” for what they believe or value, including the simple assertion of their self-interests. Women are instead supposed to “stand by your man”. The maxim “stand up like a woman” has no serious meaning. (Friedman, 2000, p. 36)

On the other hand, women are expected to maintain relationships such as marriage rather than seeking personal autonomy (Friedman, 2000). Based on a relational approach, Friedman (2000, p.36) suggests that the concept of autonomy can only be inclusive of women if at least three main changes are made, those being:

- New paradigms of autonomy that involve female protagonists,
- Redefinitions of autonomy that avoid stereotypically masculine traits,
- Redefinitions of autonomy that somehow involve social relationships or are at least not antithetical to them.

In essence, a social upbringing and ongoing personal interactions are key elements that shape a sense of autonomy, and social interactions are formed in the way persons living in a society share languages, practices, traditions, histories, goals, views and values (Friedman, 2000).

What we can learn from the literature discussed above is that personal autonomy is the ability of a person to make decisions that benefit their well-being. However, it is also important to note that individuals can only sense themselves through interactions with other members of the society in which they are living. As Friedman (2000) suggests, in order for the concept of autonomy to be inclusive, women’s autonomy needs to be defined in different ways to men’s by including all women’s social relationships. As I shall discuss below in section 3.6, autonomy might be understood in a different way again through the capability approach and associated framework.

### 3.2.2 Women’s autonomy and social constraints

The intricate web of social structures within which women live needs to be unpacked in order to understand women’s autonomy. As claimed by UNDP’s (2014) report ‘Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience’,
women’s autonomy by its nature is hard to achieve given that society has degraded the value of women in all areas of their lives. Below, I turn to examine some of the constraints women must confront in order to exercise their autonomy, which are enforced through patriarchal systems.

The concept of patriarchy relates to the idea of male supremacy in power and/or social status (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kelbert & Hossain, 2014; USAID, 2014; Walby, 1990a, 1990b). Walby (1990b, pp. 19-20) defines patriarchy as a social structure through which exploitation and oppression are exerted on women in every area of their lives, both in public and private settings. Walby (1990a) further elaborates that the patriarchy is framed within six structures: the patriarchal mode of production within households; patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal relations in the state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Walby emphasizes that “these six structures have causal effects upon one another, both reinforcing and blocking, but are relatively autonomous” (1990a, p. 20). Here Walby (1990a) implies that patriarchal ideology operates in six distinct settings. There are different characteristics in each setting, and they appear autonomous. However, the six structures inter-relate in their causal effects: the result is that each patriarchal structure defined by Walby would reinforce or block other structures; for example, male dominance within household level could lead to and help reproduce inequalities in treatment, conditions and pay between men and women in the workforce. Similarly, we can assume, improvements in equality in the home may have positive impacts over time in changing gender norms in the workplace. This observation is of relevance to this study: as we shall explore in later Chapters, women experience varying levels of autonomy at home and in the workplace as a result of entry into factory work, and this may produce interesting results for change in patriarchal gender norms over time.

How might we understand the features of a patriarchal society? Pateman (2014, p. 44) defines a patriarchal society as one ruled by men, in which men are the heads of households. Similarly, Kandiyoti (1988, p.278) asserts that patriarchy is characterised by certain features of family and kinship structure, and states that in a patriarchal family, senior male members make decisions and control younger men and women. In some cultural contexts, women are structurally positioned within families to limit their autonomy and decision-making power; for instance, in Chinese culture, daughters-in-
law are normally given the lowest range of power within households, and women cannot establish superior positions within their families unless they can produce male offspring (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In a patriarchal society, women are more inclined to depend on men. As Hosken and Snook (2005) and Mirkin (1999), argue, men have tried to degrade and oppress women using any means for the sake of improving their own status in society. Yount and Carrera (2006) add that women who have economic dependence on their husbands are vulnerable to violence, and their dependency on men is like a chain that manacles women to their abusive partners. Cain, Khanam, and Nahar (1979) also emphasise that a material base is the foundation of male domination; for example, in their case study of Bangladesh, male domination was seen to occur because Bangladeshi society allows men to control property, income and also women’s labour, especially when women are forced to give all of their income to their husbands. In such a system, all possibility of women accessing resources is denied, which keeps women in an inferior position to men (Cain, Khanam, & Nahar, 1979). Their resulting dependency on men undermines the ability of women to create a sense of self-authorisation (Cain, Khanam, & Nahar, 1979).

Arguably, patriarchal relations inform social relations in many countries in the Global South. But we cannot assume that women in the Global South have a homogenous experience of patriarchal relations: case studies show interesting and important cultural differences that impact upon and create these structures. For example, while reliance on women for household labour is a common feature of patriarchal relations, norms and practices around the distribution of and characteristics of household labour can differ depending on cultural contexts. For instance, Aina (1998, p.6) shows that in Nigeria, women are supposed to stay at home and perform domestic duties while men play the roles of breadwinners, dealing with the external world through work and commerce. Because there are specific traditional roles ascribed to men and women, families and communities in Nigeria frequently excuse men from not doing housework, including child rearing, shopping, cooking, fetching water, washing and cleaning (Aina, 1998). However, as I shall discuss with reference to Cambodian women in Chapter 5, in different contexts women can be actively involved in managing households and work outside the household. This does not mean that such
women are free from constraining norms in the household. As Butler (2011, p.32) argues ‘gender’ produces a matrix of power that regulates social department through the articulation and performance male and female roles. Butler emphasises that patriarchal relations intensify the different roles of men and women (Lloyd, 2013, p.29); the patriarchy goes beyond just a norm, but it is applied more like a law and gender becomes a destiny. According to Butler the agency of a person is a dependent variable which is a result of power relations; in this respect the rehearsal of feminine roles leads to a life of compulsion (Loizidous, 2007, p.30). For instance, as I have discussed, Khmer and Myanmar women have been taught that to be virtuous; and in order to perform this virtuosity, they need to follow codes of behaviour, including the Chbab Srey (Derks, 2008; Hoefinger, 2013; Thein, 2015). Derk, Hoefinger, and Their emphasise that the code places strict controls over moment and behaviour, and creates social sanctions against women who break code rules. The Chbab Srey explicitly instructs women to play inferior roles to men, and submission to husbands is strongly recommended (Derks, 2008; Ledgerwood, 1990). These codes infiltrate society in ways that extend beyond the family home. Anderson and Grace (2008) observe that the Chbab Srey has been placed in the school curriculum, at odds with gender mainstreaming implemented by Cambodia in an effort to achieve the principle of Education for All (EFA)\(^24\) and MDGs 2\(^25\) and 3\(^26\). Here we see Butler thesis materialised in the Cambodian context: people are taught to reiterate strict codes of behaviours which shape their “becoming” as women in this context.

In the last few decades, women in the Global South have increasingly engaged in paid work in addition to their housework, adding a further burden to their lives (Itzin & Newman, 1995). As Wolf (1992) and Davidson (1991) argue, women in these countries take on paid jobs as a survival strategy as a way to respond to systematic poverty, rather than a way to seek individual values and equality with men; the

\(^{24}\) Education For All (EFA) is a global movement led by UNESCO, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. EFA was adopted by The Dakar Framework in April 2000 at the World Education Forum in Senegal, Africa, with the goal in mind that all children would receive primary education by 2015.

\(^{25}\) MDGs 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (UNDP, 2015)

decision on taking on paid employment or migration to work is commonly made at household level or at least is proposed or initiated by parents rather than women themselves. As I shall discuss in Chapter 5, this certainly shaped the decisions made by women in this study to move to the city take on factory work.

3.3 Women’s economic empowerment

Women’s economic empowerment has been acknowledged not only as an instrumental tool for economic growth as a whole but also for upholding women’s autonomy (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009). Indeed, women’s economic empowerment is extolled by many economists as the solution to entrenched social structure and economic problems. It is also considered a prerequisite for sustainable development, with a potential significant contribution to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as women’s economic advancement leads to increased investments in children’s education and health, and reduced household poverty (Hunt & Samman, 2016, p. 7; Razavi, 2012). The Beijing Platform of Action highlights the necessary of promoting women’s economic independence by ensuring equal access for all women to economic opportunities and public services. In order to eradicate poverty based on sustainable economic growth, the SDG on gender equality uses women’s share of non-agricultural employment as one of its indicators of women’s empowerment (UN Women, 2015). As Golla, Malhotra, Nanda, and Mehra (2011) explain, ‘economically empowering women is essential both to realise women’s rights and to achieve broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education and welfare’ (p.3). However, as I shall discuss, achieving women’s economic empowerment is not a ‘quick fix’. Heterogeneous factors such as sound public policies (e.g., opportunities to access resources, social safety nets, adequate child care, healthcare and strong unions), the strong agency of women, strong support from male counterparts, households and communities, and long-term commitments from all development actors need to be in place (OECD, 2011, p. 2).

3.3.1 Defining women’s economic empowerment

The World Bank (2006, p. 4) defines women’s economic empowerment as “making markets work for women (at the policy level) and empowering women to compete in
markets (at the agency level)”. Kabeer (2012) has adopted this definition for her analysis of women’s economic empowerment and inclusive growth. The definition seems to focus on levelling up women’s engagement in any field that might strengthen their agency over their own lives. Similar to the World Bank definition, the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (SIDA) has suggested that women’s economic empowerment is a process whereby women gain real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society (Tornqvist, 2009, p. 9).

A different sort of definition is provided the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Co-operation Directorate’s (OECD-DAC) Network on Gender Equality, whereby women’s economic empowerment is viewed as the:

    Capacity of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which organize the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. (OECD, 2011, p. 6)

This definition appears to place greater emphasis on the roles societies and governments can play in developing the pre-conditions for women’s economic empowerment. To follow, societies and governments need to create environments that allow women to experience opportunities to use their labour and/or skills to receive the benefits of economic growth both in terms of skills and income.

Taylor and Pereznieto (2014, p. 1), citing VeneKlasen, Miller, Budlender, and Clark (2002), provide another definition. These authors define women’s economic empowerment in a more comprehensive way, whereby women cannot experience economic empowerment without have four powers: power within, power to, power over, and power with. Power within means women firstly need to have a sense of self-understanding, formed through social interactions such as a sense of entitlement and self-worth, and individual capabilities such as skills or knowledge that can be used to support their own existence without relying on others. Power to refers to women having economic decision-making power within households, communities, and society as a whole. Power over is women’s power to access forms of employment they want to do, as well as power over the income they have generated. Finally, power with
is women’s power to engage in all kind of economic activities without any discrimination (Taylor & Pereznieta, 2014, p. 1). These concepts relate not just to increased access to income and resources, but to forms of power over the use of resources that will benefit their lives. Golla et al. (2011) similarly define women’s economic empowerment in the following terms: “A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions” (p. 4). These scholars also explain that in order to sustain women’s economic empowerment, changes need to occur in all domains of women’s lives: individually (including changes to capabilities, knowledge and self-esteem); in communities and institutions (including norms and behaviour); in markets and value chains; and in the wider political and legal environment (Golla et al., 2011).

Based on existing definitions, this study views women’s economic empowerment as an opportunity that provides women with access to all kind of resources without any gender bias, and also as a capability that enables women to experience full freedom in the ways their income is managed. Access alone is not equated to women’s economic empowerment because it cannot be proven that women have a full right or a capability to control those resources due to social and cultural norms and the lack of protection from governments to sustain their access to economic activities and resources.

3.3.2 Key components enabling and constraining women’s economic empowerment in the Global South

Many institutions and scholars have tried to address women’s economic empowerment (Golla et al., 2011; Hunt & Samman, 2016; Kabeer, 2012; Razavi, 2012). From the World Bank’s (2006) perspective, in order to achieve women’s economic empowerment within the four key markets – land, labour, production and finance – work for women, policy intervention from governments (such as sound macroeconomic policy), responsive governance, a favourable business climate, and the openness and accountability of institutions are musts. Such intervention is viewed as a ‘now’ action that would contribute to change in other areas such as human capital variables (education, health and labour market experience) and family, social, and cultural factors.
While Kabeer (2012), as discussed above, has adopted the definition of women’s economic empowerment defined by the World Bank (2006), she holds a different view as to how to address women’s economic development. Kabeer (2012) is of the view that a relational approach can be used to encourage women’s economic empowerment. Kabeer explains that policy-level intervention is important, but to make that intervention effective, it is firstly important to understand the beliefs and values that characterise social relationships of family and kinship within a specific context (Kabeer, 2012, pp. 39-50). Individuals and groups make choices and exercise agency based on limits imposed by the structural distribution of rules, norms, assets and identities between different individuals in their society. Kabeer (2012), in this sense, indicates that personal autonomy is contextual. In some contexts, autonomy is negotiated to strike a balance between social responsibility and beliefs; and it must be understood that an individual may prefer to choose not to do something specific in order to be accepted by society. Rules and norms hold power, and failure to conform leads to social sanction. In this context, striving for “full autonomy” by refusing relevant norms of rules could mean exclusion from community and society (Kabeer, 2012). It is this perspective on autonomy in context which has helped shaped the concept of “dependence for independence” that I discuss in Chapter 7.

Golla et al. (2011) offer a different approach, claiming that to achieve women’s economic empowerment, factors such as access to individual and community resources, norms and the nature of institutions need to be addressed. By resources, Golla et al. (2011) refer to means beyond simply those that are financial or monetary, including human capital (e.g., education, skills, training), financial capital (e.g., loans, savings), social capital (e.g., networks, mentors) and physical capital (e.g., land, machinery). They further elaborate that within society, norms and institutions play important roles as distributional channels for all resources (Golla et al., 2011). To present women with increased opportunities to access resources, it is imperative that norms such as gender-defined roles, taboos, prohibitions and expectations (such as whether it is appropriate for women to be in public spaces) need to be abolished or at least modified. Such institutions include legal and policy structures, economic systems, market structures, marriage, inheritance and education systems, all which
need to be formulated in an inclusive manner to give women full rights to benefit from all institutional arrangements.

Perhaps building on the above perspectives, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) offers a very useful way to conceptualise empowerment (Hunt & Samman, 2016). The ODI suggests there are two main components that shape women’s economic empowerment: direct components and underlying factors (Hunt & Samman, 2016, p. 11). The concepts of direct and underlying factors is more or less the same as “conversion factors” as described in the capabilities approach that will be discussed below.

Direct components are implemented at the micro level and directly involve women acting as agents, while underlying factors are dealt with at the macro level, including government policies (Hunt & Samman, 2016). Direct components relate to women’s individual or collective lived experiences and comprise six key factors: (i) education, skills development and training; (ii) access to quality, decent paid work; (iii) addressing unpaid care and work burdens; (iv) access to property, assets and financial services; (v) collective action and leadership; and (vi) social protection. Underlying components are more about the wider structural conditions that determine women’s capability to access resources and consist of four main factors: (i) labour market characteristics; (ii) fiscal policy; (iii) legal, regulatory and policy frameworks; and (iv) gender norms and discriminatory social norms.

The comprehensive approach of Hunt and Samman (2016) in their work for the ODI is very useful for informing the theoretical approach of this study. The factors mentioned above which shape women’s empowerment and autonomy must be distinguished as either conversion factors that involve women directly as individuals, or factors that require intervention from external forces, including governments and international organisations. The following section will elaborate upon each factor by referencing the situation in the Global South in order to address the matter of women’s economic empowerment.
3.3.3 Direct components and their constraints in the Global South

As previously discussed, direct components relate to women’s agency as individuals. Education, skills and training are primary means to protect women from exploitation, and can increase economic outcomes from which they might benefit. The attainment of education provides women with greater access quality employment (Verick, 2014, p.1). Although education is an instrumental tool for women’s economic empowerment, women in the Global South have encountered many constraints that prevent them from attaining quality education, skills and training, including economic crises, a lack of household resources, a shortage of school infrastructure, adolescent marriage and pregnancy, and gender and social norms (Nicolai, Hine, & Wales, 2015, p. 9; Stavropoulou & Jones, 2013, pp. 26-27).

Access to decent paid work means women must be given opportunities to work in the formal sector where there are regular and predictable forms of income, proper laws, regulations, and social protection agendas (Domingo et al., 2015, p. 82; Hunt & Samman, 2016, p. 13). However, it is hard for women in the Global South to access this work due to poverty, domestic care responsibilities, poor infrastructure, a lack of safe public transport, and a lack of education and skills (ILO, 2016, p. 68; Kabeer, 2012, p.19; Salon & Gulyani, 2010). Formal employment is imperative for women’s economic empowerment because it provides the means for women to gain independence; however, women in the Global South find it hard to maintain formal employment due to their domestic responsibilities (Mahtab, Haque, Barsha, & Igi Global, 2017). In the Global South, as elsewhere, unpaid care (e.g., caring for children, spouses and parents) and domestic work hinders women from participating in the workforce. For example, a study of working women in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh found that a number of women considered leaving their job as a result of challenges in balancing work, childcare and domestic duties (Islam & Jannat, 2016; Madurawala, 2009, p. 20).

Access to control over household resources such as land, houses and financial services are critical to upholding women’s economic empowerment as well as women’s agency (Klugman, Hanmer, & Twigg, 2014, p. 130). The World Development Report 2012 affirmed that owning assets such as land and a house promote women’s bargaining
power, and boost their voices in household decision-making (World Bank, 2011, pp. 154-156). Owning property allows access to financial services such as microfinance; in recent years microcredit has become one of the instrumental tools that can enhance women’s economic empowerment (Hunt & Samman, 2016, p. 19).

For example, the Grameen Bank initiative suggests that allowing women to access to microcredit contributes significantly to women’s economic empowerment (Yunus, 2003). Yunus (2013) explains further that conventional banks in Bangladesh were gender-biased: women could not borrow money from the banks without endorsement from their husbands, while the husbands could do so without agreement from their wives. Yonus (2013) further emphasizes that the Grameen Bank shifted this convention, the bank set a target that 50 percent of their customers would be women and those women could borrow the money on their own names. Repayments are staged in way to promote affordability and consistency: rather than paying back the bank with a final lump sum, the Grameen Bank requires those women to pay back on a daily basis. As the result, the self-discipline of a daily payment allows women to see a small gain each day. Note the bank employs a large number of female bank workers to establish an environment where women feel comfortable seeking support (Yonus, 2013). Importantly, the strategy of the Bank allows women to have control over the “purse-strings” without depending upon their husbands (Yonus, 2013; Rahman, 1999).

The strategy of Grameen Bank suggests that access to and control over assets give women a sense of self-worth. Women may also gain respect from family members and other people within the community. From this standpoint, it is imperative that women, through law and practice, are provided with equal access to, and control over, resources (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996; Yunus & Jolis, 2003). Yet within the context of the Global South, discriminatory legal and customary law provisions as well as social norms and practices curtail women’s control over resources (World Bank, 2011, pp. 160-177). Therefore, it is imperative that discriminatory laws and customary legal provisions are eradicated, broadening women’s opportunities by providing greater access to and control over assets.

Collective action and leadership enhance women’s voices, both in formal and informal groups, and provide opportunities for women to develop a sense of self-confidence.
and self-esteem (Domingo et al., 2015, p. 49). For example, low-caste Dalit women in India who formed savings groups as a form of collective action gained the opportunity to develop leadership skills and, more importantly, were able to challenge existing patriarchal social structures in which men controlled all resources and power (Hunt & Samman, 2016, pp. 19-21). However, collective action and leadership is difficult to come by when women in the Global South can only access low-skilled jobs, such as in the garment sector, where the work is very organised and strict rules and regulations limits workers’ interaction. Further, in a specific context of Bangladesh, the high turnover of staff in the garment sector and the high numbers of young women migrating to the capital seeking employment means female workers often wish not to protest against the practices of their respective factories (Dannecker, 2000).

Social protection is considered a buffer against any economic downturn that might cause a sudden drop in income. Hunt and Samman (2016, p.21) claim that:

social protection can facilitate women’s economic empowerment by alleviating poverty, reducing vulnerability to economic risks and supporting women to overcome barriers that prevent their economic participation, such as caring responsibilities.

According to Razavi (2011, pp. 5-8), social protection schemes should comprise three main programs: (i) social insurance programs, which are financed by employers and employees and aim to tackle labour market risks such as unemployment, old age, illness and maternity; (ii) social assistance programs, which include social pensions, child/family cash transfer programs and public work programs; (iii) other enabling social protection programs that provide accessible and quality care services that help women balance paid work and care responsibilities.

3.3.4 The underlying components and their constraints in developing countries

Enhancing women’s economic empowerment requires support from wider structural conditions that operate across social, political and economic realms. These wider structural conditions are considered as underlying components, which comprise four main factors: (i) labour market characteristics; (ii) fiscal policy; (iii) legal, regulatory
and policy frameworks; and (iv) gender norms and discriminatory social norms (Hunt & Samman, 2016). These factors make a substantial contribution to determining the effectiveness of the direct components outlined above.

According to Cook and Razavi (2012), the labour market comprises “complex institutions shaped by social norms, discriminatory forces and power inequality” (p. 3). In order for women to gain access to decent employment, the discriminatory norms that segregate women and prevent them from receiving the same benefits as men need to be eradicated. In many countries in the Global South, women’s conditions of employment are inferior to those experienced by men, and gender segregation in the labour force leads to women undertaking different types of work than men, and receiving different benefits (Tzannatos, 1999, pp. 555-556).

It is important that all governments guarantee women equal access to and benefit from the workforce (UN Women, 2015). Fiscal policy is an enabling factor that can address women’s disadvantaged position within the labour force, and can enhance women’s economic empowerment when it allows governments to provide direct support to women and their families through investments in public services such as healthcare, childcare, pensions, education, and other social protection programs (UN Women, 2015, p.194). According to Bastagli (2015, p.28), to mobilise funds to support women, taxation is key. However, in some countries, both in the Global South and North, tax arrangements are a disincentive for women to participate in the formal sector, which can then affect women’s economic empowerment as a whole (Hunt & Samman, 2016, p.25).

Enforceable legal, regulatory and policy frameworks can have positive outcomes for women and increase women’s labour force participation. Hunt and Samman (2016, p. 25) argue that family codes, married property rights, labour laws and domestic worker protection policies offered by governments have potential advantages for women. In contemporary society, a number of countries have regulated laws, regulations and policies in consideration of women, but the enforceability of those laws and regulations is very weak, especially in the Global South where social norms, corruption and economic growth prevail over workers’ well-being (Brown, 2017; De
Women’s economic empowerment is mostly hampered by discriminatory social norms and gender norms (Bicchieri, 2017; Marcus, Harpet, Brodbeck, & Page, 2015). Social norms are informal rules or common practices that most people follow or engage in within particular contexts; these include standards of behaviour or expressions such as local beliefs, cultural or religious beliefs and codes of conduct to keep social order that people in those social contexts ascribe value to, but that are not compulsory for those people to meet (i.e., there is no legal punishment for those who do not conform to those norms); gender norms are one major category of social norms that focus on gender relations and gender roles, as well as expectations of that gender within a society (Bicchieri, 2017; Marcus, Harpet, Brodbeck, & Page, 2015). Patriarchal social structures perpetuate discriminatory social norms that hold girls and women back from realising their full potential. These norms limit their access to education, financial resources and other assets and labour force participation (Hunt & Samman, 2016, p. 26). They put pressure on women to marry early and have children, forcing them to stay at home, where they are subordinate not only their husbands but their in-laws (Kandiyoti, 1988, pp. 278-279). Gender norms within the workforce create sex labour divisions, whereby women’s participation in the workforce is not on the same terms as men, and where they face oppression and sexual exploitation, and receive lower pay (Walby, 1990b, p.180).

3.4 Does paid employment enhance autonomy for women?

From existing studies, it is hard to say that paid employment alone has the potential to enhance women’s autonomy (Denzin, 1984; Felson & Messner, 2000; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Molm, 1997; Moore, 1997). Consolidating all the relevant studies on the relationship between paid employment and women’s autonomy, I would argue that making such a judgment depends on which aspects of women’s lives we focus. For instance, women’s paid employment may be helpful in some areas, but may intensify women’s experiences of oppression in others. This section will illuminate which areas of women’s lives may be improved through paid employment and which may be negatively impacted by paid employment.
Studies of women’s work in the Global South and their autonomy regarding their fertility have shown that after women have access to paid employment, the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) rose (Sathar & Kazi, 1997; Schuler, Hashemi, & Riley, 1997). In Bangladesh, for instance, an increase in CPR from 8 percent in 1975 to 55.8 percent in 2007 occurred when, to support their family, both husband and wife worked, and women gained the courage to discuss family planning with their husbands, as well as opportunities to work (Rahman, Mostofa, & Hoque, 2014). These changes due to their employment meant women used modern contraception methods for birth control, and had fewer children (Rahman et al., 2014).

Another area of improvement concerns women’s autonomy regarding their physical mobility, especially in the contexts of patriarchal social structures, including Muslim societies where strong traditions seclude women at home (Hussain & Smith, 1999). Hussain and Smith (1999) claim that paid employment that involves travelling beyond their home communities can significantly contribute to women’s empowerment as a whole because women are able to interact with a more diverse set of people, gain more of an understanding about the outside world, have greater access to information about health, and better access to finance. A study by Dharmalingam and Morgan (1996) using evidence from two south Indian villages showed opportunities such as these empower women more than if they were just to receive better and / or more education. The study found this to be the case as education is closely related to social class, and can be used to support a family’s reputation. Rather than to empower women personally, education is not always enough to make significant changes in women’s lives (Dharmalingam & Morgan, 1996). This may suggest that, relevant to this study, access to work, rather than access to education, can be a more powerful determinant of significant change for women.

Paid employment potentially allows women’s voices to be heard in household decision-making processes, mainly in terms of their control over the family’s income and purchasing power (Lim, 1990, pp.117-118). Gaining economic power helps women exercise their rights in broader societal interactions (McLaren, George, & Harriet, 2008, pp. 7-8). A study by Shamir (1986, p.195) showed that when women share the responsibility of upholding the family’s living standards financially, they
have the courage to ask their husbands to help with domestic duties, rather than solely
shouldering the responsibility. However, such positive outcomes are not always the
case. One concern raised in a study by Sangappa and Kavle (2010) was that women’s
engagement in low-waged sectors in the Global South cannot successfully lead to
women’s autonomy because that particular kind of employment is viewed as
supplementary to their husbands’ income, thereby still positing their husbands as the
breadwinners.

Studies of the implications of paid employment for intimate partner violence (IPV)
differ in their outcomes, and it is a controversial area of study (Felson & Messner,
2000; Gibson-Davis, Magnuson, Gennetian, & Duncan, 2005; Holvoet, 2005; Kabeer,
2012; McLaren, George, & Harriet, 2008; Rahman, Nakamura, Seino, & Kizuki,
2013). Some scholars argue that paid employment does lead to reduced incidences of
gender-based violence towards women, while others found that their engagement in
paid employment could intensify such violence (Kabeer, 2012; McLaren, George, &
Harriet, 2008). Some scholars have found that employed women are more likely to
experience IPV than women who are not working because in a patriarchal society
women’s work threatens men’s masculinity as breadwinners and leaders; another
reason women might experience IPV is when economic independency is viewed by
men as challenging their authority, as if women are looking down on their husbands
(Elson & Pearson, 1981; Gibson-Davis, Magnuson, Gennetian, & Duncan, 2005;
Narayan, Chambers, & Shah, 2000, p. 118; M. Rahman, Nakamura, Seino, & Kizuki,

In contrast, other scholars argue that women’s economic independence can provide
women with higher bargaining power, leading to a lower risk of IPV victimisation
(Antai, 2011). Kabeer (2011), in her study of rural Bangladesh, suggests that although
paid employment does not provide an immediate reprieve of violence against women,
it helps by creating a sense of equal comparison with their husbands; for instance, one
a woman in her study learned to value her own contributions to her family and to
demand respect for it. As one woman explained:

Husbands would come, eat the meals we cooked and then go out again. If there
was any change from this norm, there would be abuse and violence. Now I
have learnt about our rights: “You come home after working outside, I have also been working at home all day. I took the cow out, gave it food, I cleaned the house, cooked, washed the dishes. This is not easy work; I was not just sitting around. On what basis can you get angry with me?” (Kabeer, 2011, p. 512)

Although paid employment does not always help women to stand up to their partners on certain issues, it does give them the courage to leave the seriously abusive ones. In a lesson learnt from south India, Holvoet (2005) suggests participation in the workforce does not only give women more independence over their decisions but also encourages women to leave abusive partners. Economic instability and dependence are significant barriers to women leaving their abusive partners, but with financial independence, women have broken through (Chronister, Linville, & Kaag, 2008; Rothman, Hathaway, Stidsen, & de Vries, 2007).

In terms of women’s autonomy within workplaces, a number of studies show that access to low-waged employment leads to the greater exploitation of women. Socialist feminists _Barky (1979), Berch (1982) and Hartmann (1981), have argued that women’s exposure to work also creates a pathway to new forms of exploitation, especially when a society is still driven by a patriarchal ideology. This occurs because when one society adopts a patriarchal ideology, that ideology pervades all avenues of power; for instance, in paid employment women are normally relegated to the least lucrative and lowest paid areas of work (Tong, 1989). A study of female factory workers and sexual harassment in Sri Lanka shows that women engaged in the low-waged sector are normally migrants from rural areas living in poverty, some with huge debts, and their vulnerability has been exploited, exposing them to various forms of oppression, including labour exploitation and sexual harassment27 within the factories (Perera-Desilva, 2015).

In the specific context of Cambodia, women who migrate to the city to work may be sexually exploited. The term ‘garment worker’ is normally used to refer to a woman

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27 Some forms of sexual harassment experienced by women in factories include rape, attempted rape, touching and groping, being sent and shown pornographic material, verbal abuse and sexual innuendo (Perera-Desilva, 2015).
who has little education and is poor and gullible; some men exploit this by luring women into sexual relationships with the promise of a future marriage (Derks, 2008b; Perera-Desilva, 2015). Female workers in Cambodia lack information about and experience of the outside world, and due to their limited education and lack of support and protection from senior relatives have been deceived by both single and married men, losing their virginities to and cohabiting with men without being married (Hoefinger, 2013; Nishigaya, 2002). In many of these cases the relationships do not last long, and after breaking up or being abandoned by those men, some female workers end up performing sex work (Hoefinger, 2013; Nishigaya, 2002). Hoefinger (2013) and Nishigaya (2002) found that because Cambodian society condemns women who sell their bodies for a living, those women still continue to work as, or at least use the title of ‘garment worker’ and sell their bodies in secrecy in the evening as karaoke singers, club dancers, bar attendants and beer promoters who also provide sexual services to guests (Hoefinger, 2013; Nishigaya, 2002).

Given all the factors described above, it can be argued that paid employment can affect women’s autonomy in positive and negative ways, especially in the case of women in parts of the Global South and in Cambodia where patriarchal structures strongly govern gender relations. Even so, it seems also to suggest that although paid employment may expose women to new types of exploitation such as that in the workplace and by opportunistic men, opportunities to work outside their home villages and towns have the potential to change women’s outlook on life, raise their awareness of social issues and their own rights, learn new things from interacting with new types of people and institutions, in which those are key indicators that can empower women in the Global South (Schuler, Hashemi, & Riley, 1997).

3.5 Economic restructuring, low wage employment and women’s economic empowerment

Economic empowerment for women in the Global South can only be understood in the context of economic and social transformations that have occurred over the last four decades. Countries in the Global South have been involved with export-oriented industrialisation and the global value chain since the early of 1980s (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2000, pp. 47-49). Trade liberalisation and economic restructuring have led to a
division of production whereby developing economies concentrate on manufacturing, while more developed economies focus on services, the integration of countries in the Global South into global commodity production has been based on the availability of cheap labour as a resource (Fukunishi & Yamagata, 2014; Porpora, Lim, & Prommas, 1989; Razavi, 2012; Salmivaara, 2018; Wolf, 1992). The absolute advantage of cheap labour is that it has allowed the governments of countries in the Global South to develop labour intensive production as their economic strength to attract foreign direct investments (Ear, 2013a, pp. 59-60; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005, pp. 251-257; Swanepoel & De Beer, 2000, p. 49). This type of production involved less research and development, fewer high-tech components and skilled workers, and more importantly, a low-social cost of labour exploitation, meaning the enforceability of laws and regulations that protect workers’ rights are weak, and the owners of production industries can take advantage of workers without sanction (Wolf, 1992). Although this type of integration has contributed to remarkable economic growth in some countries of the Global South, questions remain over the long-term sustainability of such growth.28

Over the past few decades, women in the Global South have been viewed as well matched with work in export-oriented labour-intensive industries, not least because they can easily be exploited. Women have been labelled as ‘nimble-fingered workers’, and as cheap, unskilled but trainable, perseverant and docile; as such, they have been subjected to super-exploitation (Porpora, Lim, & Prommas, 1989, pp. 283-284; Wolf, 1992, pp. 111-116). Again, persistent gender norms have led to the exploitation of women by constructing them as compliant subjects. Ghosh (2009, p. 178) claims that the feminisation of labour has been encouraged by the widespread conviction among employers in East and Southeast Asia that female employees are tractable and subservient to managerial authority, less prone to organisation into unions, more willing to accept lower wages, and easier to dismiss using life-cycle criteria such as marriage and childbirth. Indeed, the gendered construction of the female worker has shaped investment strategies used by many governments to attract foreign investors to

28 The 2008 crisis led to a decline in world exports in 2009 for the first time since 1982. Economies around the world were seriously affected by this slump. The recession worsened economic conditions within countries in the Global South, which were still in need of financial assistance to rehabilitate their economies (Fuentes & Ehrenreich, 1983, p. 13; Moyo, 2009, pp. 20-21).
their respective countries during periods of economic transformation. For instance, in the 1980s a Malaysian government investment brochure stated: “the manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Her hands are small, and she works fast with extreme care” (Rupert, 2006, p.96).

3.5.1 Women’s migration to work in the city

In many countries in the Global South, the growth of export-oriented industries coupled with a surplus of rural labour has pushed a large number of women to migrate to the city for work (Gaetano, 2015; Khaing, 1984; Phouxay, Tollefsen, Samhällsvetenskapliga, Kulturgeografiska, & Umeå, 2011). In the Cambodian context, rural-urban migration leads women to undertake a variety of professions, including as domestic servants, babysitters, workers within small and medium scale businesses, workers in manufacturing, market traders, beer promotion girls and sex workers (Derks, 2008, p. 207). Women migrate to the city to work for a variety of reasons. One main reason is as a strategy to cope with poverty in rural households (Chant, 1992). The need for daughters to fulfil their obligations towards their families is one push factor that leads to such migration (Muecke, 1992, pp. 895-898). Self-development, a desire for material gain and to experience a modern lifestyle, as well as the desire to be equal to their peers are other push factors that encourage rural women to migrate (Derks, 2008, p. 57). Rural women may also migrate to the city after divorce, and may also be escaping abusive partners (Derks, 2008, p. 58).

In the specific context of developing countries where women need to migrate to the city to work, such migration has also intensified women’s vulnerability because they often have to live in unfamiliar places, sometimes in less than favourable environments (Thi Thuy Phan et al., 2016, p. 839). They face not only exploitation in the workplace but also sexual violence and harassment, road accidents and robbery; further, female migrant workers normally live in rented rooms that are privately owned and built without legally standard requirements, in living spaces surrounded by pollution, without hygiene and sanitation, located on dark and muddy roads, and sometimes they need to shower outside their living quarters (Thi Thuy Phan et al., 2016, p. 839).
3.5.2 Educational attainment and women’s factory work

Female workers in garment factories do not have high-level skills, and previous experience is not a priority for selection for employment in the garment industry. Factory work is typically manual in nature, and female workers working in the textile and clothing industries normally have little secondary level education and are mostly trained on the job (Keane & Te Velde, 2008, p. 22). Instead, informal networks, rather than formal skills or education, provide opportunities for women to migrate to the city when a job is available. However, low skills and educational attainment impacts access to legal entitlements and rights (Prota & Bereford, 2012).

Without education and knowledge of their labour rights, female workers often do whatever their employers ask of them, and sometimes accept employment without being given formal appointment letters (Khan, 2001, p. 186). Women are also vulnerable to being dismissed with immediate notice, and without receiving any benefits (Khan, 2001, p. 186). Kabeer’s (2004) study showed that in the mid-1990s only 15 percent of labourers in developing countries entered into the workforce having signed a formal contract. Due to women’s poor education and limited access to support networks, factory owners can easily take advantage of women (Afsar, 2004, p. 142). Female workers often do not actively engage with trade unions when their working rights are violated because they believe doing so could be more harmful than beneficial as unions are weak and sometimes make decisions that favour factory owners (Hossain, Mathbor, & Semenza, 2013, p. 208). In factory work, there is a division of labour between men and women; men tend to undertake skilled work such as tailing, ironing, maintenance and supervisory roles, and are remunerated more highly than women (Anwary, 2017, p. 183).

Limited skills and the very real prospect of being let go from factory jobs weaken women’s sense of agency (Heath & Mobarak, 2014; Kabir, Maple, & Fatema, 2018). Women’s labour is therefore highly precarious, since their employment security is severely limited and subject to the ebbs and flows of the market (Heath & Mobarak,

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29 In many countries across Asia, education is compulsory until ninth grade; however, primary education is out of reach for many children in poor families because of limited school infrastructure within their villages, and higher education is far too costly for those families (Zhoa, 2015).
2014; Kabir, Maple, & Fatema, 2018; Shoma, 2017). This was particularly apparent during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, during which a number of factories in the Global South closed, leading to a large number of female workers being laid off; now unemployed, they were forced to return home, some women are then called back to do the same work for lower wages, and choose to take on those roles rather than remain unemployed (Zhi, Huang, Huang, Rozelle, & Mason, 2013, pp. 26-27).

For many women in the Global South, being unemployed means more than just having no income. Their relatively poor socio-economic backgrounds normally intensify their situation if they are laid off from work. A detailed elaboration of this situation will be discussed in the following sections.

3.5.3 Legal regulation and unionisation

Excessive working hours, low wages and hazardous working conditions are ongoing issues at many factories in the Global South, especially in Asian countries. In China, many female workers take on overtime work for financial reasons, but often this is not a fully autonomous decision because overtime is expected or required by factories and the workers cannot refuse it without the risk of being dismissed (Verite, 2004). Seven developing countries of the Global South – Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kenya, Madagascar, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Vietnam – have all experienced rapid growth in garment exports to the Global North; such factories are sweat shops in which workers work long hours in poor working conditions for low wages (Fukunishi & Yamagata, 2014).

In Bangladesh, the working conditions of workers have come under scrutiny after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013 and killed 1,100 workers (Gillian, 2015). The situation was like on the morning of 24 April 2013, there was a power outage on the top floor of the building and the building collapsed at about 08:57 am on that day, there were 3,122 workers working in the building at the time of collapse and the main cause of collapse was because the building was supposed to be used as commercial (BBC, 2013). Despite these concerns, the everyday health of workers is still affected, as they are exposed to fabric dust, smoke generated by cutting machines, heat generated by electric sewing machines, continuous whirring sounds, adhesives,
lack of ventilation, bright overhead fluorescent strip lights and unsafe electrical wiring (Ashraf, 2017; De Neve & Prentice, 2017). This affects both the physical and mental well-being of garment workers, which continues to be neglected (Ashraf, 2017; De Neve & Prentice, 2017). Labour exploitation such as long working hours, low wages and harsh working conditions are common within labour-intensive industries because improving labour standards is costly, and increases the cost of garment productions (Oka, 2012). A number of studies of these issues have been conducted in Bangladesh (Ashraf, 2017; De Neve & Prentice, 2017; Oka, 2012), and while little data of a similar nature exists in Cambodia, in Chapter 6 this study will show there are many similarities in the characteristics of factory work in Cambodia.

In order to improve working conditions within labour-intensive industries, recipient governments such as that in Bangladesh have regulated labour laws and enforced some rules and regulations that aims to protect workers’ rights; however, those governments hesitate to sanction factory owners when they disobey laws and regulations, fearing that those multinational factories will mobilise their factory premises and move to other developing countries (Koggel, 2003, p. 177). Labour exploitation including long working hours, unsafe physical facilities, forced overtime, lack of workplace amenities, no holidays, and taking sick or maternity leave can lead to workers losing benefits as stated by law, or being completely dismissed (Alam & Blanch, 2011; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). There is also evidence of cases of physical and psychological assaults of workers by team leaders and supervisors that have been ignored by governments and their representatives (Alam & Blanch, 2011; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). In addition, given the limited capacity of inspectors and resources in those countries, the enforceability and implementation of laws and regulations is weak, because there is no incentive or budget allocation for travelling provided to inspectors to do their jobs (Robertson, Di, Brown, & Dehejia, 2016).

Understanding the limited capacities of many governments in the Global South to enforce their own labour laws, multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations and trade unions have intervened to improve working conditions within labour-intensive industries (Fukunishi, 2014). For instance, multinational corporations have developed their own codes of conduct for suppliers, to ensure them that global brands have set conditions, and that if any suppliers breach the code, they have the
right to shift their order to other suppliers who are committed to the code (Locke & Romis, 2007). In many South Asian countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan, trade unions have been established to protect workers, act as conflict resolution mechanisms, help improve labour standards and women’s productivity, and minimise the gender wage gap (Shoma, 2017, p. 128). The ILO has played a crucial role as the custodian of workers’ rights within UN systems, whereby supervision and monitoring has helped improve working standards for workers, while pressure from buyers to conform with compliance certification systems is a bargaining tool used to negotiate with factories. However, compliance certification systems can only be applied to larger factories upon which buyers have a greater influence, and that are well monitored by the ILO (Shoma, 2017, p. 128; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004, p. 95).

In relation to issues effecting workers, Cambodia has similarities to other countries in the Global South. Those include the shared economic factors which prefigure the emergence of garment factories, the composition of the workforce (ie. largely composed of poor rural urban migrants, often women), working conditions and interventions from international organisations, as well as the measures taken by governments to attract and keep foreign investors (Polaski, 2006). Cambodia’s employment relations, as mentioned in Chapter 2, reflect a situation where the government does little to enforce its own legislative requirements. The pressure of international donors, trade liberalisation, the availability of cheap labour, and the growth of export-oriented manufacturing mean that workers are treated by the government as a commodity to serve economic growth, at the cost of deterioration of labour conditions.

Labour unionisation is one of the mechanisms that can protect workers and build better working conditions (Nuon & Serrano, 2010). Based on a study of the Better Factory Cambodia 2013, 58 percent of 2,000 exporting garment sector’s labour force is estimated to be unionized. This means, and despite the factors described above, Cambodia has a high level of union density in comparison to other countries such as Bangladesh, where only 4% of 3,500 factories have a union presence (ILO, 2017), and Thailand where there are around 2,000 garment factories and only 9 unions (Factsheet Thailand, 2014). The presence of the unions within the factory sector will be discussed further in Chapter 6.
3.6 The capability approach as a theoretical framework

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the impact of women’s access to employment on their autonomy is complex and debatable. Some scholars strongly argue that women’s access to employment contributes to upholding women’s autonomy, while others suggest the complete opposite (Denzin, 1984; Felson & Messner, 2000; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Molm, 1997; Moore, 1997). This study attempts to offer a different perspective by employing the capability approach as its analytical framework to understand the relationships between paid employment and autonomy, focusing on different stages of female workers’ lives.

The capability approach framework was pioneered by Amartya Sen in the early 1980s and has been employed in a number of academic disciplines since, including studies of human development (Fukuda-Parr, 2003), gender inequality (Robeyns, 2002), development economics (Alkire, 2002, 2008), women, culture and social justice (Street, Nussbaum, Glover, & World Institute for Development Economics, 1995; Nussbaum, 2011a; Nussbaum, 2011b; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Nussbaum, 2001), and economics and philosophy (Pettit, 2001). There are several ways the framework can be explained based on the different approaches used in these different academic disciplines, and the multidisciplinary adaptability of the framework is its main strength (Kuklys, 2005).

It should be noted that capabilities approaches are not without their critics. For example, Pogge (2010, p.1) has argued that the ‘capability approach’ is subjective and contextual, it is almost impossible to determine capabilities because there are no fixed or universal principles that can be applied. Pogge emphasizes that there are no fixed conditions relating to culture, power relations, variations in social climate,

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30 Sen (1985) adopted the capability approach when he found that Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is not the only factor that determines the level of an individual’s functionings; this was based upon practical evidence derived from a comparative study of Brazil, Mexico, India, China and Sri Lanka. The study showed that while the GNP per capita of Brazil and Mexico were more than seven times the GNP per capita of India, China and Sri Lanka, the performance of functionings in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality and child death rates were most favourable in Sri Lanka, better in China compared to India, and better in Mexico compared to Brazil (Sen, 1985, pp. 46-51). In his study on ‘well-being, functionings and sex bias’, (Sen, 1985, pp. 52-69) also found that the capability to achieve functionings was less for women than men, given that women are more vulnerable to malnutrition and morbidity.
environment diversities, and personal heterogeneities (pp.4-19). Beitz (1986) also argues that Sen’s approach is too broad; and suggests that rather than assuming all capabilities are important that it would be more practical to weigh each capability against each other. Other perspectives from authors such as Oizibash (2011), Nussbaum (1988) and Clark (2005) have critiqued Sen’s failure to supplement his framework with a coherent list of important capabilities. While these authors worry about the flexibility and breadth of Sen’s perspective, this is also the strength of Sen’s approach. As Alkire (2002) highlights, one of the chief strengths of Sen’s framework is that it is flexible and exhibits a considerable degree of internal pluralism, which allows researchers to develop and apply it in many disciplines. Indeed, as I shall discuss below, Ingrid Robeyn’s and Martha Nussbaum provide some useful modifications to Sen’s framework which make this approach useful to apply to the analysis of women’s autonomy in Cambodia. Thus, while Sen’s capability approach plays role as a powerful for analysis; we can also acknowledge that in order to make it relevant to a specific context, the works of other scholars are potentially useful for improving its relevance.

In order to provide a more detailed explanation of the framework, this study has focused on the work of two main scholars who have used the framework to assess and evaluate women’s situations, mainly in context of women in the Global South. The two main scholars are Ingrid Robeyn’s (2003, 2005, 2008) work, the capability approach is a normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about social change in society. The main characteristic of the framework is its focus on what people are capable of doing and being; the focus on a person’s capabilities is a different method of understanding such issues to philosophical approaches that focus on a person’s happiness, desire-fulfilment or income, expenditure and consumption (Robeyn, 2005). For Robeyn’s (2005), taking such an approach means evaluating well-being, justice and development in terms of people’s capabilities to function, to have the freedom or capability to lead the lives they want to lead, to do what they want to do and be the person they want to be. After having all of these substantive conditions and options made available, the person can then choose which options they value most (Robeyn, 2005). Those choices may depend on their beliefs and the level of acceptance they have within their
respective communities (Robeyns, 2005). As an example, every person should have the opportunity to be part of a community and to practice a religion, but they should also have the right to choose to be a hermit or an atheist. Robeyns (2005, p.94) further adds that:

The capability approach is not a theory that can explain poverty, inequality or well-being; instead, it rather provides a tool and a framework within which to conceptualize and evaluate these phenomena; applying the capability approach to issues of policy and social change will therefore often require the addition of explanatory theories.

To follow Robeyns (2005), poverty, inequality and well-being depend on the particular context in which they occur and are often measured subjectively. Thus, it is hard to develop a theory that explicitly define these conditions, and the capability approach should therefore be seen as a tool that can be used to explain these phenomena, rather than a rigid theory. In this sense the capability approach described by Robeyns has proved to be a powerful framework for the theoretical approach of this thesis. This is because this framework has allowed for studies of kinship systems, relational approaches to gender relationships, the characteristics of social norms and good governance, facilitating a complex and nuanced understanding of the relationship between paid employment and women’s autonomy.

Nussbaum’s (2011) work also focuses on the capability approach, and she has conducted many interesting studies of women’s movement and social justice by using and advancing this approach. Nussbaum (2011, p.17) argues that the capability approach is sometimes known as the “human development approach”, and explains how it has been used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to assess and analyse development issues within the Global South, including human rights, equality and social justice. Nussbaum (2011) uses the framework to answer the question: ‘What does a life worthy of human dignity require?’ To answer this question, Nussbaum (2011) used the framework to argue that to live a worthy life, a person needs at least 10 central capabilities:
(1) *Life*: Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length;
(2) *Bodily health*: Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; (3) *Bodily integrity*: Being able to move freely from place to place; (4) *Sense, imagination, and thought*: Being able to use the senses; (5) *Emotions*: Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; (6) *Practical reason*: Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life; (7) *Affiliation*: Being able to live with and toward others; (8) *Other species*: Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature; (9) *Play*: Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities and (10) *Control over one’s environment*: In terms of political, it is being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life and in terms, of material, it is being able to hold property. (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 33-34)

Nussbaum (2011) created this list in the belief that such capabilities shall belong first and foremost to a person, and second to groups; the approach thereby places utmost importance upon the individual, rather than society. She further explains that what she terms the capabilities approach31 – preferring the plural over the singular – views each and every individual as a homogenous unit, and recognises that the conditions experienced by individuals must be addressed in policy because social conditions can prevent broader groups such as children and women from experiencing benefits via policy than individuals (Nussbaum, 2011). Thus, the 10 central capabilities should be considered as possible for individuals to achieve, even in cases where social conditions make it seem impossible (Nussbaum, 2011). For Nussbaum (2011), these capabilities must be protected for a person to truly live a worthy life. While, for example, play and having leisure time might be considered unnecessary and extravagant, such capabilities are important in the context of women’s rights, as women have fewer opportunities for play and leisure time because of ‘the double day’ that women commonly experience when they undertake work and household duties; thus, if men

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31 Nussbaum (2011) prefers to use the plural ‘capabilities’ given that an individual’s quality of life is marked by plurality and is qualitatively distinct; for example, it includes health, bodily integrity, education, and other aspects of individual lives that cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion.
also shared household and care responsibilities, women would have more leisure time, which would improve their lives (Nussbaum, 2011).

Both Robeyns (2005) and Nussbaum (2011) utilise and advance the capability approach to serve their own purposes when assessing issues relating to human well-being. This study chooses to employ the framework closer to Robeyns’s (2005) perspective than Nussbaum’s (2011). Based on Robeyns (2005), I would propose that in order to understand women’s situations and movements in Cambodia, especially the implications of paid employment on women’s autonomy, additional theories including female autonomy theory, collective/relational theory on gender roles, theories on women’s movements and some understanding of the political economy behind the emergence of labour-intensive industries in the Global South need to be included. The ten central capabilities proposed by Nussbaum (2011), while useful, are alone insufficient to understand the situation of Khmer women. Analysis of their situation in reference to the ten central capabilities might only find what is lacking, rather than seeing the other sorts of capabilities women may attain. Robeyns (2005) framework supplements Nussbaum to offer a more comprehensive perspective.

3.6.1 Key elements of the capability approach

The capability approach has two core concepts: functionings and capabilities. According to Sen (1985), these concepts need to be analysed in order to measure people’s well-being and freedom. In the following sections I discuss these concepts, and will then explore other concepts that have been framed around the capability approach framework, such as agency and freedom.

The concept of functionings is influenced by Aristotle’s term “ergon” in Greek which means “function” (Baker, 2015, p.229), and refers to the functions or accomplishments of a person; originally Aristotle used it to describe:

(1) The function or activity that is the actualization or use of a state, such as knowledge of the craft of medicine, and (2) for works that are the further results of that activity. (Reeve, 2014, p. 197)
Sen (1999) defines a functioning as the achievement of a person, i.e. what they manage to do or be. Functionings comprise an individual's activities and states of being, for example, being in good health, being well-sheltered, moving about freely, or being educated (Sen, 1999, p. 75; 2003). Sen (1999) further suggests that different resources, such as goods, services, income and commodities, have the capacity to allow for the achievement of functionings; as such, these functionings can only be achieved through interactions of individuals with commodities. Sen (1992, p. 5) further adds that functionings can be divided into two groups: elementary and complex. Elementary functionings represent minimal gains from accessing basic commodities to meet essential needs, including ‘being well-nourished, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality’, while complex functionings can include having self-respect, and being able to participate in community life as a form of social integration shared with others. Sen (1992) believes that social integration and an individual’s acceptance by their community are functionings a person must achieve to live a valuable life. Sen (1992) distinguishes between the two types of functionings in order to measure the level of functioning achieved by a person. For instance, if a person only needs to perform a simple task involving physical mobility, that person only needs an elementary type of functioning. However, in other cases, such as where a person needs to enjoy their own rights and obtain personal well-being within a community, complex functionings become the relevant indicators for analysis. Sen (1992) also argues that ‘the selection and weighting of different functionings influence the assessment of the capability to achieve various alternative functioning bundles’ (p. 5).

As explained earlier, the capability approach is a lively framework that scholars from various disciplines have modified to serve their own interests. Robeyns (2005) suggests that functionings should include “working, resting, being literate, being healthy, being part of a community, being respected, and so forth.” (pp. 95-99). However, these functionings are not merely attached to particular goods or services, but the way those goods or services produce an effect in the individual (Robeyns, 2005). For example, we are not intrinsically interested in bicycles because they are made from quality materials, but because they can take us places we want to go more quickly than walking (Robeyns, 2005). Robeyns (2005) further explains that the relationship between goods and the achievement of various related functionings is influenced by three groups of conversions factors. First, personal conversion factors...
(e.g., metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, intelligence) influence how a person can convert the characteristics of the commodity into a functioning. Both Sen and Robeyns used the case of bicycle to explain achieved functionings, they explained in a way that personal conversion factors refer to the person’s physical ability to use the commodity, the bicycle cannot perform its own function if the person who uses it has an impairment that prevents them riding a bicycle. Second, social conversion factors include social and institutional arrangements such as public policies, social norms, discriminating practises, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations. For example, a government imposes regulation may prohibit a person riding a bicycle before she/he turns 15 years of age. In this case the bicycle can perform its function; however, legal arrangement prevents it being used n particular ways. And, finally, environmental conversion factors (e.g., climate, geographical location) play a role in the conversion of the characteristics of the good to individual functionings. For example, the bicycle may be in good condition, and the rider may be physically and legally able to ride the bicycle: however, road conditions may prevent the bicycle being used as a transportation; so the bicycle still cannot be performed as it is expected (Sen, 1985, p. 6; Robeyns, 2005, p. 99).

The term capability reflects the various functionings a person can potentially achieve and involves the person's freedom to choose between different ways of living; in other words, the capability of a person refers to their substantive freedom to achieve functionings (Comim et al., 2008, p. 84; Deneulin & Shahani, 2009, p. 32; M. Nussbaum & Sen, 1993, p. 31). Sen (1992) defines freedom as “the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value” (p. 31), and suggests that the concept of freedom understood via the capability approach is in a form of ‘positive freedom’ (Sen, 2004, p. 586), similar to that described by Berlin (1969), as discussed earlier in this chapter. In the capability approach, ‘capability’ sometimes means freedom to choose one or two functionings to which a person ascribes value. This can be viewed as an alternative definition of ‘autonomy’.

3.6.2 Sen’s capability approach and feminist concerns

Many feminist scholars argue that some normative theories, including studies of inequality, poverty, well-being, freedom and social justice, are biased towards men
(Okin, 1989, pp. 7-8; Robeyns, 2008, p. 82). Robeyns (2008, p. 82) further elaborates upon the problematic aspects of those theories, noting that they do not specifically focus on women’s issues, and can therefore only to be used to explain male experiences. To follow Robeyns (2008, p. 82), these theories ignore various aspects of social institutions and dimensions of well-being that are of special importance for women, who enjoy less fundamental functionings than men: they have poorer health, fewer professional and technical skills, face more obstacles to access employment, and are more vulnerable to violence. As Nussbaum (2001, p.1) argues, this therefore means it is imperative to advance the capability approach to meet the reality of women’s lives.

Although Sen does not specifically mention the supplementary theories that should be added to operationalise the capability approach framework, his work does not strictly prohibit or deny the need for such additional theories. This means a range of options can be considered (Robeyns, 2008). For example, in feminist literature, theories on preference formation, individual and collective decision-making, gender relations and social institutions can be integrated to make analyses via the capability approach more effective (Robeyns, 2008, pp. 100-101). Robeyns (2008) further elaborates that Sen’s capability approach framework embraces feminist thought for its evaluation and analyses. Rather than taking a stand on ontological or methodological individualism, Sen prefers ethical individualism; this is a method of inquiry feminists believe can offer an understanding of gender relations, gender inequality and the well-being of women. Ethical individualism refers to who or what should count in a person’s process of decision-making; in assessing well-being, individuals are viewed as ultimate units of concern, and social structures and societal properties should be taken into consideration only if they are important factors impinging upon the well-being of individuals (Robeyns, 2008, p. 94). Based on this, my view is that the capability approach resonates with feminist approach to analysis, and that the ethical individualism Sen has adopted expands the validity of the approach into many different research disciplines.

Robeyns (2005) argues that integrating feminist thinking into the capability approach is based on the idea that to understand women’s situations more completely, variables including gendered social norms, cultural norms, traditions and systems of oppression, stereotypes, and other women’s vulnerabilities must be recognised. Robeyns (2005)
strongly suggests that when it comes to women’s concerns, to measure and assess levels of achieved functionings, a number of extra indicators specifically associated with women need to be considered. This is because analyses that use the same indicators for men and women are more likely to fail to adequately attend to women’s issues.

3.7 Operationalising the capability approach framework for this study

After a discussion of the key concepts of women’s autonomy and women’s economic empowerment, and reviewing various studies on the implications of paid employment on women’s autonomy, this study has identified the capability approach formulated by Sen (1985) and advanced by Nussbaum (2011) and Robeyns (2005) as having great potential to address gender issues and feminist concerns, more so than most other theories on well-being and social justice. This does not mean other social justice theories are not applicable, but that the capability approach works best not just as a theory, but as a framework that is adaptive and able to be modified to address the specific social concerns on which this study is focused. The study employs the capability approach as an analytical framework to understand how Khmer women understand their own autonomy and how access to paid employment in the low-wage garment sector can affect their experiences of that autonomy in both households and workplaces. The approach will be applied consistently throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis. It will be used to explain how Khmer women understand autonomy before migrating to work in the city (Chapter 5), how paid employment in the city affects those women’s autonomy in their places of work (Chapter 6), and lastly how paid employment in the city has changed social and gender norms and the autonomy of those women within their community and household, and as individuals (Chapter 7).
Chapter 4: In Search of the Answers: The Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology used and fieldwork undertaken in this study, shaped by the research question: ‘To what extent does Khmer women’s economic empowerment in the low-waged garment sector in Cambodia lead to a change in their experiences of autonomy?’ The first section provides an outline of the research design and strategies employed and explains the rationale behind using a single case study in full recognition of its limitations, as well as a discussion about the longitudinal approach that has been utilised. In the second section, I describe the tools used in the data collection process, including interviews and informal observations. In the third section, I explain how the collected data was analysed. In the fourth section, I outline the ethical procedures taken into account in the conduct of the research, based on conditions set by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney.

4.2 Research design

A research design is ‘a logical plan for getting from here to there’: a work plan that enables the researcher to travel from the initial research questions towards answers. Along the way there are a number of major steps that often include the collection and analysis of relevant data (Yin, 2014, pp. 28-29). Case study approaches naturally have limited scientific generalisation. It means a case study is insufficient to model a conclusion on issue that can be applied in all cases; in order to form a generalisable conclusion a single case study must combine with other case studies that have replicated the same or similar results under different conditions (Yin, 2014). For this study, the sample size is only 40 female workers out of 552,500 (85% of the total workers 650,000) (CHDS, 2014). This is, of course, a very small sample in comparison to the total number of female workers in Cambodia. This means results cannot be generalised to form a representative picture of the population cohort. Statistically significant results could be attained through a large-scale population study; however, this would be beyond the parameters of a social sciences doctoral project. But there are advantages to a small-scale study. A population study would not be able to capture details that small scale interviews can elicit. By choosing a case study approach, as I
elaborate below, though not producing results which can be said to be statistically representative of a population, it nevertheless can yield rich and fine grained understandings which can in turn set the foundations for future studies.

The single case study research is different from other related qualitative methods such as ethnography and grounded theories (Yin 2014). At least one difference is the way theory is used within a case study approach. Ethnography and grounded theories often may deliberately avoid testing theoretical propositions at the outset of the project (O’Reilly, 2005); whilst, the single case study is operated in the different direction, with theory development in place to serve as a blueprint for the study (Yin, 2009). Sutton and Straw (1995) claim that case study research is “a [hypothetical] story about why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occur” (p. 378). Th case study research, such as employed in this research, are more “deductive” in nature. To put it simply, this study aims to test theory in the field.

All types of research methods have its pros and cons, based on the strengths of the case study research, this study employs the research method as a tool to search for the answers to the research question. Schramm (1971, p. 209), through his work on instructional media projects points out, case study approaches are worthwhile methods of research because of the depth of analysis the research offers. A case study approach emphasises how and why a decision or set of decisions are made, how the decisions have been implemented and the results of that implementation (Schramm, 1971, p. 209). As I shall detail below, Yin (2014) suggests a case study approach allows for ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions to be asked; these are explanatory questions that, to be answered, require research methods that trace operational links rather than mere frequencies or incidences (Yin, 2014).

There are two types of case study research: single case studies and collective case studies. The latter involves a comparison of relative cases, while the former focuses on one person “called biographical study” or on one event “a critical incident study” (VanderStoep, 2009, p. 209). In this research project, the single case study is employed given the characteristics of this study, and a detailed explanation as to why the approach was chosen will be illuminated in the following sections.
4.2.1 The single case study design

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the main objective of this research is to investigate how the economic empowerment of Khmer women in the low-waged garment sector in Cambodia might influence those women’s experiences of autonomy at their workplaces and in their personal lives. The purpose of the study is to understand (1) the characteristics of paid employment to which many young women in Cambodia have access, (2) the characteristics of those working women, and (3) the implications of that paid employment on their autonomy. A single case study approach was employed to collect and interpret primary and secondary data on the changes experienced by women with regard to their autonomy.

According to Yin (2009), there are five rationales for using a single case study research design: firstly, a single case study can confirm, challenge or extend a well-formulated theory, deepening specific research, challenging the assumptions of existing research and shedding light on areas for future investigation. Secondly, a single case study design can generate an in-depth understanding of an extreme or unique case about which there is limited or no previous research. The results of such studies may deviate from existing findings and describe events or phenomena outside of everyday or mainstream experiences, thereby presenting a new take on an existing field of research. For example, studies of this nature can be used in clinical psychology, such as a case where a specific and rare mental health condition is to be documented and analysed. While single case study approaches can provide details about exceptional circumstances, experiences or events, they can also help confirm and document the occurrences of everyday life. This is the third rationale for the single case study, which in this context aims to provide detailed elaboration on common issues in contemporary society; for example, studies on the potential social benefits of entrepreneurial activities that may reduce the incidence of poverty (Yin, 2009). As a fourth rational of a single-case study is the “revelatory” case; That is, the cases that had previously eluded “social science inquiry” and prove informative in how they shape generalisable interpretations (Yin, 2009, pp:48-49). As an example, Yin refers to Elliot Liebow's (1967) famous case study of unemployed men:
Liebow had the opportunity to meet the men in an African American neighbourhood in Washington, D.C. and to learn about their everyday lives. His observations of and insights into the problems of unemployment formed a significant case study, because few social scientists had previously had the opportunity to investigate these problems, even though the problems were common across the country. (Yin, 2009, p.49)

Finally, the single case study approach is suitable for research that utilises a longitudinal study, whereby an individual or cohort is followed over a period of time. Longitudinal studies aim to capture how certain conditions and their underlying processes change over time, and a longitudinal case study can be deployed to understand what happens prior, during and after critical events (Yin, 2002). As Yin (2002) explains, the process of change observed should reflect the theoretical propositions proposed by the study.

This study responds to three rationales, outlined above. Firstly, this study seeks to engage with and confirm existing knowledge. As I have described, there are many studies that have explored the implications of economic structural change on women’s autonomy and social and gender norms in Global South countries. As such, this study itself is not new since it seeks to build on existing theories of autonomy and empowerment; however, it seeks to extend this scholarship to the specific context of women in Cambodia. Secondly, as described above, a single case study approach can provide insight into a unique case or area of study about which there is limited knowledge. For more than three decades, women’s access to formal paid employment within export-oriented industries in Cambodia has been a growth area, but thus far there is limited knowledge on the relationship between Khmer women’s experiences and paid employment, especially in low-wage sectors like the garment sector, and what such employment means for women’s autonomy. Lastly, the longitudinal approach taken in this research, relating to the use of follow up interviews, traces changes experienced by a cohort of female workers in the city, and thereby relies on a single case study design to fully track those changes.
4.2.2 Operationalisation of the single case study method

4.2.2.1 Sampling

Through a single case study using a purposive sampling method, this research seeks to collect in-depth data on the lives and perceptions of women involved in garment work. There were 40 participants in the first round of the study and a cohort of 30 of these women in the second round. This sample was carefully targeted to yield new information on this group of workers. Neuman (2011, pp. 267-268) and Bailey (1994, p. 96) note that purposive sampling can be described as ‘judgmental sampling’ because researchers use their own judgement to determine whether certain types of respondents hold specific characteristics which best meet the purpose of the study. Such judgments are deployed using specific criteria that require the researcher to obtain a high degree of understanding about the proposed sample, including knowledge that will allow them to thoroughly investigate a particular population group with unique characteristics (Neuman, 2011; Bailey, 1994).

However, it is also important to notice that purposive sampling has drawbacks. A wide sampling approach may lead to the selection of extreme or deviant cases or samples that may distort the perspective of the researcher, particularly where the sample is not statistically significant (Patton, 2002, pp. 230-242). Harsh (2011, pp. 66-67) also cautions against the use of purposive sampling in research because it may only confirm the existing bias of the researcher. Purposive sampling can provide compelling advantages, yet it also lacks generalisability through representativeness.

While taking these cautions into account, purposive sampling nevertheless appears best suited to the research conducted in the present study. It allowed me to directly choose the specific group of people I wanted to understand; namely, female workers with experience working in garment factories. The approach allowed me to ask people in this population group specific questions about their experiences of paid employment, and the impact of that employment on their perceptions of their own autonomy.
4.2.2.2 Participant selection

The participants (40 in the first round and 30 in the second) were drawn from a population of adult female workers in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. According to the latest report by CARE (2017), the garment sector in Cambodia employs approximately 650,000 workers, 85 percent who are women. The 40 participants were selected from different locations across Phnom Penh, including the districts, or khans, Chak Angre Leu, Russey Keo, Mean Chey and Dangkor. Twenty participants had spouses or partners and the remaining 20 were single (for the purpose of this study, I define the latter term as not married, or living in a defacto relationship).

All participants were rural-urban migrants, aged 18-45 years, with over one year’s experience working in a garment factory prior to the interview. The low end of the range represented the lowest legal working age of 18, as stated by law since the sector first developed in the mid 1990s. The majority of female workers in the sector are about 18 years of age or more, and the upper reach of the age range reflected this. The condition that participants had at least one year’s experience working in the garment sector was set so that the women who participated could reflect on changes in their employment over time, especially in terms of the different working conditions they were exposed to as a result of market fluctuations. It was surmised that such fluctuations would affect female workers’ perceptions of both their employment security and their autonomy. Thus, participants who had worked in the sector for longer periods of time and who were subject to different conditions were preferred as interviewees, especially those who had experienced the economic recession during 2008 and 2009, which, based on my review of existing secondary researches on the issues, substantially affected female workers within the garment industry.

The set condition of a minimum of one year’s experience working in the garment sector was also guided by the intuition that female workers who had spent one year working in the city would have had opportunities to visit home and reflect on the contrast between their new lives in the city and their old lives in the villages. Indeed, participants in this study suggested that female workers would usually visit their
villages twice a year: once during Khmer New Year and once during Pchum Ben. Participants with less than a year’s experience may not have had first-hand opportunity to contrast the difference between their lives in the city with their lives in rural settings, and thus were not preferred for the study.

As described in Chapter 2, female workers employed in garment work are in highly precarious employment and social situations and have limited power. In order to avoid any perception of coercion, CARE Cambodia, an international development organisation that works closely with women and girls (including those in garment factories) to bring sustainable changes to their communities made initial contact with potential participants. With a formal letter from the University of Sydney, CARE International approached potential participants on behalf of the researcher (see the appendix 4 of the invitation letter and 5 of the institutional support from CARE on this research). After potential participants responded to CARE Cambodia indicating their willingness to participate in the research, I contacted them directly to set up the interviews. In so doing, I minimised the risk of imposing CARE Cambodia’s own selection bias while also avoiding any potential coercion.

### 4.2.3 The longitudinal qualitative interview

As discussed above, this study employed a longitudinal approach, whereby 40 participants were interviewed in the first round of the study, and follow up interviews were conducted with a cohort of 30 of the original participants. Longitudinal research is commonly used in quantitative studies; increasingly, the method has also been adapted for qualitative studies, enabling the researcher to capture how individual experiences of social, political and economic settings change over time (Calman, Brunton, & Molassiotis, 2013; Hermanowicz, 2013; Neale, 2011; Rico et al., 2013; Rosenbaum, More, & Steane, 2017; Schramm, 1971; Tam, 2018). By collecting data on and measuring changes to one or more variables for more than one time period, a longitudinal study helps explain the causality between the variables and allows for

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32 Pchum Ben is a religious festival that culminates in celebrations on the 15th day of the tenth month in the Khmer calendar, and usually occurs five to six months after Khmer New Year. During the 15 days of ceremony, the last three days of the ceremony are national public holidays in Cambodia.
comparisons of data across time periods to be made (Kuper, Reeves, & Levinson, 2008, p. 3).

Respondent recall is a challenge in longitudinal studies (Kuper et al., 2008). Memories can be inaccurate when individuals are required to recall past experiences, especially when the time since those experiences increases. The challenge of having participants accurately recall information is common to both retrospective and prospective designs of longitudinal studies, and impacts such studies in unique ways (Kuper et al., 2008). As Kuper et al. (2008) explain, one such challenge could be that accounts given by participants of their experiences change between the first and second round of interviews, which can occur when, over time, stories about the same experiences and events become altered. In this study this phenomenon was not purely reflective of the participants’ memories, but of cultural factors that impacted upon the memories recalled and shared. In the Cambodian context, cultural norms exist that advise women not to share personal information with strangers (see Chapter 5). As a result, participants may have been more likely to offer more complete or more accurate responses in the second round of interviews than the first, as their familiarity and trust with the researcher grew. This led to a situation where the validity and realizability of the data from the first round of interviews appeared to be lower than that of the second round.

In order to understand possible changes and reasons behind the changes of their answers, the participants were not told their answers to all the questions in the first round of interview. However, when I noticed any changes in their stories after the second round of the interview, I reported back their previous responses and asked them why their answers may have been changed. The purpose of doing so is to cross-check their responses between the first and second round interviews. I have previously conducted social research in a Cambodian context; this experience has highlighted that female interviewees may hesitate to share their stories, particularly in their first meeting with a researcher.

Another challenge undertaking longitudinal research is attrition: the potential loss of participant numbers in the second round of interviews (Winiarska, 2017). This is a common phenomenon that occurs for various reasons, including loss of interest in the
study, mobility and changing personal life circumstances. This study found similar reasons for decreasing participant numbers were migration (internal and external migration out of the country), changing personal lives’ situation such as marriage and changing job which led to the cessation of employment in the garment sector, and loss of contact due to participants changing their phone numbers. In order to secure a viable number of participants for the study, to suit capacity and the time period allowed, I recruited as many participants as I could for the first interview, in anticipation that it would be possible that 30-40 percent of the participants would drop out of the study. In order to mitigate this, I requested individual information from participants, including their place of birth and contact number. This information was collected using the Participant Information Statement (Appendix 7), along with their consent in the form of a Participant Consent Form (Appendix 6). I also asked participants whether they could provide me with another phone number I could reach them on in case the other number was not available. Further to this, I conducted follow up calls with participants between the two interviews. Overall, the number of participants in the second-round interviews was 25 percent less than the first round, with 30 out of 40 participants in total secured for the second interview. This attrition rate is in line with at least some studies on loss of sample in longitudinal research (see for example a study on ‘Attrition in longitudinal studies: who do you lose?’ conducted by Young, Powers, and Bell (2006)). Of the 10 participants who left the study, two migrated to Korea and one to Thailand, and I was unable to successfully contact the other seven participants. Because the participants lived in various locations, some having moved from Phnom Penh since the first round, the second interviews were conducted in different places around Cambodia. I will discuss further the physical settings for the interviews below in section 4.3.1.

4.3 Data collection

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken in two rounds. The first round was from June to September 2015 and the second from June to September 2016. My fieldwork was based on two methods of data collection: (1) primary data in the form of key informant interviews with both single female workers and female workers with spouses or partners, and (2) secondary data in the form of bibliographic materials used to construct a theoretical background for the study.
4.3.1 Primary data

Primary data was collected through two rounds of individual, face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews. The in-depth interview is proposed as a tool that aims to build a life history narrative and is suitable with the interviews that are usually very lengthy, focusing on specific and often sensitive topics (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011). A script with a set of questions divided by different stages of lives of female workers had developed to guide the interviews; but allowed women to elaborate in an organic way based their personal experience. This meant the interviews were “semi-structured.” The questions asked were developed to get in-depth information from participants. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. As discussed above, there were 40 participants in the first round and 30 in the second. The 30 participants in the second round had all been interviewed in round one, thus introducing a longitudinal element to the study by following up with interviewees after a period of one year.

Two main groups of participants took part in the study: female workers who were single, and those who had a partner or spouse. The main reason for focusing on these two specific groups relates to the social stratification connected to the institution of marriage, and its implications for household arrangements and women’s autonomy. As explained in Chapter 2, marriage normally means a Khmer woman takes on certain roles and responsibilities, not just as a wife, but as a daughter-in-law and mother. Arguably, female workers with spouses or partners are potentially more likely to experience autonomy through paid employment in a different way to female workers who are single. In order to accommodate these potentially different characteristics, two sets of questionnaires were used. Women with spouses were asked a slightly different set of questions to single women. The different questions focus on how they chose their partners; their contribution to household decision-making; their relationships with their husbands and families-in-law; their children; their changing roles and responsibilities after getting married; and their changing perceptions of normative gender codes. Given that the partner status of some of the female workers changed over the course of the study, the interview questions needed to be flexible. Indeed, some female workers were in marital relationships for the first round of
interviews and then separated before the second round of interviews; meanwhile, some of the women who were divorced in the first round of interviews remarried before the second round. There were also a number of women who were single during the first round and married during the second. I have included a full list of interview questions which guided the semi-structured interviews in Appendices 1 and 2.

To account for the impact of their relationships on their employment and autonomy, I asked female workers with spouses or partners during the first and/or second round additional questions to those asked of the women who were single during both rounds. These were: “How has your life changed after [marriage/separation]?” and “What do you think of your current relationship status?” Concurrently, female workers who were single during the first interview and married during the second interview were asked the same questions for the same reason – to differentiate the experiences of marriage and single life on women’s paid employment and autonomy.

The interviews were designed to trace the key events in the lives of the participants, starting with their lives before they migrated to the city to work. Some participants worked not just in the garment sector after making the move, but in domestic work, on construction sites and at local restaurants. In these cases, the interview questions were designed to help the participants compare their perceptions and experiences of garment factory work with other forms of employment.

The questions covered a broad range of issues related to gender relations, women’s perceptions of cultural and traditional norms, personal autonomy before and after migration to work, the conditions of workplaces and households, and women’s memories and recollections of working and living in the city. As discussed above, I have included a full list of interview questions in Appendices 1 and 2.

It is difficult to ask questions around autonomy and gender relations in diverse cultural contexts because cultural and social norms may shape how a person defines autonomy (Evans, 2002). In order to explore the concept of autonomy – which, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, is broad, abstract and subject to differences of interpretation – I focused on women’s experiences making decisions, their voices within their families, and their attitudes and reactions to the degrees of freedom they have experienced.
throughout their lives. This is in line with the capabilities approach I take in understanding autonomy. Regarding gender relations, broad questions were asked around relationships with family, husbands, in-laws and other people in their communities back to their homesteads, in the city and within workplaces. These broad and open questions allowed participants to talk about any issues they felt comfortable discussing. I did not directly ask participants about experiences of violence, although, as I shall discuss, some women disclosed such experiences during the interview process.\footnote{As I discuss below, all women were offered information on support services available to them, such as counselling.}

In consideration of the participants’ privacy and confidentiality, the first round of interviews took place in quiet, private rooms in coffee shops\footnote{As there is a high demand in Phnom Penh for private spaces for personal or business meetings, a number of coffee shops in the city offer private rooms that can be rented. With consent from participants, these rooms were chosen for the interview, along with spaces in community centres.} and community centres at times most convenient to the participants themselves. In the second round, some participants invited the researcher to their rent-rooms for the interviews. Such arrangements were conducive to participants saving on travelling time and cost, and also indicated their growing trust in the researcher. Not all women were interviewed in the city. Between the first and second rounds of interviews, two participants stopped working at factories and returned to their home provinces. I made phone calls to them and asked permission to have second time interviews. I also proposed to have interviews at quiet places convenient to interviewees. However, two interviewees requested that the interviews be conducted in their homes: private homes are a better choice and more private in rural areas. Upon request, I met and interviewed both of these women at their houses in the provinces.

Before asking the questions, I explained the objective of the research to the participants, described the general types of questions that would be asked, and what they could expect of the study. When each interview began, basic data from each participant was collected in the form of a questionnaire. Next, an interview was conducted and audio-recorded, lasting between 45 and 75 minutes. Once the interview was complete, participants were allowed to ask questions or express any concerns they might have regarding the interview process or the study itself. At the close of each of
the first round interviews, I thanked the participants and invited them to participate in the second round of interviews.

The same questions were asked in the second round as in the first. As preparation, I reviewed all answers given by each participant in the first round of interviews. However, I did not share the answers they had given with them, lest this influence their second-round responses. As the interviews progressed, I noticed there were significant discrepancies between the responses provided in each round of interviews. In these cases, I either asked further probing questions to understand the reason for these discrepancies, or politely and directly asked if they could explain why these differences existed. One reason I identified was that the discrepancy might relate to the lower level of trust the participants had in me during the first round compared to the second. I discuss the implications of this further in the Conclusion.

An audio recording device run through a mobile phone application was used to record the interviews. The devices were used for each interview and the data was downloaded and saved on my personal computer in an encrypted format. After transferring, all the recording data in the phone was deleted and stored on in an encrypted format on portable data drive as a back-up. All the interviews were transcribed by myself and one research assistant I hired for the task. The research assistant did not know the participants whose responses she transcribed. The interviews were transcribed into the original Khmer before I translated them into English. After this process was complete, I then reviewed all completed transcripts to ensure no information was missing. The transcribed documents, like the audio recordings, were saved on my laptop with encrypted coding for security, as well as on a portable data drive. To protect the anonymity of the participants, the saved files did not include the interviewees’ names. All hardcopy documents were stored in an envelope and locked away in a filing cabinet at the University of Sydney.

35 At the close of the second round of interview, a small token was provided to each participant in a form of a t-shirt, a box of soap and shampoo and some snacks.
4.3.2 Secondary data

The primary data collected was complemented by the secondary data. I used bibliographic materials to construct a theoretical background for this study, those being academic texts, legislative texts, development policies and plans, official documents and reports of governmental and non-governmental organisations, and professional research institutions and thinktanks. This secondary data collected helped me to form a more complete understanding of the conversion factors experienced by Khmer women, the characteristics of the employment in which they engage, and their access to public services. Some of the documents studied were in Khmer, including ancient didactic codes, folktales, and documents published by the Cambodian Government, civil society organisations and others. I personally translated the Khmer documentation into English for the purpose of this study.

4.4 Data analysis

The results of the interviews provided insight into why the women undertook certain activities, what they valued, and how their experiences related to their autonomy. In terms of analysing these specific aspects of the women’s lives, it is important to understand that context matters. The need to focus on context was the rationale for selecting a single case study design for this research. As discussed above Yin (2009) supports the single case study because it is the “best fit” for understanding a social problem. Women’s economic empowerment and its implications for autonomy is considered as a social issue. To gain and insightful and deep understanding of this issue, the social research method needs to explore in a detailed and intimate way the conditions that women face, and how cultural and gender norms are shaped in the context of Cambodia.

As per Creswell (2009, p. 179), data analysis involves ‘organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data base, coding and organising themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them’. Accordingly, this study used a set of codes to decipher and organise the empirical data gained through interviews. Saldaña (2016, pp. 3-4) explains that codes in a qualitative sense comprise words or short phrases that represent, capture or condense important content or an important essence; data subject to coding can include interview transcripts, field notes.
of participant observation, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, and e-mail correspondence. Saldana (2016, pp. 4-5) further explains that there are a number of ways of coding: descriptive codes will summarise the primary topic of the interview: Vivo Codes will take material directly from what the participant themselves say; and Eclectic Codes will draw impressionistic phrases from open-ended answers. As I shall discuss below, I found Eclectic Codes useful for my research approach.

After coding, all the codes need to be compiled to create patterns. They then need to be categorized as themes or concepts, which are analysed with respect to how they contribute to relevant theories. There are certainly some debates on the amount of data that should be coded; for example, should coding be applied to the whole body of data or just partially? (Lofland, 2006; Poland, 2001; Seidman, 2006; Wolcott, 2001). Saldana (2016, p. 15) suggests that all data gained from interviews should be coded to avoid any omission; this is because data we might initially think is unimportant may contain some unknown information that could lead to rethinking codes, categories, themes, concepts or theories.

In this study the coding approach was applied to all data gained from the interviews. The main data for this study was derived from interview transcripts translated into English from Khmer. In order to fully code these transcripts, I listened to each interview and read through the transcripts several times to understand the similarities and differences between one participant’s responses and those of another. I used the coding method proposed by Saldana (2016). I primarily used “Eclectic Codes” (as discussed above), utilising them to form patterns that generate causation, similarity and difference between first and second round interviews. Though it was evident that some of the interviews contained irrelevant information, I nonetheless coded that information, recognising that data irrelevant to this study might potentially inform and be relevant to other, different research.

All interview data were organised, sorted and managed in MS Word and Excel files. There were two cycles involved in this process. The first cycle involved arranging all the information into MS Word with clear divisions between data from the second and first rounds. Two different font colours were assigned for this process: black for the
first and red for the second. This allowed me to compare and contrast the first and second round interviews in one document, including analysing their similarities and differences. In the second cycle, I identified patterns and themes from the organised data sets and extracted all relevant information from the two rounds of interviews. This information was then entered into MS Excel files, which were organised and sorted by questions. Sorting was a convenient method of organising the data when specific information could be quoted and directly support arguments within the thesis. A number of quotes were extracted and included in full in the text to avoid speaking on participants’ behalf. This was important as it meant the women’s own voices prevailed over those of the researcher and any of the authors of the secondary data.

4.5. Ethical issues

In this study, female workers were asked to share their life experiences and perceptions of those experiences, including those with families, communities and workplaces. They were also asked about how those life experiences changed after entering into the workforce. There was some risk that participants would disclose that they had suffered from harm in their lives. Expecting that a proportion of the participants, particularly those with spouses or partners, might have had experiences with domestic violence, I was prepared for this possibility, and needed to ensure participants not only that my interviews would not cause any further direct harm or place women in situations of risk, but that I could direct participants to support should any of the participants choose to seek help.

The following measures were taken to ensure the privacy and safety of the participants. Firstly, the fieldwork was designed to comply fully with the conditions of the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney. The role of the Human Ethics Committee is to protect the privacy and safety of research participants, and the fieldwork was conducted after receiving approval from the committee. To ensure compliance with the conditions, the following precautions were taken:

- To avoid coercion, I did not contact the potential participants directly. As discussed above, the selection process was conducted by a local organisation, CARE Cambodia;
- The participants were informed about the study in advance. Detailed information such as research objectives, information about the researcher and participants’ rights to engage in/withdraw from the research were included in the Participant Information Statement, printed on the University of Sydney’s letterhead (see Appendix 3). It was stressed that participation was on a voluntary basis, as confirmed in the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 4);

- As described above, the participants were interviewed individually at public places such as in private rooms in coffee shops, and other places where they felt comfortable;

- All relevant documents including Participant Information Statements, Participant Consent Forms and questionnaires were translated into Khmer, and their content explained to the participants before the interview; and

- As a further protection of participants’ privacy and safety, the following steps were taken: (1) the audio recordings of interviews were stored securely on the researcher’s computer in an encrypted format with password protection, (2) the participants’ names were not revealed in any aspect of the research or any related published documents, (3) only my supervisors and I had/have access to all relevant data, (4) only one research assistant was hired to transcribe the interviews, but she did not participate in the interviews themselves, and (v) the contact numbers of organisations that offer support services to women were provided to participants with those organisations’ permission if the women needed to seek assistance and assurance.

I also explained the participants’ rights before, during and after the interviews. If they had no questions or objections, the participants were asked to sign a Participant Consent Form (Appendix 6) as evidence they had understood what the study was about and the possible risks and benefits of their participation. A copy of the Participant Consent Form is included at Appendix 6. The participants were informed about their right to end the interview at any time and their right to withdraw from the study if they were worried about the consequences of their answers; in these cases, interviews recordings and transcripts were destroyed. In the Participant Information Statement (Appendix 7) provided contact information about agencies, social workers and a judge.
The latter contact information was included in case the participants needed to file a legal complaint or report any concerns about the study to someone who was independent from the study.

The proposed research received endorsement from the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney with the project number 2015/337 (see the appendix 3 of the approval letter from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney).

4.6 Conclusion

In summary, in order to answer the research questions posted above, this study employed a single-case study research method. A purposive sample of women working in garment factories in Phnom Penh was pursued, with the assistance of CARE in Cambodia. In order to trace changes and get insightful and more realizable data, this study adopted longitudinal interview approach, whereby 40 participants, were interviewed in the first stage of the study and a cohort of 30 participants were interviewed a second time, one year later. The attrition in the number of participants were due to migration and changing personal lives’ circumstances of the participants. Interviews were conducted in Khmer, and numerous steps were taken to offer interviews privacy and a comfortable space to elicit accurate responses. The research was compliant with University of Sydney human research ethics guidelines.

Now, all the methodological aspects have been set out and it is time to look at how those aspects played out in the field. Based on the employed methods, chapter 5 reports on how economic transition and the emergence of garment factory work has shaped the decision-making process for women taking on this work. Chapter 6 reports on the specific results relating to women’s lives in the workplace, and garment work shapes women’s autonomy with respect to employment. Chapter 7 explores the impact of work on women’s lives outside of work, with a focus on decision making, relationships and households.
Chapter 5: Women’s Lives Before Factory Work

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided background information on the political, social and economic situation in Cambodia and the socio-cultural norms relating to gender that affect women’s lives. This chapter expands upon that discussion by focusing in detail on the life stories of female rural-urban migrants before they moved to Phnom Penh to undertake factory work. It analyses primary data collected through the first and second stage interviews of this study and discusses the perceptions those women held of their autonomy in the rural settings in which they lived prior to migration. Such perceptions were traced through the lenses of socio-cultural norms, poverty, education attainment, access to information about work and life in the city, and how they view their own autonomy. As I shall discuss, the decision to migrate to the city was a significant one; this decision occurred against prevailing gender norms which would otherwise prevent women from wandering too far from their families. As such, while the women in this study certainly appeared to have restricted freedoms, having the agency to decide to migrate was an exercise in autonomy that occurred even before they left home. I will go on to discuss the implications of this, and women’s own perceptions of this autonomy herein.

5.2 Women’s perceptions of cultural norms

As explained in Chapter 2, Cambodia is still considered a hierarchical society where title, age, gender and wealth define the status of an individual. In order to preserve this custom, a number of didactic codes have been formulated to guide how an individual should behave. The Chbab Srey, discussed in Chapter 2, advises women about appropriate behaviour in various aspects of their lives, both when they are single and after they are married. In some respects, the code is pervasive and governs everyday life, yet the interviews revealed that the participants only knew a fraction of the code, having learnt some of its precepts from their mothers or grandmothers. When asked about their knowledge of it, participants in this study explained their understanding of the behavioural conduct advised by the Chbab Srey:

- Women should not rustle their skirts while walking;
• Women should speak softly and sweetly, and sit and walk demurely;
• Daughters should be obedient towards their parents;
• Women shall not wander far from home or stay at other people’s houses for too long;
• Home is the place for women, where they should undertake domestic tasks such as cooking, taking care of younger siblings and children, managing the family’s budget and serving their husbands;
• As wives, women shall equip themselves with patience, fortitude, respect and resignation towards their husbands.

These points are considered to be straightforward and easy to understand, and senior people in Cambodian society often use these ideas to advise their female relatives. Compared to my knowledge and experiences as a student to whom the Chbab Srey was taught in secondary school, I argue that in order to understand the sophistication of the code, one needs to be equipped with some knowledge about familial relationships and other general knowledge about life that cannot necessarily be gleaned from secondary education alone. Thinking back, I recall that students needed to memorise the Chbab Srey, and that there was limited explanation of each precept of the code. Further, teachers did not emphasise that the code had any particular importance in everyday life. I only started to understand the code’s core meaning after I became interested in women’s movements in Cambodia and had gained a postgraduate degree. By that stage I had experience as a wife, and some understanding about the complex nature of familial relationships with my in-laws. In those situations, the code only made intuitive sense through my lived experiences of family and community, and I did not view it as a formalised set of documented rules and prohibitions. As such, I was not surprised that some of the participants (or, indeed, their respective mothers and grandmothers) did not completely understand the Code or apply it to everyday life.

In the interviews I asked the women how much they understood of the Chbab Srey, to what extent the code applied to their families, and whether there were activities that occurred at home that went against the code. As previously discussed, the interviews showed that women only had a partial understanding of the code; further, they showed
the norms established in the code are not always complied with. They also showed that parents can interpret the code to regulate their daughters’ behaviour. In some cases, it appeared parents applied the code relatively strictly. One participant suggested acceptance of the code accompanied acceptance of the perceived practical value of the code in safeguarding the personal safety of young women from being subjects of sexual harassment from men:

Lina: I don’t know exactly what [the code] is. My grandmother asked me not to travel at night and to behave nicely by walking and sitting demurely. This might have been her interpretation of the code, but I do not know for sure. I did everything my grandmother advised me to do. I remember my mother was not very happy when I asked her if I could join friends in the evening and go to certain events. She thought it would not be good for a young girl to be in a group that consisted of both boys and girls because boys can be very playful, and girls might be harassed, or involved in courtship.

Another two participants similarly explained that their mothers and grandmothers used the norms derived from the code to govern their behaviour:

Phally: I learned some of the code from my teacher. It says there are many things women are meant to do. We need to be very mindful in the way we talk, sit, stand and sleep. We need to learn how to take care of all the household chores, and we should not visit other households unless it’s necessary. Women also need to give full respect to their husbands. I don’t think all these ideas have been applied in my daily life. My sisters and I just act normally and follow our mother’s advice. My parents have rarely stopped me from doing anything.

Ravy: When I was at home, I knew very little about the code. All I knew was some basic advice. I knew that it says when women walk, their skirt must not make a sound, and when eating, women should not let the spoon touch their teeth. This came from my grandmother, and has been applied within my family. For instance, my mother used this advice as a reminder for me to be careful with my behaviour. Whenever I touched my teeth with a spoon, my mother would look at me and clear her throat as a sign to stop doing it. Oftentimes, my
mother did not allow me to visit friends and asked me to stay home and help with household chores, or to take care of my young brother. I was fine with staying whenever she asked me to; refusing not to do it would provoke mother’s anger.

The interviews showed women understood their expected compliance with limitations on activities outside the home, particularly in terms of intimacy and affection from men, whether or not they knew much about the code itself:

Srey Touch: I don’t know much about the code. I just know that when I was at home I needed to help my mother with household chores and take care of my younger siblings. Even more important was that I should not be too playful with boys, because this could lead to people talking badly about me. I was not allowed to have any male friends. I could be lazy sometimes, but most of the time I helped my mother to my fullest capacity. For women, I think the activities that are most prohibited are going out with friends, especially strangers, and having relationships with men.

It is clear that the code places strict restrictions on women’s behaviour, particularly outside the household. Yet in other cases, the code appears more as a loose guideline, with women explaining that it only occasionally shaped their behaviour and the interventions of their relatives into their lives:

Phalla: I remember [the code] is all about walking softly. Young people should bow their heads when walking past older people, and we should not listen in on what those older people are talking about. Doing so is not good manners because they may be talking about adult issues that are not appropriate for girls to hear. Simply, we must do what they ask. They always want us to be good, so there is no need to ask why or how we must behave a certain way. Questions like that are challenging and are strongly prohibited. The code wasn’t strictly applied in my family, but if I ever did something like play a game that was meant to be for boys, my mother always told me I should not be playing such a game.
Pisey: There are some basic manners I needed to follow, such as walking softly, being obedient, not visiting other people’s houses too often, and doing the household chores. If I ever walked too loudly in the house, or laughed too loud, my mother would glare at me or clear her throat and say, ‘Be a woman and mind your manners.’ I would obey. My mother is not very strict, and I was usually allowed to visit friends or relatives living nearby for a short period of time. I would always tell her who I was visiting as it was good for her to know where she could look for me. My mother did not let me go anywhere further away with friends and said it didn’t look good when girls and boys go places together.

For some participants, the code had almost no direct influence. For example, one interviewee could only describe one instance where the code directly resulted in her parents prohibiting certain behaviours:

Nimol: I don’t know much about the code. As a daughter, I needed to take their advice, especially in terms of choosing a husband. I also needed to do household chores like cooking, cleaning and washing. I don’t know for sure how much my parents applied the code, and I don’t know how much of my mother’s advice comes from it. To me, the code provides general advice as to how to be a good daughter. For example, I once asked my mother if I could quit school and move to an urban area to work, but she refused to let me.

The interviews seem to suggest that the use by parents of the code’s prohibition of daughters wandering far from home serves two functions: firstly, for to ensure the personal safety of daughters; and secondly, to ensure young women perform household chores, which is the duty of good daughters. Certainly, some women saw the practical value of the code supporting their personal security:

Kolap: My mother always told me it is not good for a young woman to travel alone without accompanying relatives because it is not safe, and women may become the subjects of sexual exploitation by men. Another concern is some people would think negatively about women who do so or talk about them
badly behind their backs. I think the belief is that women travelling alone at night must be secretly in a sexual relationship with someone. I thought that made sense, so I’d listen to my mother, and usually only went out in the evening or travelled with my relatives for my own safety.

On the other hand, some women actively resisted the paternalistic prohibition of their movement:

Mouykea: I found no reason for my parents to stop me from participating in evening events at the pagoda with my friends. When I asked for my mother’s permission, my father stepped in and simply said, ‘do not go’, and that was it. So, sometimes when I really wanted to go, I ignored my father and just went. I knew that at most my mother might be angry with me for few hours or a day. I do sometimes think my parents are very old fashioned.

The participants’ responses showed a similar inconsistency in how they accepted the precepts of the *Chbab Srey* regarding the behaviour of women who show affection to men. The code prohibits women from expressing behaviours that provoke or attract sexual attention from men. However, none of the participants ascribed to this advice directly as described in the code; even if some women did follow this advice in line with general cultural norms which aim to protect “family reputation”. Participants also displayed a critical awareness of the ways patriarchal norms shaped their behaviour, including constraints on how they could display emotion and affection. Meun Mei’s version of the code instructs women thusly:

Being a woman, before showing any behaviours which include the way you talk, the words you use, the way you look at people, the way you smile and the way you sit, you need to be cautious not to make men feel you are trying to show affection to them. Men generally respond to women in respectful,

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In Cambodia, people may view women who travel at night as showing a willingness to engage in sexual intercourse with men in secret. In cases of rape, there are popular views that sexual violence will not happen if women stay at home with their families, and if they don’t wear revealing clothes or behave in a way that provokes sexual attention from men. In this respect, gender norms in Cambodia reproduce the patriarchal dynamics of sexual violence cultures seen elsewhere.
disrespectful or playful ways based on those behaviours. A woman who tries to show this kind of affection is considered a ‘rotten woman’.

In this response, the participant is aware of the code, but is also critically aware of the way power inequalities between men and women affect women who display affection to men. Such women are seen as vulnerable to unwanted attention from men, and also stigmatised.

In summary, the knowledge young Khmer women have about the Chbab Srey is largely hearsay in nature, and compliance with the code is uneven at best. In some respects, while the code was taught within formal educational contexts, its transmission appears to belong to an oral tradition of informal education. It is therefore possible that the real rationale and core meaning of the code has been lost to the younger generations; ironically, because of the very culture that discourages women from asking for clarification or explanation from senior people. Mothers and grandmothers tend to use the code to crack down on young women’s behaviour, arguing that they know best, and adapt the advice to serve their own perceptions of what is proper and improper behaviour for girls and women.

From the participants’ responses it is unclear whether the Chbab Srey imposes strict, clear rules on behaviour that must be followed precisely, or if those rules are optional. In my own observations, I have seen women apply the code in a loose way while also acting in ways that are at odds with advice in the code, or at least common perceptions of that advice. It could be said that senior family members use the code to encourage young women to be ‘decent’, but not necessarily to become ‘virtuous women’, as would occur if women strictly followed the code in its entirety.

37 It is unlikely that the participants learned about the code at secondary schools where the net enrollment of women is 35.8 percent or less in rural areas (UNICEF, 2013). Out of the 40 participants in my study, there are 10 female participants had gone through secondary education, amongst 10 one is doing university degree and only one participant finished her secondary school before 2007 and she could not remember exactly where she had learned about the code besides few basic rules mentioned in the chapter. The code was removed in 2007 by request of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.
5.3 Cultural norms and their implications for women’s education

There are a number of factors that contribute to contemporary Khmer women’s low-level of education. Those factors include gender norms, poverty, lack of access to schools in rural areas, lack of personal motivation to obtain education, domestic duties, and the poor quality of public educational systems (Kurt, 2003, p. 31; MoWA, 2014, p.6; Mary, 2014, pp.45-47). In this section I set out participants’ responses to questions about the reasons my research participants dropped out of school. It became clear through my interviews that while poverty and limited education infrastructure played a central role, gender norms reinforced and exacerbated the situation. For example, gender norms make women believe higher education is not imperative, and that to benefit from education they would need to have at least a graduate degree, which is out of their reach:

Bopha: It was hard for my family to afford my further education because if I went to high school, I would need to travel, because the highest year of education at the school in my village is grade 6. Higher education is not a must for me, and it would burden my family.

Another three participants similarly expressed that their education was secondary to supporting their families:

Champa: I left in grade 3. My family was very poor. My father went to work outside the village for five years and found another wife. He did not come back home, and my family struggled. As a daughter I needed to help with the household chores to allow my mother to earn more to support us.

Raksa: I quit school in grade 5. During that time, I was the only adult female child. Due to my family’s situation, and having many younger siblings, I quit school so I could stay home and help my mother sell Khmer noodles. I knew that getting a higher education would be good for my future, but we were so poor and needed to have something to fill our stomachs every day. One thing was for sure: we could not eat books.
Len: I studied until grade 6 and quit because my parents were in debt. School was far from home and to pursue my studies my family had to spend a lot of money, and I knew due to their situation I wouldn’t be able to study any longer. My parents did not want me to leave school, but I insisted and they had no choice because they also knew they could not afford my education.

Participants’ responses also showed how gender norms prioritise the education of sons, with daughters encouraged to drop out to keep their male siblings in school:

Sokleab: I studied until grade 9 when I was 16 years old. At that time, my father was deceived and was hugely in debt. My parents took out a bank loan for USD 3,000 and sold almost all our property except farmland. My father fell ill, and our motorbike was stolen. Seeing my mother in despair, I decided to quit school and help them make a living. We decided to keep my brother in school instead.

The beliefs imposed by gender norms imply that women’s place is in the home, and influence young women’s decisions regarding formal education:

Pisey: I studied until grade 8, but I failed my exams. My parents suggested I try again another year, but I refused as I thought it was a waste of time. I was not good at studying and I didn’t think I could do much with just a high school education. I believed I would need at least a university degree to find work, and I knew I wouldn’t be able to reach that level, so I decided to drop out sooner rather than later before my family became poorer and poorer. My plan was just to run a small shop from home, so I decided to go to the city and work to save some money for that, rather than spending time pursuing my education.

Srey Touch: I studied until grade 9. My family did not have any financial problems. At that time, I told my parents I wanted to quit school because I was not good at studying, but they wouldn’t let me. During school vacation, I worked temporarily before going back to study. However, after working, I didn’t want to continue studying, so I just stopped going to school and did not tell my parents. When they found out I wasn’t going anymore they asked me why, and I told them I wanted to go to the city to work and learn the skills to
become a beautician. I wanted to have my own business either in the city or in my hometown after a few years of working in the factory.

These responses show that cultural norms do not directly contribute to women dropping out of school, but it can be the reason they lose interest in education. The norms can also affect the perspectives of both parents and women themselves when making decisions not to pursue further education. Another concern that should be addressed is that both participants and their families view education in terms of qualification attainment and not ability to read, think and write. The two participants above find little motivation to continue to high school (grade 10 to 12) because they believe that in order to gain professional employment, they would need university degree. Here parents are also convinced and allow their daughters to drop out school when they are in lower secondary school because it seems that a good job (that is a job outside of garment work) will require university qualifications. Here, senior study at school is understood as merely a pathway to further education, and not a good in itself.

While many of the participants dropped out of school to work, employment itself was a potential pathway to education. One participant managed to continue her studies after factory working hours; I have included her story below in Box 1: Educational persistence. This case illustrates that school dropouts are motivated by more than just economic concerns.

**Box 1: Educational persistence**

Sopheap is a 22-year old female worker at a garment factory in Streung Mean Chey, Phnom Penh, and also a part-time university student. She is from Tbong Khmum province. At home she lived with four siblings. Her parents divorced when she was three years old. Her mother and her brothers have a strong belief in education and encouraged her to continue her studies. Her mother is illiterate and does not want her daughter to be ignorant, knowing that education can improve her daughter’s life and help her avoid hardship.

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38 Sopheap is an alias for a participant.
Due to her family’s economic situation, Sopheap came and worked at a garment factory in Phnom Penh during school holidays. She always wanted to have at least a bachelor’s degree, and her mother and older brother tried their best to support her so she could finish secondary school. After school, Sopheap’s brother got married and had additional responsibilities, while her mother had grown old and could no longer earn an income. Her mother and brother suggested she would need to support herself to continue her studies, although her brother would still pay for her food and provide accommodation for her in his house in the city.

After finishing her high school degree, Sopheap moved to live with her brother, and took her mother with her. Sopheap works from 7:00am to 4:30pm and takes an evening class in accounting at a private university that offers evening class. She saved enough of her wages to buy a secondhand motorbike and a laptop. She tried not to spend extravagantly on clothes and cosmetics like her peers because her education was more important. At one time she wanted to dye her hair, and asked permission from mother, who did not let her do so.

Currently, Sopheap is in her second year of university and is committed to completing the course. She also has a clear purpose with her education. After finishing she will apply to work as an accountant either at her factory or somewhere similar. After saving a sufficient amount of money, she wants to set up and run a shop using the skills she learned at university.

When she experiences unfair treatment at her workplace, Sopheap tries not to get into a fight with her team leader, and instead focuses on the task at hand. She explained that although factory work doesn’t require a high level of education, that when the person in charge of recruitment learned she had undertaken higher education she was assigned to tasks that were less heavy and involved calculation and reading.
5.4 Cultural norms and their implications for vocational training

Cultural norms encourage Khmer women to develop skills and take up occupations that accord to their gender. Commonly, women become tailors, weavers, wedding embellishers and beauticians. Although the government provides specific vocational training\(^39\) to students, the students’ families fund most of that training. Some participants said both they and their parents tended to place more value on vocational training than university study as the former is more practical and takes less time to undertake than formal secondary or tertiary education. Their responses seem to also suggest that vocational skills serve women’s characteristics well, and will assist them in any further roles they take on, mainly after marriage:

Sarem: I still want to open a grocery shop. I can’t just stay home and do nothing. My mother always told me it’s good to have a skill because nobody can take that away from you. She also told me I would gain respect from my husband-to-be and family-in-laws because my skills will make me a partner and not a burden.

While women’s skills are appreciated from a cultural perspective, the emergence of factory work in the city provides women with more chances to acquire a number of skills to support themselves, rather than having to rely on their families:

Ravy: I thought it would be good to obtain some skills so I could have a small salon of my own where I can earn an income and look after my family after I get married. Before he died, my father wanted us to obtain a higher education or at least specific skills we could use to support ourselves. I always remembered his advice and spent many weekends training in short courses. After I finished, I started using my savings to buy things I will need for the salon.

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\(^{39}\) The government of Cambodia has reformed the educational system, allowing students who complete lower secondary school to either continue to higher secondary education or to undertake technical and vocational training (MoWA, 2014, p. 6). Gender segregation is also present within vocational training in terms of course take-up, with only a few selected courses focused on weaving, textiles, garments, beauty and handicrafts being recommended to women (MoWA, 2014). Further, the educational schemes offered through the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT) focus on technical training that targets men more than women (MoLVT, 2017).
Women’s strong beliefs in having vocational skills appear to have given them more space for their personal development, and, with approval from their parents, means they need to send less remittance home:

Khim: I know one day I’ll want to leave the factory, so I’ve acquired new skills as a tailor. I discussed this with my mother before I started the course because studying would mean I’d be sending less remittance home. My mother was very supportive of the idea. Once I’ve accumulated enough savings, I’ll quit my job at the factory. It’s exhausting work, and it would be good to have a better alternative. If I do not take up any training opportunities while I’m living in the city, and don’t have an income to learn new things, I will have nothing, and will face hard times in the near future.

Dy: In the next few months, I plan to quit working at the factory and open a small salon in my hometown. I think that will be more sustainable than working in the factory and will also be much better than working in other sectors, such as in a restaurant or doing domestic work. I discussed the idea with my mother before I started the beauty salon training course. She was very supportive and believes that it’s always good for a woman to have a skill. She said I should take the opportunity, and that I wouldn’t need to send money home. She wants to be sure I’m able to have my own business and stop working at the factory, because she knows how hard factory work is.

Given technology has dramatically changed the nature of work, one participant observed that in order to develop future job skills, English language training was a priority:

Sokleab: I cannot work in a garment factory forever. I once thought about learning wedding embellishment, but realised the business might not run well in my hometown. I already have sewing skills, so decided I wanted to become a tailor. I discussed the idea with my husband, and he agreed that when I have enough money, I’ll train for those skills. I want to open a small tailor shop here in the city, and I also want to learn English. Apparently, to be a good tailor, it
is important to know some English because there are many styles of fashion that are explained in English.

These responses appear to suggest that cultural norms encouraged the women to acquire skills to generate income at home. However, because of poverty, some of the participants’ parents could not afford to pay for training for their daughters. It is more than likely such training is only accessible to better-off families who can afford course fees and the start-up capital to open small shops for their daughters at home after they finish their courses. Thus, paid work offered an opportunity for some women from low income families to take on additional training and acquire capital. All the participants who took short courses on weekends and after working hours said they paid course fees from their own savings. In order to do this, they had to ask permission from their parents, because they would be sending less money back home than usual.40

Being skilled and self-employed was highly desirable for the participants. Almost all understood factory work to be just a temporary job that would not provide them with skills that could be utilised in other roles. Acquiring vocational skills therefore became the women’s backup strategy, used to save themselves from unemployment in the future. For the participants, the ideal life after marriage would be staying at home and taking care their children while running a small grocery, salon or tailor shop in front of their houses. Acquiring new skills in addition to working at a garment factory was seen as offering the means to achieve this goal. I shall return to explore this in Chapter 6.

5.5 Cultural norms and their implications for women’s engagement with local activities and information

From a recent survey of information accessibility conducted by BBC Media Action Research and Learning, out of 2,597 young Cambodian people, 92 percent have access to television and radio, 96 percent have access to phones, and 34 percent have access to the internet, with men having better access than women in general; men also are

40 Based on their responses, the women seemed not to know that the Cambodian government offers short course training free of charge. This could be connected to their lack of information about the outside world, evidently an issue for many women who are prevented from having a life outside the home.
most likely to watch news than women (BBC, 2014, pp. 5, 13, 26). The BBC’s report did not provide the reason behind the lower percentage of women who watch and listen to news than men. However, my research appears to suggest women’s lack of interest in news media might be the result of gender-biased cultural norms. The norms recommend women should stay out of discussions or debates occurring between men relating to politics both within and outside the household and should instead focus on domestic duties. When asked about activities they undertook during their free time and their interest in news about politics and social problems, the participants explained they had little interest in listening to news and politics. Some explained they were too busy with household chores. Instead, the participants chose to listen to music to relax, or to spend time with family members and friends:

Nimol: I like listening to music and visiting relatives and friends. I listen to the news sometimes, but not often, as I don’t have much time. I like listening to songs because they make me feel relaxed.

Savin: I like listening to music on the radio. I sometimes listen to social news, but not much about politics as I don’t really understand it. At home, I didn’t have much free time because I had many household chores, and my mother didn’t like me listening to the radio because she thought it was a waste of time. She could always find something for me to do, rather than listening to the radio.

To a certain extent, gender norms also distinguish the type of information pursued by the women I interviewed. Although women have an equal stake in social and political concerns in Cambodia, gender norms appear to have convinced the women that information on social movements and politics was targeted at men:

Da: I do not like politics. My education is too low to understand it, and I have no interest in it. I think politics is more for men, as normally they discuss those issues.

Tei: I think politics is for men. Some men in my village liked to discuss politics.
Srey Touch: I like to know about social problems, but at home I didn’t have any time to listen to the news on the radio. I only listened to the radio when I had no chores, and I rarely listened to politics. My father sometimes listened to news about politics, but I never cared for it.

From the above responses, it appears that the participants showed less interest in listening to the news because their main concerns were household chores and earning an income to support their families to their fullest capacity. The recurring message is that “politics is for men.” Perhaps this lack of engagement with political news through formal media channels also shaped how the participants attained their jobs in the factories. All participants turned to peers and relatives to do so and did not look for vacancies advertised on television and radio.

While access to information via television, radio or the internet did not appear a high priority for many participants, there was at least one for whom access to such information proved vital. Details of this case study are provided in Box 2: How information changes a life.

**Box 2: How information changes a life**

Phalla is 27. She works in the sewing section line of a garment factory. She is from Kampong Thom province. She dropped out school in grade 3, when she was nine years old, because her mother was sick, and her father had another wife. She lived with her mother until she passed away. After her death, Phalla and her three siblings went to live with relatives. Her older sister went to live with an aunt in the city, Phalla moved to live with another aunt in a different village in the same province, and the two younger sons lived with their father.

Phalla’s life with the aunt was terrible. She had to get up before dawn and go to bed late every day because she needed to help her aunt at her small restaurant, for which she received no pay. Phalla waited for her older sister to come and rescue her from

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41 Phalla is an alias for a participant.
her situation. After several years living with her aunt her wish came true when her sister took her to live with her in the city.

While Phalla was working for her aunt, she liked to listen to the news on the radio and started to ask herself why she didn’t move to the city with her sister instead of moving to work with her aunt. She learned from radio shows and advertisements that the city was not a bad place, that there were many things to do there, and lots of opportunities to make money.

Soon after arriving the city, Phalla’s sister helped her apply for a job at the garment factory at which she worked, but Phalla did not get it, and instead started working as a house keeper at a guest house. She took a sewing course and waited for an opportunity to work at the garment factory. Phalla didn’t enjoy working at the guest house because she worked alone cleaning rent-rooms and sometimes foreign guests attempted to touch her inappropriately. After two weeks working at the guesthouse, Phalla got a job at a factory not far away from her house.

During working hours, the factory allowed workers to listen to songs or the news on their mobile phones using headsets. For Phalla, this meant learning new things that were important for her to know. As she explained: “Listening to the news was good because I learned a lot of things, such as how women have been deceived by men, or have become the victims of sexual trafficking, I also learned how to loan money from the banks.” As a result of this information, Phalla borrowed money from the bank and purchased a small plot of land. She also learned how to loan money to her colleagues in order to receive interest, from which she made a good income, in an addition to her pay from the factory.

Phalla is very cautious about interacting with strangers. Of the 40 participants, she was the only one who asked me if she could choose the place for our meeting. She also ordered her own food to avoid the possibility of being drugged. When I asked her where that kind of thinking came from, she said “I don’t know you, only that CARE introduced you to my factory. I don’t think you’re a bad person and I accepted the invitation because I wanted to learn something new. However, I also
need to protect myself in my own way to avoid being harmed. I know from the news that there are many cases of women being trafficked in Cambodia.”

Phalla’s story is interesting as it shows how access to information can change a person’s life. While she only has a grade 3 education, listening to the news every day has educated Phalla about the world around her, making a substantial contribution to her life.

Young Khmer women have very limited interactions with local authorities. Communes and Sangkats42 play council roles in Cambodia, and are the lowest level sub-national governments, dealing directly with local people. The participants noted that their parents got in touch with the local authorities when they needed legal documents, but said they did not know anything about the roles and responsibilities of those authorities43. Usually, local authorities hold monthly meetings to update local people on issues such as local development and safe migration. By law, people migrating from rural to urban areas must notify local authorities both in their own villages and towns, as well as in the city. All participants explained that they did not know they needed to inform their local authorities about migrating to the city:

Kalyan: I did not tell my village chief. The story was my aunt who is a city dweller went to my village and I came with her and lived with her in the city. I didn't know I needed to inform the village chief. Most of the time my father interacts with local authority.

Sengly: No, I did not personally tell my village chief, but he did know that I had moved to city to live with my father’s distant relative. When I applied to work at the garment factory, my mother did all the paperwork.

42 The term ‘Commune’ is used to refer to lowest level of local government in provincial level and ‘Sangkat’ is for capital city and municipal level. See n39.

43 Cambodia is a unitary state and its territory is divided into the capital city, provinces, municipalities, districts (srok/khan) and communes (khum/sangkat). All levels of the administration are governed in accordance with organic law. The two laws on communes/sangkats were promulgated in 2001, and organic laws that apply to provinces/municipalities and districts/khans were implemented in May 2008 (MoI, 2008, p. 20). There are 1,633 communes/sangkats across the country. Since 2002, the elections at commune/sangkat level have been held every five years to select councillors from party lists.
Another participant explained that her mother had communicated with local authorities so that her daughter could get a national identity card to prove she was 18. Such identity cards are needed to work in garment factories.

Vanny: Yes, my mother informed the local authorities about my migration so that I could receive identity papers, including an identity card, which meant I had the right to work in the garment sector as I was over 18.

The above responses seem to indicate that the women often view official records of movement as nonessential. However, they are essential as failure to report movement can have far-reaching consequences for a person’s safety. Local authorities simply cannot offer help to parents in emergencies if women do not notify the authorities of their migration status. Indeed, the participants’ responses suggest that the women do not trust their local authorities and, perhaps, the whole system of government. This confirms what has been found in existing studies on democratic governance in Cambodia (Sen, 2012) and also confirms that in this context, the trust is built with kinship and in a small group of relatives (Grahn, 2006).

Further, it may also be suggested that the functions transferred through de-concentration and decentralization reforms of government has not been effective at the lower level of governance. For example, one participant who had travelled to Malaysia to work lost contact with home, and felt afraid and abandoned:

Kagna: I wanted to work in a factory when I was 17, but I was too young, skinny and small. One day I heard from a lady in my village that Malaysia needed workers from Cambodia. She helped by calling the recruiting company, and I got the job. I went to Malaysia and worked as a domestic worker for almost two years. I worked for a Chinese family, doing all the housework and taking care of the children. The owner of the house owned a beauty salon. They were all very kind to me. My contract in Malaysia was for the full two years, but suddenly the company closed down, and the owner of the house sent me back home. When I returned to Cambodia, I had USD2,500, but could not find my way home, and people found me strange because I mixed Khmer words with Chinese. My father didn’t know where I was and thought I might be dead.
My father told me he asked the local authorities to look for me, but they could not help because nobody knew my address in Malaysia. The chief of my village did not even know I had migrated to Malaysia until my father asked him for his help. I was lucky I eventually made it home to my family. After this experience I will not migrate to another country again. I am scared of feeling lonely and abandoned.

The story above shows what can occur when the proper authorities are not contacted regarding migration. For this participant, the experience of being lost and unable to find her way home was stressful, not just for her but for her family, and ultimately deterred her from migrating externally again. It may now be that she recognises that it is her responsibility to report any future migration to the local authorities. It also shows why it is important for local authorities to be aware of the movements of their people.

5.6 The emergence of garment factories in the city and its implications for cultural norms

Based on the interviews, this study has found that the emergence of garment factories in the city and women’s employment within them has challenged cultural norms. As mentioned in Chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, according to gender norms, Khmer women need to stay at home to help their families and be responsible for household activities such as chores and caring for children. Many young women are now challenging these norms by choosing to migrate to the city to work, and rural families must decide whether to allow their daughters to work to improve their financial situation or keep them at home to maintain their reputation. Sometimes the trade-off for maintaining that reputation means they are barely subsisting; thus, breaking gender norms and allowing women to work is necessary.

The interviews revealed both a recent history of structural change in Cambodia, and awareness that cultural norms, including perceptions of the acceptability of garment work, were undergoing change:

Bopha: I used to hear some senior people say that girls who go to city to work are not good because they might work in clubs and beer gardens, or even as
prostitutes. They say those girls must have boyfriends and no longer have their virginity. But now more people seem to have become accustomed to the idea of women working. Almost every family in my village has a daughter who works in the garment sector, so people no longer criticise female workers in this way. For the last 10 years, women have come to work in order to help their families, so as long as they send home remittance they would be viewed as dutiful daughters and be respected from their families and communities. And, it is also acceptable for women who move to the city to marry who they choose, as long as they bring the husband home to meet the family and have a proper traditional wedding. When I first talked to my parents about moving to the city, they were not so happy because they thought working in the city was not good for women, but I told them that being good or bad was up to me, and not just based on if I worked in the city or not. I also told them how I could help them by sending remittance home, and they agreed to let me move.

Leak: When I migrated, some of the senior people in my village still held negative views about women working in the city, but my family knew factory work was not a bad job because I already had two sisters working in the sector. It was hard when my oldest sister moved, because my parents, and especially my father, were looked down upon. My father was viewed as not having the ability to control his children. He wasn’t happy about that, but we were very poor at that time, so all the children needed to help in one way or another, and factory work was a good choice. My sisters just wanted to help, and nothing else. Now, almost all households in my village with daughters send them to work in the garment factories. So, it’s become a normal phenomenon, and nobody criticises it anymore.

As these participant responses show, with increasing numbers of young women from rural families migrating, living and working in the city has been demystified, which has ameliorated the negative perceptions of female workers as women who have gone against traditional gender norms.

Responses also showed that the remittance sent home to improve their families’ living conditions had the effect of empowering women to contest cultural norms. In some
cases, women dared to challenge and ignore the advice of senior people within their families:

Kalyan: I think in the 1990s and 2000s many people had negative attitudes towards women who worked in garment factories. Sometimes, they blamed the women's parents for letting their daughter migrate to the city. Some parents felt ashamed because at that time it was only in cases of extreme poverty that families allowed their daughters to go to the city to find work. Now, because so many women work in the garment sector, people aren’t as negative, and I also think female workers don’t care what those people say behind their backs anyway. I think it could even be said that some of those people were so negative because they were jealous. Living a decent life in a rural area requires a lot of money, which is different to how it was in the past. So, to be a virtuous woman who just stays home is a wasted opportunity, and people do not appreciate the idea so much anymore. In my case, my mother had no objections for me moving because I came to live with my aunt who was already working in the garment sector.

Sarem: When my father was alive, he didn’t let any of his daughters work in garment factories. He was very sceptical of the idea. At first, I also thought it was not good for young women to go far from home, but then I saw that those women were sending remittance home. Now, their parents do not need to work hard; some now just lease their land to other people to farm instead of doing it themselves. Their lives have become much better since having daughters who work in the factories. Now, some people have shifted their criticism to daughters who have not sent any remittance home. In my case, after the death of my father my mother remarried, and I informed my mother that I was going to move to the city with friends. My mother was not so happy about my decision, but I ignored her as I believed it was the only way I could earn some income to support myself. I also did not understand why she wanted me to stay at home and be a burden to her. I came to the city to help her.

Srey Touch: Old people think that girls who come to work here might misbehave, and that they are influenced their peers. There are women who
hang out at night with their boyfriends, and those people would criticise them. I don’t think anyone thinks like that anymore. So, when my friends asked me to come here, I ignored my mother and grandmother and moved. They never wanted me to move to the city because we were not so poor. They said they earned a lot and that it was an easy work, so there was no need for me to move, but I did anyway. At first, I thought I’d work temporarily for one or two months during school vacation, but after working for a while, I no longer wanted to study, so I quit school. I first came here with my neighbours, whom I trusted. I also have cousins working in the city.

Clearly these women are defying cultural norms. However, what is interesting about the interviews is that the primary push factor leading to rural-urban migration for these women is poverty. In a sense, these women are complying with quite a central cultural norm: namely being dutiful daughters making a strategic decision to support their families. It could be said that this is a reshaping of a traditional gender norms whereby women are able to find employment outside the home without upsetting the status quo in any true measure. Thus, while the families of the first and second waves of female rural-urban migrants occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s needed to confront many criticisms for their decision to migrate to the city, a deeper exploration for the reasons those women shown that they are in fact providing more effectively for their families than ever. Thus, the decision to “wander” away from home becomes a way for these women to be “dutiful daughters.”

After a number of young women have migrated to work in the city, often with goal of supporting their families, they discover that working and earning, more than just an exit strategy for poverty, is valuable for other reasons. Increasing numbers of young women from rural areas move to the city for other reasons, including the desire to search for their own value, live and earn independently, show their own strength and capacity, be like their peers, and change their way of living and looking at the world. Two participants explained that, aside from poverty, being able to support themselves and experiencing life outside their homes and villages were important push factors.

Sokhom: I wanted to undertake a training course to become a beautician, but my family could not afford to pay for it. After staying home for few months
after dropping out of school, I grew bored, so I asked my cousin about moving to the city to work so I could gain an income for my personal spending. I didn’t want to ask my mother for money all the time when I needed to buy personal things.

Vanny: The main push factors for my migration were financial issues in my family, wanting to try new experiences, and helping my mother pay back loans from the bank for construction of our house. By working here, I could send USD50-100 a month to my mother for payment of the debts, as well experiencing how it is to live independently. Although it was hard to live far from home initially, it was worth doing it because it was a good life experience as my parents cannot be with me all the time- one day soon I have to be on my own.

Another participant explained that she wanted to be like her peers who help their parents improve their living conditions. She also wanted to prove to her peers that she could work and earn money just as they did:

Kunthea: My push factors were the desire to help my mother, to work in a formal sector, and to live in the city. Many of my peers came first and sent home money. I saw how their families benefitted: they bought new houses and new motorbikes, and their parents didn’t need to work as hard as they did before. I wanted to be like them.

Another three participants had different motives not solely related to their families, but to themselves as individuals. They shared similar reasons for wanting to migrate: they wanted to have their own income, new and modern clothes, to wear makeup, and to have fair skin. They viewed working in the city as a means to find freedom and change their ways of living and dressing.

In Cambodia, skin tone is one of symbolic signs of being rich and poor, town people and rural people, modernity and tradition. Rural people are associated with a darker skin tone because their work is mostly outdoors, whilst city people are associated with fairer skin because they work mostly indoors and earn much more (Derks, 2008, p.145).
Sarem: Poverty is one of the main push factors, but my real intention was wanting to work and earn money to support myself. I wanted to have nice clothes and experience the city lifestyle. I didn’t want to be viewed as a frog in a well. I felt discriminated against by my peers after they migrated to work in city. I was still in my hometown, and my appearance was just as a peasant girl.

Romdol: I would say poverty and my personal desire are push factors. I like being pretty, and I saw women from the city looked very beautiful. They dressed nicely, looked sexy, smelled nice; their skin is fair, and they wore lipstick. I wanted to be like them.

Nimol: I wanted to dress nicely and be like my peers. After moving to work, they sent money home. When they visited home, they always looked so modern and nice, with fair skin. They talked only with other women who had migrated to work, and they laughed and looked happy. I felt very different to them, so I asked my mother to let me go to work.

I consider the above responses reflective of a trend whereby economic transition contests cultural norms and allows women, for the first time, to have confidence to make their own decisions to migrate and work in the city. It has ushered in a time when young Khmer women know what they want to be and what they want to do, and to have self-worth and a sense of agency over their own decision-making, which evidently has important meaning to them.

5.7 Conclusion

Viewed from the perspective of autonomy and the capability approach explained in Chapter 3, social and cultural norms imposed on Khmer women limit their autonomy. The interviews show that cultural norms teach women to be passive and discourage them from questioning rules and advice from senior people. This prevents women from attaining relevant information that benefits them and inhibits their mobility to explore life beyond the home. As a result, young women engage less in household decision-making and accept inferior roles to men. This resonates with scholarly discussion in this area: as discussed in Chapter 2, a number of scholars such as Derks (2008),
Ledgerwood (1995) and Mary (2014), have discussed that way that Khmer gender and social norms constrain the autonomy of women and also limit women’s understanding on the concept of autonomy.

The interviews show that the autonomy of Khmer women from rural areas is restricted due to social and cultural norms, especially those relating to gender. Typically, young Khmer women who live at home are inexperienced, poorly educated, and respectful of the need to be dutiful and obedient daughters. Migration to the city evidently offers those women a chance to engage in personal decision-making processes that have the potential to improve their lives. Sen (1999) argues that, in order to obtain autonomy, “people have to be seen as being actively involved – given the opportunity – in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs” (p. 53). To follow Nussbaum (2001) and Razavi (2012), the concept of human development and the possibility of leading a meaningful life means an individual need to be an agent of her own life. To realise true development, people therefore need to be given the opportunity to be actively involved in making their own choices: choices they value and find meaningful (Nussbaum, 2001; Razavi, 2012).

The economic transition associated with the emergence of the garment sector in Cambodia has brought about significant changes in the lives of young rural Khmer women. For better or for worse, young women have started to compare themselves with their peers, creating a sense of self-worth. Initially, women’s desire to work was connected to the need to earn an income for the sake of their families. However, as we have begun to see here, and will see in more detail in chapters to come, this process has challenged patriarchal traditions.

In Chapter 3, I defined autonomy as the ability of a person to make choices that she/he and society values for these choices to provide benefit and contribute to one’s well-being. In line with this definition, this chapter has showed that in a Cambodian context, Khmer women can become actively involved in making their own choices around the decision to migrate to the city for work, and thus experience autonomy. However, even though these decisions appear to conflict with social norms, they occur in a negotiated context where social and cultural values are complied with. This would suggest that cultural norms cannot be completely changed, only modified in line with traditional
expectations, and only through the action of significant external forces. In this context, that external force is economic transition, which allows women to experience and enjoy the many opportunities that living and working in the city can offer.
Chapter 6: Women, Factory Work, and Autonomy in the Workplace

6.1 Introduction

Cambodia’s engagement in the global export market and the emergence of garment factories, many concentrated in the capital Phnom Penh, has contributed to economic growth, but it has also changed social structures around women’s work. As a result, the lives of young female rural-to-urban migrants have been transformed. Theoretically, as some argue, paid employment has increased women’s autonomy; however, as I will explain in this chapter, the concept of Khmer women’s autonomy in the workplace is more complicated than a simple correlation between paid work and opportunities for emancipation.

It is hard to say comprehensively or definitively whether paid employment provides sufficient capacity to improve women’s autonomy. Based on Sen’s (1985) framework, in order to assess an individual’s achievement of a specific functioning, three components must be assessed: the characteristics of resources to which the individual has access, the characteristics or capabilities of the individual themselves, and other related conversion factors that can hinder or foster the individual’s capability to achieve the attempted functioning (Sen, 1985). As I discussed in Chapter 3 in order to explain the interaction of these components, Sen (1985) and Robeyns (2005) offer the functioning of a bicycle as a transportation method as an example. He explains that mere access to a bicycle cannot prove an individual can obtain the capability to use it as a means for transportation, and explains why this is the case (Sen, 1985). Firstly, Sen (1985) argues that it is important to understand the characteristics of the bicycle as a resource, and its capability to perform its expected role as a type of transportation; for example, if the bicycle is in a poor state of repair, or has a flat tyre, it is unable to fulfil its function (Sen, 1985). Secondly, the capability of the individual who accesses the bicycle must be assessed, because the bicycle cannot function if the person is physically disabled or in poor health, for instance (Sen, 1985). Thirdly, there are other related conversion factors – discussed in chapter 3 as the resources or characteristics which facilitate or inhibit functions – that happen in an individual’s life that need to be factored to ensure the achieved functioning of a bicycle as a mean of transportation.
is made possible; these factors can relate to the condition of the bicycle, the health of the person who intends to ride it, the conditions of the roads on which it is to be ridden, and any laws and regulations around the use of the bicycle. These three components need to be interconnected to fully achieve the expected functioning of the bicycle as a mean of transportation.

The same logic can be applied when aiming to understand the implications of factory work on women’s autonomy. This chapter considers an achieved functioning in this context with respect to the autonomy of Khmer women within the garment sector. The three components are as follows: firstly, factory work is viewed as a resource, and must be assessed as such; secondly, the agency of women working in garment factories must be assessed in terms of the potential this work has to offer autonomy; thirdly, the conversion factors that create opportunities and introduce constraints within workplaces must be considered regarding their potential to encourage or limit women’s autonomy.

This study defines women’s autonomy in the workplace as “an ability to exercise choice and control in the workplace, and access security and rights and entitlements”. As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of autonomy is contextual and subjective; as such, rather than assessing the three components and women’s autonomy based on previous studies in similar areas, this study aims to assess the three components from the perspectives offered by the 40 participants in the first round of interviews and the 30 participants in the second round of interviews.

6.2 Factory work as a resource

In Chapter 2, the characteristics of factory work were discussed. This section focuses specifically on how factory work contributes to women’s autonomy in the workplace. Below, I seek to understand both the negative and positive effects of factory work as a resource in terms of how it might hinder or foster female workers’ autonomy.

6.2.1 Unfavourable characteristics of factory work

As discussed in Chapter 2, at the macro level, Cambodia’s export-oriented industry has led to unprecedented economic growth, mitigating poverty and offering thousands
of jobs to women. In this sense, factory work exists as a resource available to low income women in Cambodia. However, the interviews undertaken in this study offer a different, more complex story. There is no doubt factory work offers women a number of benefits, such as the ability to support themselves and their families, the opportunity to live independently, the capacity to develop skills and access on-the-job training, and exposure to new living environments; however, these opportunities arise alongside the labour exploitation they experience in the workplace. To again use Sen’s (1985) bicycle analogy, as I have described it above and in Chapter 3, the bicycle is functional, but the individual can only utilise this resource if they are prepared to ride uphill. Hence, the individual must use a lot of energy to move the bicycle, in the awareness that it is the only alternative available to walking. Four research participants’ responses illustrate this challenge. The first participant described how she dealt with unfair treatment within the factory and the consequences of that treatment:

Savin: When I feel under pressure from my team leader and supervisor, I can seek help from high ranking factory staff, regular inspectors from the government, staff from NGOs such as CARE and ILO, who often provide us with training, and from internal and external labour unions. However, in my experience, the process is usually that any issues between my team leader and I are dealt with by the unions, who go through a mediation process while we go back to work. Since the last issue between us, my team leader and I have not talked to one other. Often, she just stares at me, watching me closely. It makes the working environment much worse, and I don’t think any change will ever happen in terms of the pressure of the workload because the pressure comes from the factory itself, and therefore cannot be mediated and changed. I do not want to work here now, but I have no choice, because it will be hard for me to get another job within the queue check section. I have come to believe that it’s better to keep quiet and accept that the team leader and factory will always have the power because they have the right to dismiss workers. I need money and fighting back will just intensify my current situation. Keeping quiet is a better solution, so because my family and I need my financial support, I just grit my teeth and keep working.
This participant’s story shows how women’s factory work occurs in the context of limited access to labour rights. Women are not in a position to complain when things go wrong in the workplace, and also have a limited ability to find alternative employment, meaning they need to tolerate less-than-ideal working conditions. The story shows how seeking help can exacerbate such conditions; in this interviewee’s case, challenging authority created conflict and led to imposed additional surveillance. Thus, while working conditions were already exploitative, conflict with the team leader made her situation almost unbearable. Further, the participants’ limited access to other forms of work and her family’s poverty meant she had to continue to endure the exploitative situation. This kind of thinking proves the reality of weak labour relations, something I discussed in Chapter 2. Support mechanisms such as trade unions are unable to attain justice for workers and hold garment factories accountable. The situation suggests that some workers who take a stand, do so at their own risk.

A second participant described how hard she needed to work at a factory on a very low wage to help her family out of significant debt. Her decision to work in the factory exposed her to exploitative conditions:

Savin: I knew about the harsh working conditions in garment factories before I came here, but there were no better choices. Personally, I think that whenever we work for other people, we experience labour exploitation in one way or another. It is just a matter of how much. Now, I accept that my life is harder than when I was home, where I helped with farming. I worked in the hot sun, but it was better than working in the factory because I did not need to work eight to 10 hours a day, I could breathe fresh air, I could stop whenever I wanted to, and there was nobody who scolded me and pushed me too hard. However, my family needed my support to pay off their debt, and our farmland is quite small, so my parents’ labour alone is sufficient. For that reason, I just focus on my work and avoid confrontation because I know it will bring nothing good for me. When I can keep my head low there is no major problem.

Here, the participant openly describes how the volume of work and its intensity were less onerous at home in a rural setting than in the factory. Financial circumstances
compelled this participant to accept the hard life of factory work with this full realisation.

A third participant reflected on her lack of access to basic employment benefits such as sick leave:

Srey Touch: The factory only cares about reaching targets, and it is very hard to take sick leave. I do not know exactly what is stated in the laws and in my contract, but based on my experiences things have changed. A few years ago, we could take a couple of days as sick leave with pay and still be entitled to a monthly bonus, but now we can only take half a day of sick leave and receive our pay and bonus. For any longer period, workers need to submit a letter from the doctor about our illness. Without the letter, the factory cuts the bonus. We may also be fired if we take sick leave longer than a week. For example, I had typhoid and needed to go back home to get better. I lost my job for a few months, because even with a letter from the doctor, I couldn’t take sick leave for that long. I am lucky my mother came to the city and took me back home. After I’d recovered I stayed home for a couple more months before coming back to work. My father doesn’t want me to work at the factory because their business at home is enough to support my family, but I am used to earning my own income and buying anything I want without feeling like a burden on my mother. Also, after working for a while, I found it hard to stay home with nothing to do.

This response also shows how women endure exploitative work for financial stability. The participant accepts that basic benefits like sick leave are not available to any true measure, but is willing to stay in the industry for her own financial gain. Standing up for one’s own rights leads to sanctions, including disrupted good relations with supervisors. Workers learn about this reality quickly either through their own experience or by hearing of the experiences of their peers. As previously discussed, government regulations of labour rights is hampered by the strong pressures on the State to provide benefits to foreign investors who contribute to the country’s economic growth (see Ward and Mouyly, 2016).
Another participant described her experiences of working in a garment factory and how certain crises and factory closures impacted upon her decision-making:

Mei: I have worked as a garment worker since the early 2000s. I used to work in the sewing section, then I became a team leader for many years, and now I work again in the sewing section at my current factory. I have suffered tension, pressure and unfair treatment, both as an average worker and as a team leader. I have worked at several different factories over the past 10 years; with my sewing skills it is not hard to find a new job. From what I have experienced, the factory has all the power, and other bodies such as unions and government inspectors just go through the motions. NGOs are more powerful, and factories are afraid of them because they are independent. Still, no factories have been closed down because of harsh working conditions, like dismissing workers without proper reasons, and health problems caused by chemical substances. So, it is best just to say ‘yes’ and accept all kinds of conditions in order to stay and earn an income.

Here we see an awareness of the structural conditions in Cambodia’s garment factories, and the inevitable exploitation that accompanies female labour within them. It is evident that while there are rules and regulations that are intended to protect female garment workers, that their enforceability is very limited. As such, the situations described above are consistent with the exploitative working conditions seen elsewhere in the Global South within manufacturing sectors, as discussed in Chapter 3. The factories hold a lot of power, and many workers are willing to endure exploitation, meaning non-compliant workers can easily lose their jobs. Thus, female workers’ employment choices are profoundly limited. These workers need to balance between financial freedom for their own and their family’s well-being against the experience of labour exploitations in the factories. I would describe this situation as ‘dependence for independence’ as a way to conceptualise the way in which women have accepted subservience and exploitation in employment in exchange for gains in independence at an individual and household level.
6.2.2 Positive impacts of factory work in the city

Despite the difficult conditions described above, many participants detailed many different ways of working in the city had positive effects on their lives. As I shall explore below, factory work offered the women the unprecedented experiences of having an independent income, living out of home, being exposed to new living environments, and having more opportunities to get ahead in life. Factory work not only equips women with skills (e.g., sewing skills), but also women are able to attain many other skills by taking advantage of opportunities available in the city to enhance their own flourishing. Participants explained that they found opportunities to undertake formal training, such as to become a beautician, barber or tailor, and language training (e.g., in Korean and Japanese) for the purpose of external migration. Further to that, some female workers explained how they attained financial literacy and learned how best to borrow from and save money with the bank. For example, one participant reflected that if she had not come to the city to work that she would not have had the chance to access useful training, nor would she know that private banks promote small businesses and that she could borrow money from them to open her own shop:

Ravy: There are many shops that provide training during weekends. For instance, as well as, working I’m interested in doing some training at a salon or at a tailor’s shop. I intend to save some of my income in the bank so that I can open a shop in the future and borrow some money to operate my business. I do think such training provides many good opportunities, and that I should take advantage of them all because they are not available in my hometown.

Taking on other work and training while also working in the garment sector is another way, women can gain both additional skills and comparative experiences of working in different sectors. As one participant’s story shows, this helped her to shape a broader outlook on the kind of life she wanted to lead:

Champa: I have learned how to sew, and in addition to that I have learned many things from working as a domestic worker, helping with business, and at the restaurant. From the business perspective, I understand it is very important to
have my own, so I can be my own boss. I have always dreamed of having a small grocery shop here in the city. I am trying to save money for that now.

Sengly: I have learned many things from working as a housemaid. I have seen how living standards in the city are very different from my hometown. Also, I’ve learned that there are many different types of business activities that occur here, many more than in my hometown. Working and living with city people did change my mindset, and I am now trying to save money to open a shop selling clothes back in my hometown. When I have enough money, I want to go back home and take care my daughter.

The above responses show the sorts of opportunities that are the indirect outcome of undertaking factory work and living in the city. While factory work exposes women to labour exploitation, it also opens up women’s potential access to different resources and opportunities. As such, it can be concluded that while factory work can constrain women’s autonomy due to its exploitative nature, it still can operate as a resource providing those women with life experiences that are not available in their hometowns. In this way, factory work presents women with some flexibility to exercise their autonomy.

6.3 The capacities of women who undertake factory work

The previous section showed that factory work is much like riding a bicycle up a hill: female workers must expend a lot of energy to undertake that work, but in doing so they are exposed to new opportunities, which can have significant outcomes for their lives. However, there are severe constraints here. The capacity of the agent who rides the bicycle – or the female worker who undertakes factory work – is a significant factor in determining whether the resource’s function can be fully achieved. To again refer to Sen’s analogy, if the bicycle rider has an impairment that prevents them from riding, or has a health condition, or has not learnt to ride the bicycle, then their ability to utilise this resource towards flourishing is limited. This means the ability and vulnerability of female factory workers need to be assessed in order to understand why they might choose not to stand up for their rights or to seek help. A number of factors limit the choices female workers might make in relation to the resource of factory work,
including limited education and levels of debt and poverty, which can shackle them to low-paid work within the garment sector. At the same time, opportunities to undertake training while living and working in the city can offer flexibilities or options for women to exercise their autonomy.

6.3.1 Female workers and education and skills attainment

As discussed in Chapter 2, a number of barriers to educational attainment exist for rural women, and female rural-urban migrants who work in factories in Cambodia usually have limited literacy skills and low levels of education and skills attainment. A recent survey conducted by CARE (2016) showed that of 3,000 female workers, the literacy rate was only 57.9 percent, with 28.4 percent reporting they could read very little, and 13.6 percent reporting they were illiterate. These findings appear to align with the educational attainment levels of the women in my study: of the 40 participants, 41 percent had a primary level of education, 48 percent had lower secondary education and only one participant was completing higher education. One participant claimed to have no formal education whatsoever. None of the participants had undertaken vocational training relevant to their roles in the factories before they migrated to the city. All participants explained that they acquired any relevant skills after migrating. Five participants paid for a few days of sewing skills training before they became employed, while the others indicated they had learned their skills through on-the-job training.

One participant disclosed that, due to her low skills level and limited education, she needed to rely on informal networks and cash payments to attain a job:

Bopha: I quit school when I was in grade 6. I can read simple words, but that is all. I did not have any skills before I came here. I brought some money with me because I knew I would need to wait some time before I could get a job, and I knew it would be easier for me to get a job if I knew some basic sewing skills. I paid to learn how to use a sewing machine before I took a sewing test to work at the factory. To get the job, I also needed to pay money to the person in charge of recruitment at that time.
This participant’s response is interesting as it showed how she effectively needed to bribe the person in charge of recruitment because her skills and education were too low. In combination, this payment and her skills training provided an entry into factory work that may not otherwise have been possible.

Another participant explained that due to her low education, she needed to work as a domestic worker before she was able to work in the garment sector:

Lina: My education is only up to grade 4. I can barely read, and can only write a little. At first, I came here to work as a domestic worker because I knew I couldn’t get a job at a factory. I had to wait for several months because jobs in production lines that require no skills are very competitive. My sister advised me to undertake a sewing course, and after I had finished it, with her help I got a job at the factory. I like working in the garment factory more than working at someone’s house. Factory work pays a higher wage, and as a factory worker your status in society is higher. Importantly, I do not need to worry about being sexually harassed by the men who own the houses at which I worked.

To follow this response, it could be said that regardless of the harsh working conditions, factory work appears to be preferable to domestic work in terms of the financial security and well-being it may provide. This is potentially one reason why factory work is highly competitive, and why factory jobs that require few or no skills are in great demand: because they allow women with little experience to make an income.

Actively gaining new skills appears to be advantageous. One participant related her experience of how higher skills and improved conditions were connected:

Kunthea: I just finished primary level, grade 6. I’m able to read some of the news and can write some basic words, such as my personal information. At first, I worked in the queue check section of the garment factory, which requires no skills. All I needed to do was check the stitches on the clothes, and count the units I had already checked. I wanted work in the sewing section because I would earn more money. In that section, workers are paid based on
the number of units sewed. I also knew if I had sewing skills it would be less pressure to find and keep a job because at least I would have a specific skill for a specific role. With that intention, I spent my lunch breaks learning how to sew from my friend, using her machine. After a few weeks, I had the right skills, and was moved to the sewing section.

Similarly, another participant explained that her ability to read and write, and her basic mathematical skills contributed to better working conditions than those of the production line:

Sopheap: Currently, I am in my first year of university. I first came to work in the queue check section during school holidays when I was in grade 10. After that I asked a friend to teach me how to sew. Next school holiday, in grade 11, I worked in the sewing line section. After finishing high school, I came here to work again. They asked which grade I had completed and if I knew how to use a computer. I told them I’d finished high school, so they assigned me to work as an invoice collector and for payroll. In administration my workload is lighter, and the job is less pressure compared to the production line.

The above narratives reinforce the view that women employed in factory work tend to have relatively low levels of educational attainment, and that their low education levels do not hinder them attaining factory work. However, while educational attainment is not necessarily a barrier to accessing this sort of work, low levels of education do ultimately shape women’s experiences of autonomy and their achievement of functioning, particularly in terms of how they understand their legal rights and entitlements. When I asked the participants about their knowledge of their rights, of factory regulations and their employment contracts in the first round of interviews, all 40 participants could not provide a detailed explanation of their rights based on their employment contracts and their factories’ internal regulations. Responses by four participants in particular were representative of the women’s knowledge of these rights and regulations.

The low level of educational attainment of three of these participants meant they were unable to properly read their employment contracts:
Bopha: After signing the contract I just kept it under my sewing machine. I didn’t read it. There were so many pages and I didn’t think it was important to read it. I never heard anyone in the factory say they had read their contract. I never read the factory’s regulations either. My team leader told us about some basic regulations: you aren’t allowed to talk on the phone, to eat or chit-chat during working hours, and you can’t stay in the bathroom too long. The last regulation is because when some workers need to make a phone call they go to the bathroom as an excuse.

Lina: I have not read it. On my first day of work, a staff member from the office briefly read it out for me. I thought the contract was just a piece of paper, and that we just have to follow the instructions of team leaders and supervisors. I’ve never read the factory’s regulations, but I know they are set out on the entrance door.

Kunthea: I don’t know about it in any detail, I just know that at the very beginning we have two months as probation, and after two years we can receive an annual bonus. I never read the factory’s regulations. I just do whatever I am asked to do.

Another participant who had read her contract and a lot of additional information about the factory and its regulations still showed a fairly casual attitude towards labour rights:

Sopheap: After signing my first employment contract, I read it once. I don't remember all the points now. I thought the contract was just a formal procedure and didn’t really mean anything. Sometimes I notice labour exploitation, such as restrictions on taking sick leave, but I do not tell my peers that they can claim for sick leave benefits, as mentioned in the contract because in so doing it could cause me trouble. I’ve also read all the information around the factory. Management places everything on the wall. As well as regulations, there is information about verbal and sexual harassment, about the factory’s licence, its organisational chart, and a list of the unions I can seek help from.
Here, the women appear to believe their employment contract is not important. As a result, they either have limited knowledge of their rights and entitlements, or do not seem overly concerned about them, as the final participant’s story suggests. As a result, these women might not know whether their rights are being violated or might not be in a position to do anything for fear of being targeted for telling others about their rights.

The study suggests that low education was connected to a lower awareness of rights and principles of fair treatment, and with this, an acceptance of exploitative conditions. As a majority of participants did not read their contracts or their factories’ regulations, it is no surprise that they might not have a strong idea of whether the conditions they experience meet those set out in the regulations. The stories show they tend to accept their treatment by the factories, and that they would have little idea as to how they might stand up for their rights, including any legal documentation they could use to support their claims.

This aligns with the work of Prota and Bereford (2012) – discussed in Chapter 3 – which highlights that low skills and low education impair access to legal entitlements and rights. For example, some workers with low education or skills will need to bribe employers in order to gain employment. Lack of education is what holds the women back from challenging authorities and achieving autonomy in the workplace. Indeed, it could be argued that this would make any potential collective action impossible, through for example unionism, limiting the women’s ability to stand up for their rights.

### 6.3.2 Indebtedness

As discussed in Chapter 5, a common push factor for women’s rural-urban migration is to help their families repay any debts by sending money home in the form of remittances. Debt would function as a constraint on the capacity of women to realise the benefits of factory work as a resource; but also this work would offer a pathway out of debt. Many of the participants described how their families’ indebtedness drove their rural-urban migration:
Ouksa: I needed to drop out of school in grade 8. At that time my father had applied to work in Korea, but he was deceived and lost about USD3,000. My family had borrowed that money from a local money lender and needed to pay it back, so my mother asked me to stop studying and help take care of my younger sibling. My mother needed to come to city to work to repay the debt, then I also needed to work to help.

Sokleab: I studied until grade 9, when I was 16 years old. At that time, my father was cheated and the family was deeply in debt. They borrowed USD3,000 from the bank and sold almost all our property, except some farmland. Then my father felt ill, and our motorbike was stolen. Seeing my mother in despair, I decided to quit school and help them make a living. I moved here to work to help them.

In both these cases, the family finances collapsed, compelling family members who were otherwise not employed to seek work. As discussed in Chapter 5, this in part reflects a change in gender roles, whereby fathers who were previously breadwinners were unable to provide for their families and resurrect the financial sustainability that had been lost. Further, as has been previously discussed, it is common for young women to abandon education in order to resolve this debt. As I have also outlined, such limited educational attainment then impacts these women’s opportunities and autonomy.

6.3.3 Factory work as offering resources to expand capacities

As previously described, a number of research participants used their income from the factory to acquire new skills, including as tailors and beauticians, or by learning a new language, such as Korean, to work internationally. Although those opportunities may not have been enough for them to gain autonomy within the workplace, they appeared to provide some flexibilities while broadening workers’ horizons. In this sense, factory work itself is not a direct resource that improves autonomy; however, the income and opportunities available as a side benefit of factory work, offer opportunities for women to improve their capacity and work towards enhanced autonomy. One participant explained how financial pressure was reduced after she finished her training and generated savings:
Ravy: I have finished my beauty salon training and have used my savings to buy everything I need to open a salon. I plan to stop working early next year and open a small shop in my hometown. Now, on weekends, I do makeup and hair for some of my friends when they are going to parties. I make some money out of that. I don’t care much about the factory work now. When I feel sick, I just ask for leave, and if the factory doesn’t allow me to take leave, I just take it anyway. My team leader knows I’ll quit soon, so she thinks there’s no reason to put pressure on me.

Another participant similarly observed that if garment workers have other employment options available, it becomes more difficult for supervisors to use the threat of dismissal to enforce compliance:

Phalla: Now I’m engaged. I’ve used my savings together with my fiancé to buy some land not too far from the city. We plan to open a small restaurant as my fiancé used to be a chef. We have prepared everything now, but I still want to work at the factory because I can make some income by lending money to my colleagues with interest that is even higher than my wage. When lending money is no longer popular, I may stop working in the factory completely and focus on my business instead. My team leader just asked me to keep working for at least another year because she does not want to hire new workers.

Another worker learned to speak Korean to escape the long hours of factory work in Cambodia:

Ouksa: I have a new job in Korea. My father is working there. I’ve studied Korean for more than a year now. I haven’t had any days off because I dedicate my spare time to learning Korean. I am waiting for the day to be sent off to Korea. In the meantime, I’ll keep working at the factory to earn some money for my daily spending. I don’t rent this room with any friends, so I pay for it myself. I’ll keep working as usual, but I don’t want to work overtime because I am exhausted, and I want to have some time to relax. My team leader doesn’t
force me to take overtime. I think I have more freedom now that I have found a job in Korea, even though I am still in Cambodia.

Another participant suggested that in order to strive for fair treatment within the factory, skills can be used a bargaining tool within her current employment in the garment sector. Here the interviewee seems to acknowledge the current precarity of factory work (see 6.4.1 below) and she expresses concern that even though she has skills that serve her well in working in factory, she needs to secure her future in the context of an industry that is subject to economic volatility. In this context, it is also apparent that the factories need workers with skills to increase their production, and there is competition between the factories in employing those skilled workers:

Sokleab: My employer likes me because I am capable of using many different types of machines. During the working day, I always use some of my break to learn to use different machines. With my skills I am not afraid to fight back when I feel I am unfairly treated, and I’m not scared of being fired because it will not be hard for me to get a new job at another factory. I don’t mean to be rude, but I need to be respected as a worker and not treated like a slave. I know factory work cannot last long given the current situation in which a number of factories are shut down, and that I’ll find work in this sector for at least another five to 10 years. Until then, I will have enough saved to do other things.

Interestingly, the one participant who was pursuing a university degree appears to believe that even in a sector where formal education is not a requirement, she receives special treatment because of her higher level of education:

Sopheap: I just work to support my own study. My brother pays for my accommodation and other relative costs of living. With a better education, I am working more like a supervisor’s assistant. I’m not working under any team leader, but am directly supervised by my supervisor. I help her with many things, and she always protects me. I am under less pressure than my colleagues. My supervisor has asked me to continue working as an accountant for the factory when I finish studying.
It is evident that training can also lead to improvements in how women are treated at work. One participant mentioned that when team leaders know women have learned new skills and intend to open their own businesses, they become friendlier because they do not want to bring in new workers who do not have any experience:

Savin: My team leader said she wants me to work for a couple of years more because she doesn’t want to recruit new workers she’ll need to train. She said I can open my business later and that now I should save more money at the factory. If I stay I can also be with my husband, who works at the same factory. Now it is easier for me to take leave, when before it was very hard. For instance, my team leader allowed me to take leave to visit my ailing mother when she was hospitalised in the city.

These kinds of opportunities appear to have built the women’s sense of self-worth, allowing them to exercise their autonomy to a certain extent, even if perhaps it does not extend to what they deserve in accordance with laws and regulations. Nonetheless, it is evident that while factory work itself does not directly improve women’s situations and working conditions, is a resource that enables them to change their circumstances.

6.4 Social conversion factors

Social conversion factors are the final element that Sen (1985) suggests should be considered when assessing or evaluating levels of achieved functioning. I defined social conversion factors in the Introduction chapter as cultural norms, characteristics of work, living in the city, and availabilities of support from government and relevant institutions might hinder or foster women’s autonomy. As the achieved functioning focused upon in this study is women’s autonomy in the workplace, a significant social conversion factor is women’s experiences of precarity, which has been impacted upon by the global financial crisis, the political economy behind the emergence of garment factories, and political instability.

6.4.1 Precarity of factory work

During the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, around 70 factories in Phnom Penh shut down. About 18 percent of the total garment sector workforce, roughly 63,000
workers, were laid off. Other workers had their employment temporarily suspended or were offered no longer offered overtime (Chan & Ngo, 2010, p. 9). During the economic downturn the total salary lost by garment workers was approximately US$6.2 million per month between May 2008 to May 2009, female workers normally remit around USD $30 per month to their families (MoP, 2013, p. 13) and remittances to families fell by 6 percent over this period (Chan & Ngo, 2010). Needing to continue to support themselves and their families, the bulk of the laid-off workers could not afford to return home, so they stayed in the city and searched for new jobs in garment factories and other sectors (Chan & Ngo, 2010, p. 23). Although no specific nor substantial data has been reported on these shifts in employment, there is evidence that female workers turned to sex work during this period (UNIAP, 2009, p. 5).

Politics and protest also shape the garment sector in Cambodia. Given the large number of people working in the sector (more than 7000,000), garment workers have been targeted by political parties, particularly the main opposition party, as a source of votes (Prak, 2014). These alliances have led to intense and political confrontation in Cambodia. For example, 350,000 garment workers from nearly 500 factories across the country went on strike in 2014, an action was organised by the opposition party (CNRP). Approximately 100,000 workers had gathered at freedom park on 22 December, calling for the Prime Minister Hun Sen to step down (Um, 2014; Wong, 2013). The Cambodian government used military force to dissolve the strike: four people were killed and 21 wounded (Prak, 2014).

Since then, more than 100 garment factories in Phnom Penh closed down as the result of a number of strikes and demonstrations within the past few years (Yon & Chen, 2018). Some factories suddenly closed without informing their workers, who were offered no compensation (Hawkins & Kang, 2016). Further, due to political instability, up until early 2018 one third of garment factories only offered fixed-duration contracts (Yon & Chen, 2018). Commentators have noted this practice is used to dissuade workers from engaging in strikes and demonstrations and keeps workers in line because any action of that nature will affect their job security. Based on labour laws (articles 67, 68 and 69), the benefits factories receive from keeping workers on fixed-duration or short-term contracts relate to the fact that those workers do not benefit from
seniority bonuses, monthly bonuses, holiday leave and other entitlements (Yon & Chen, 2018; Yon & Andrew, 2018).

It is not clear that workers see political parties as interested in advancing their rights. There are some studies on the political situation in Cambodia which have pointed out that the opposition party (CNRP) has influenced and put pressure on government to commit to reforms, including raising the workers’ basic wage (Arnold, 2014, 2017; Arnold & Hess, 2017). An enormous strike happened in 2013 which contributed pressure to raising wage of workers from USD60 per month in 2013 to USD153 per month in 2017 and provided selected improvement in terms of working conditions (Arnold, 2017). However, one interviewee suggested that the strikes and demonstrations held by the opposition party only served their own political ambitions, rather than improving worker rights, and brought more harm than good:

Lin: The demonstration is to raise the salary. Now, our monthly wage has been increased US$12 more but the workload is much more than that I would say. The demonstration is actually more about politics, I think. I did not join any of the demonstrations because I do not want to get myself involved with politics and possibly, I can be fired from the factory - some of my friends who were actively involved with the strikes and demonstrations lost their jobs. I think it is better to keep low profile and focus on working.

One participant who experienced both the global financial crisis and more current political instability described her situation:

Pheak: My previous factories closed down due to the global economic crisis in 2008. During that period, from what I know, about 120 factories closed down because buyers reduced their orders. A number of female workers lost their jobs during 2008 and the following year. In my experience, factories only kept workers who never complained or demonstrated, and took minimal leave. None of the factories cared about laws or regulations, and some shut down without informing their workers. For instance, the last factory I worked at allowed workers to work as normal on a Saturday, then the next Monday when we went to work, we found the factory had closed. We all stood waiting for the
factory to open, not realising it had stopped operating. I am speechless that the government still has not taken any action such as putting pressure on the factory to give us some compensation. From this experience I learned that if we want to keep generating income in this sector, when there is no alternative employment, we need to avoid having any problems at work, and work harder.

Another two participants raised similar issues:

Ny: Many factories have closed down now. Many female workers have lost jobs. I didn’t want to be unemployed, so as soon as the factory closed down, I immediately started looking for a new job. Now, I work the night shift at another factory. Sometimes I join other workers who are trying to claim compensation for what has happened. The union supports workers, but I don’t know if we will be successful because until now there has been no action on the part of the factory. I am currently working on a short-term contract of six months in the sewing section of the factory. I now have to focus on work and generate income as I know sooner or later there may not be any more jobs available within garment factories.

Kalyan: After my factory was closed without any notification, I waited to see if the union could get us some compensation. I worked for that factory for quite a long time, and was entitled to an annual bonus and other benefits, but I’ve received nothing. Now I have a new job at another factory in the sewing section, but my contract is only for three months, and factory jobs are very unstable, so I may need to look for something else.

All the conversion factors indicate that garment work is very precarious. The government evidently has limited capacity to regulate the industry, given that that the global market dictates supply and demand, and therefore factory conditions and stability. For the sake of national economic growth and to keep investors in the garment sector, the government appears to discourage workers from participating in strikes and demonstrations, including those organised by opposition parties. The government must also dissuade workers from engaging in strikes because this could encourage factories to move from Cambodia to other developing countries where there
is less tension between factory operators and workers. These structural factors shape the everyday experiences of women in the garment sector, and it means not only that female workers are treated unfairly, but that they do not expect to be treated as such. Female workers will avoid engaging with unions or in disputes with team leaders because they may be fired. Factory work is a means to an end for these women, and they are unlikely to rock the boat for fear of losing their economic stability.

6.5 Conclusion

To articulate the different elements of factory work that relate to the capability approach framework, this study suggests that women’s autonomy within the workplace cannot be achieved by any genuine measure. In Cambodia, work in the garment sector appears to provide greater bargaining power for factories than workers. As a result, as both this study and existing studies suggest, investors in the sector are in a good position to negotiate with government agencies to level down their responsibilities and accountabilities as stated in laws and regulations.

This study shows female workers in the garment sector in Cambodia are subject to labour exploitation; as such, their work in the industry is precarious, and they are vulnerable to changes within it, which may be affected by greater forces such as the global financial crisis or the whims of their team leaders, supervisors and factory operators. Given the financial situation of many female workers, the income generated from working in the garment sector may be the only resource available to improve their well-being and livelihood, as well as that of their families back home, even if their labour rights are violated. Interestingly, this chapter shows that even if garment work is not a capability within the workplace, it becomes one outside the workplace when it offers potential emancipation through economic freedom and the development of skills. These factors can allow those women to exercise their autonomy through the indirect opportunities derived from living and working in the city, and the development of their capabilities as a result.

Finally, it is worth noting that this chapter provides a useful way to understand the analytic problem of how achieved functionings are realised. The above discussion appears to suggest that in order to assess the achievement of autonomy it is insufficient
to just look at the characteristics of paid employment as a resource; the personal capacities of women who are employed; or examine conversion factors. This sort of analysis simply focuses on the direct relationships between women and work. Instead, we must also assess the opportunities that indirectly arise for factory workers as a result of paid employment. The opportunities, for example, for women to use their location in the city to access training or gain new worldviews that allow better recognition and realization of rights, contribute tangibly to enhanced achievement of functioning. Although these opportunities may not offer comprehensive freedoms and equality, they at least allow women to have some spaces to exercise their autonomy within their workplaces and also create a new set of capabilities for those women for their future lives beyond factory work. Of course, the transformation of the lives of women is not restricted to their experience in workplaces. As I shall discuss in Chapter 7, arguably the most significant changes to achieved functions occurred with the private lives of women that I interviewed, at the level of the household and in their personal relationships.
Chapter 7: Factory work and its implications for women’s autonomy at personal, household and community levels

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in chapter 6, economic empowerment does not always engender autonomy for women in their working lives, though it may provide some indirect benefits that may contribute to experiences of autonomy. This study shows factory work is difficult and exploitative, but also that paid employment does provide several avenues for autonomy, as it can provide the means for gaining skills, finding opportunities to generate income and taking on training that allows women to achieve functioning later in life. While limited opportunities for autonomy exist within the factories in which the women in this study work, the story appears to be different when we shift focus to the women’s personal lives. This chapter aims to capture the positive impacts of working and living in the city on women’s autonomy by examining their day-to-day lives, as described in the interviews. The capability approach framework and the example of the ‘bicycle’ – as per Sen’s (1985) and Robeyns ‘s (2005) work), described in Chapter 6 – is also applied here. This time, it is used to consider women’s autonomy at the individual, household and community levels, both in their rural hometowns and in the city. To capture the different viewpoints of single female workers and female workers with spouses or partners, the responses from the two groups of participants will be considered separately.

In Cambodia, marital status defines the different roles of women in society. Roles shift for women based on their status as daughters, wives or mothers. Daughters are generally obedient to their parents, who have the responsibility of being their protectors. As I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, young women are strongly advised to comply with all social and cultural norms to uphold their families’ reputations and offer help to their families to their fullest capacities. Mothers usually have legitimate rights to make all decisions for their daughters, showing a shift in roles as women change from being children to adults (Legerwood, 1995). Based on the Chhab Srey, it is evident that wives and mothers play different roles: mothers are expected to be in charge of the family’s budget management, to resign themselves to their husbands, to
be honest, and to show fortitude towards in-laws in order to maintain harmony in the family.

This chapter is structured as follows: firstly, it focuses on the implications for women’s lives offered through opportunities to earn income and live in the city. Next it will show how these opportunities impact women’s changing roles as decision makers, both on the individual level and within their families, including decisions related to choosing partners/spouses. This Chapter will examine the changing attitudes of women towards household labour distribution with their partners, as well as towards domestic violence, and physical violence specifically. It will also examine their ability to deal with discrimination they face due to their choice to live in the city, and how social norms can serve as a form of protection for women.

### 7.2 Single female workers

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, single women in Cambodia are expected to perform roles as dutiful daughters who are obedient, passive and hard-working. They are their mothers’ right hands and give support to their fullest capacity to help their families when they are single. Young single women in rural areas are involved very little in household decision-making processes; their mothers play the primary roles as decision makers, and often have the final say in decisions made by their daughters. After migrating to work and live in the city, changes can be observed regarding the ways young women engage in decision-making processes. This includes the ability of women to make their own decisions in choosing their spouses, and impacts on their sense of self-worth as they learn to protect themselves against discrimination from people living both in their communities and in the city itself. This section will show that the power that fuels these trends and changes is generated both from income-earning activities, and their experiences of independent living in the city.

#### 7.2.1 Remittance and its implications for decision-making processes

As discussed in Chapter 6, garment work can provide women with the capability to exercise their autonomy outside their workplaces. Although the wage relationship in factories is exploitative and limits women’s autonomy in the workplace, outside the factory the income generated is potentially a powerful tool. Scholars have shown the
process of sending remittance home allows female workers in Global South to experience influence and power in their families and communities (Lopez-Ekra, Aghazarm, Köttter, & Mollard, 2011). In addition, women use their power to earn as a tool to claim autonomy and equality within households on a more equal basis with men (Ghosh, 2009; Morrison, Schiff, Sjöblom, & World Bank, 2008). As Lopez-Ekra et al. (2011, p. 71) explain, this new status as an acknowledged significant economic provider can act as a catalyst for change, challenging ideas about gender roles within both the family and community. In line with this, my study confirmed that women experienced increased autonomy through the process of providing for their families. However, as I shall go on to discuss, the results of this study show deeper complexity than studies which suggest a direct correlation between providing remittance and autonomy: instead, as I shall discuss achievement of autonomy can only ever be partial.

In this study, 17 out of 20 single participants sent remittances home to their families, while 19 out of 20 participants with partners or spouses described sending remittances home when they were single, but no longer. At least based on my sample, sending a portion of wages earned to families appears a near universal duty for single daughters employed in the city, and was perceived by all participants as a role to be fulfilled by dutiful daughters. However, the participants also showed they recognised the implications of this practice on their personal decision-making processes, as well as the level of engagement they had in their household’s decision-making processes. Participants responses to the question: ‘Do you think after entering into the workforce, your voice in your family is more strongly heard?’ showed some interesting responses. On research participant highlights evolving perceptions of autonomy:

Srey Touch: I feel like I’m more independent now, because when I was home, I depended on my mother to make the decisions. I could ask her to buy personal things for me when I needed them, but everything else was up to her. After coming here and earning my own income, I have made a number of decisions by myself and sometimes I share ideas with my mother about my younger siblings’ behaviour and education.
Here we can note that financial autonomy brought with it a shift in status, and an evolution in the relationship between mother and daughter. The daughter is no longer passive, now actively taking on the role of advisor for her mother and siblings. This does not mean social norms no longer apply (something I will explore in depth below), but rather that the participant began to take on more of a decision-making role within the context of prevailing social norms and her family.

Other participants provided similar responses:

Sarem: I am living on my own now. I make all the decisions by myself. I discuss some things with my mother, like making decisions on buying jewellery, changing factories, and my plans to undertake short training courses. My mother normally just accepts my thinking and allows me to do what I think is right. She just asks me to worry about my safety and to behave properly as a woman, meaning that I should not have relationships with men. My parents often say I am mature now. They know I can distinguish between wrong and right and that I know what I need to do for my own future.

Da: After migrating to work, I gained full freedom to make decisions. My parents trust me because they know I would not do anything against our traditions that could ruin the family’s reputation. Most of the time my mother seeks my advice, such as when she wants to buy land or some pigs to raise.

Based on these responses, it is evident that a significant change occurred when women migrated to work in terms of their autonomy to make decisions. Whether they notice the change or not, it is clear that entering the workforce and sending home remittances shifts their status so they can make decisions that impact their own lives, while also gaining a new role as adviser to their parents. The changes happened more to daughters rather than sons because as one participant mentions:

Phin: As a daughter, I need to respect my parents and help my mother with house chores. As of now, I try to send home as much as I can because it is normal that daughter shall help family to my capacity. After married, I cannot help them much as I will have my own family. I also have brothers who are working now, but they do not send much money home because men do not
know how to save and they spend a lot to eat outside, enjoy evening time with friends and when they have girlfriends the spending is even more. Due to my commitment in supporting my family, I think my parents give me more power in making household’s decisions.

As a result, parents appear to reduce the domineering aspects of their behaviour and their control over their daughters’ decision making, both at the individual and household level. However, as I have noted above, social and cultural norms still shape those women’s behaviour. As I will go on to discuss, the interviews revealed a complex relationship between the status and behaviour of the women I interviewed and evolving social and cultural norms, which can act both as a constraint and as protection.

7.2.2 Experiences of working and living in the city and their implications for social and cultural norms

As discussed in Chapter 3 as per the work of Hussain and Smith (1999) on importance of women’s physical mobility in Bangladesh, paid employment that involves women traveling away from their hometowns can empower women because it allows them to broaden their knowledge and access a number of services. As I shall discuss below, the capacity to travel away from home is a capability that contributes much to women’s autonomy, breaking traditional social and cultural norms that prevent young women from making their own decisions.

In Cambodia, age is understood as a measure of knowledge accumulation. Social and cultural norms suggest that the younger generation, especially young women, need to listen to members of the older generations. As previously noted, young women in Cambodia are advised to be passive listeners, and mothers often make decisions for their daughters; I call this phenomenon “mother knows best.” As described above, opportunities to work and live in the city independently appear to challenge these social and cultural norms. This is not the product of resistance to the idea that mother knows best; rather, it is the experience of living independently that pushes female workers to learn to manage their own lives. Many of the research participants described arriving in the city nervous and homesick. Many had lost almost all contact
with their families because neither they nor their parents could afford to have mobile phones. This had certain outcomes for the women:

Kalyan: The main challenge for my first migration to the city was overcoming homesickness. I missed my parents, friends and everything in my village. I cried myself to sleep for many nights. I was also frustrated when I started work and had to learn to deal with the stress. Step by step, I learned how to manage my daily life, such as when I woke up and what I would eat for lunch. I had to decide what I needed to buy for my daily use. I also had to work out how much money I needed to send home and how much I needed to keep each month to cover my spending.

Soknov: It was quite scary to live in a stranger’s house. The first house owner often had parties and some of their guests slept overnight and got drunk. Life was terrible. I almost went back home, but decided against it because I needed to earn money. It was scary because I kept wondering what would happen if those people did something bad to me. I wished my mother was with me then. I hadn’t talked with my family for many months. Now, I know how to protect myself. I sometimes tell my mother about life in the city when I visit home. She has no idea about life here, such as why I need to save money, what kind of training I can access and which skills are in high demand in the labour market for women.

It is evident that in the city, the women did not have their mothers to make decisions for them, so whether they wanted to or not, they had to learn to be strong and make decisions for themselves. Over time, the participants acknowledged their mothers were not in a position to help with the challenges they faced because they had no experience of life in the city. In this sense, through isolation and force of circumstance, the participants learn to trust themselves more in making daily decisions.

The above responses suggest that economic transformation has created an unprecedented rupture in social and cultural norms pertaining to Khmer women. Working and living in the city was not an opportunity that older generations of women could not access. Older generations evidently have little understanding of factory work
or what it is like to live in the city. Their experiences of city life is what makes young female workers believe they are better off than their parents in terms of future opportunities that might allow them to flourish. As such, through material experience, young female workers challenge the norm that “mother knows best,” sensing that, in fact, they know better than their mothers.

I noticed other changes in social and cultural norms. In a similar fashion, this empirical study noted changes in how the women valued the Chhab Srey. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the women recognised that basic parts of the code were applied to their behaviour in a loose way before they migrated to work in the city. As noted, women were aware of the code, but inconsistently applied it or had it applied. A lack of interest in subscribing to the code is exemplified in the women’s decisions to travel to work in the city, challenging the norm that suggests women “should not wander too far from home.” Yet we can see that life in the city poses further challenges to the way women perceive the code. This study suggests that after gaining experience working and living in the city, and seeing the lifestyles of city women, the participants, particularly the single women, became very sceptical about the code. Their responses suggest the rules of the code are no longer applicable:

Sarem: There is no need to change the code. It’s not important because only senior women still care about it. I do believe people change in accordance with society, but we are far too busy earning money to fill our stomachs than to worry about the code. In working environment, we need to walk fast, and we need to scream to be heard sometimes because the sound of the sewing machines is so loud. It’s different for women. My brother stays at home and his wife comes to work and earns an income to support their family. Traditionally, it was not a good image for a man as a breadwinner, but now it is useless to care about gendered roles any longer, since the person can earn more should go out to work, regardless of their sexes. I think as long as my sister-in-law doesn’t involve herself in infidelity when she lives far away from my brother, everything else can be tolerated.

Here, the research participant understands the strict gender norms within the code as a set of archaic cultural norms that have no place in contemporary society. Indeed, with
reference to her brother’s case, it is evident that in a fast-changing-world the code can constrict the flourishing of individuals and families. As participant notes, particularly in the case of a wage-earning urban society, then it makes more sense to respond to the demands of the market rather than to fully comply with the code in order to sustain livelihoods.

Another two single participants offer similar ideas. Both stress the importance of the economic market and financial survival to their lives, while also showing how this concern challenges any contemporary relevance of the code:

Sokhom: Now, nobody cares about the code. Everyone needs to work, and if we apply the code, we may die from hunger. The code is not applicable to current society. From my experience, people just enjoy being critical of our behaviour, but nobody will offer to help. When my family borrowed from them, all they cared about was getting a high interest from us for their own good. I learn that lesson very well. This is why I need to make money. Now, I observe that people have changed as they give more appreciation to daughters who go out to work to support their families, rather than to those who just stay at home, do the household chores and are virtuous women.

Da: Things have changed, because the upheaval of society means everyone needs to seek opportunities to earn money. We cannot depend on farming anymore; the weather has changed, and many natural disasters happen. Women have become the labour force who need to go out to make an income. We cannot just stay home and do chores. If we always stuck to the code, our families would end up in poverty. It’s time to stop thinking about the code and focus on how to better the family's living conditions.

The responses above indicate that compliance with the code is highly incompatible with the reality of working life in the city and supporting families through hardship. As I discussed in Chapter 6, family debt was a driver for women migrating to the city for work, against social and cultural norms. Here we see that comparative earning power alters the traditional relationships between men and women in the household. It shows economic necessity is the primary justification given by the participants as to
why they believe the code cannot be applied in their current circumstances. For better or worse, in the contemporary context, it makes sense for women to go to work, and this shifts traditional norms. However, this does not mean the code has no place in the lives of the single women I interviewed. It is evident from the interviews that the women believe certain decisions are beyond their capacity due to cultural and social constraints, such as decisions about marriage. When single participants were asked: ‘What kind of decision making still requires your parents’ or family’s approval?’ the responses from interviewees revealed the importance of the code and traditional beliefs in informing decisions over marriage. On respondent observed:

Sarem: After migrating to work, I make all the minor decisions that affect my daily life. I still seek approval when I want to travel out of the city with my factory colleagues or friends, or if I want to buy something expansive, like jewellery. Currently, I am not sure whether I should make up my own mind about choosing a partner, or if I should follow my family’s advice. I’m in a relationship with a man at the moment. He’s from my village and a college student. My mother and sisters do not like him; they say he is too playful and that he may not really love me. I am at the crossroads now. I don’t know what I should do. Experiences show that parents or families don’t want to be responsible for their daughters if they marry someone they don’t like. I also understand that married life is not easy. There could be many problems, and without support from my family and family-in-laws, the marriage could not go far.

This participant seems to suggest that living independently in the city allows her to make only low-level decisions that relate to daily life. She still needs to inform or seek approval from her family for significant decisions, such as buying expensive goods and, most importantly, having relationships. It is evident there could be significant consequences if she decides to marry the man with whom she is in a relationship, which would arguably play a central role in deciding whether to make that decision on her own.

Two more participants tell similar stories, reinforcing the importance of family involvement in decisions about romantic relationships:
Da: I can make any decision my own except about marriage. I think my parents’ approval is still very important because they would know better than I whether he is a good and reliable person. Decisions around marriage are a big concern as they can have a lifelong impact. I have to listen to my parents because if something bad happens I will need their support. Some people would just laugh at me and nobody would help me when I had problems with a husband as I chose myself without approval from my parents.

Srey Touch: My mother asked me not to travel at night or far from where I live, and not to have a relationship with any man without letting her know. She told me if a man really loves me, he would approach them and get married based on our tradition.

The above responses show that paid employment at least partially betters women’s autonomy at both the individual and household level, insofar as women are empowered to make a range of decisions over their day-to-day lives. However, this autonomy only extends to some forms of decision-making; compliance with some social and cultural norms is still a necessity, because eventually the women will need their families’ support. In this sense, compliance with social and cultural norms serves the purpose of protection, which I will discuss below.

7.3 Female workers with spouses/partners

As I have noted, single women and those who reside with a long-term spouse or partner have different experiences of decision-making and autonomy. This study found there were three areas in which women with spouses/partners exercised autonomy in ways that are perhaps unprecedented, and which conflicted with social and gender norms. These relate to decision-making processes around marriage, the distribution of household labour, and women’s abilities to respond to domestic violence.

7.3.1 Married women and the process of choosing spouses

Women in Cambodia are discouraged from cultivating romantic relationships before marriage. It is common for women to only meet their partners after their parents have
decided they are a suitable pair. In some cases, women will only meet their chosen marriage partners on their wedding day (Thavry, 2017). In traditional marriages completely arranged by parents, women experience minimal autonomy in relation to this important life decision. However, as mentioned earlier, substantial cultural changes are occurring in relation to women’s decisions around marriage. To follow are responses from female workers with spouses/partners when they were asked: ‘How was your marriage arranged?’:

Bopha: It was not an arranged marriage, although I needed approval from my parents. I knew him before we were married because he was a friend of a friend. He asked me to marry him and I told him to seek approval from my parents, and that if my parents agreed I had no objection.

Kalyan: It was not a completely arranged marriage. He is a friend of a friend. He often visited me and one day asked to visit my village. After he did that, he asked me to marry him. I told him it was up to my parents. At first my parents hesitated because they did not know anything about my husband’s family background, but some senior relatives convinced them to let me marry him because I was quite old, and because they believed my husband really loved me because he approached me with the consent of parents rather attempting courtship without informing my parents. After a discussion, my parents agreed and we were married.

Marriages that were not arranged by the participants’ parents appear to have begun with the women becoming acquainted with their husbands before marriage. The women then gave permission for their husbands to approach their parents (which effectively meant the women had accepted the men’s proposal). In other words, the women’s own decision-making was important in their choice of spouse; however, their parents still played a crucial role in approving the decisions made by their daughters. This parental approval appears to be a cultural procedure performed to gain respect and support from families and communities.

Some women cultivated relationships with men, but were careful to avoid being perceived as having a ‘boyfriend’ to avoid potential shame and conflict with their
families. One research participant described a two-year friendship with a man who would later become her husband:

Sokleab: I dialled a wrong number, which was his, and later discovered he lived in my village. Later on, I visited his sister’s house and we met. He asked his sister to get my phone number, and we kept in touch via phone as friends for more than a year. Though he also lived in Phnom Penh, we only met in person twice a year during Khmer New Year and Pchum Ben. Whenever I was confronted with a problem, I talked to him over the phone. He consoled me. We had been in contact for about two years when he proposed to me, but I said I needed to ask permission from my parents. During Khmer New Year I told my parents about his intentions. They asked me if he was a good person, whether he had a specific job and how long we had known each other. I told them accordingly and my parents agreed to our marriage.

The above stories show changes in how these Khmer women select their spouses and partners. These women were initiators and initial decision-makers in their relationships. When the women agreed to marry, they asked the men to approach their parents for approval. As such, their parents played the roles of validators rather than match-makers. This does not mean the input of the parents was superfluous; parents served an important function in the overall decisions around the women’s marriages. A number of participants emphasised the importance of gaining their parents’ approval, and said they would not dare to go against it, as one explained:

Kalyan: Although I liked my husband before we were married, I would not dare to get married if my parents did not approve of us. Their support is very important for me in the future. Their approval is a form of protection if and when I might have problems with my husband. It would be very painful if we have problems in the future and my husband said I was low-hanging fruit and a disgraceful daughter. My parents would put all the blame on me because I didn’t listen to them. Now, because I respected their decision, I dare to ask my mother to help take care of my daughter. That has allowed me to work until now. Without her support I may have ended up staying at home.
The above response shows that the role of parents as validators is vital because the family remains a woman’s social safety net after getting married. It is also evident that parental approval leads to material security, such as the promise of future support in childcare. The participants understood before migrating that they would not be able to take care of their children while working in the factory for at least 8 to 10 hours a day; thus, they needed their mother’s help. Of the 20 married participants, 2 participants brought their children with them to the city with help from their mothers (their mothers moved to live with them in the city), 11 did not take their children with them when migrating, leaving them instead with their family, or, in the case of one participant, with their in-laws.

Another story also presents a similar idea, with the participant foreseeing what will happen if she ignores her family’s advice and marries a man with whom she is deeply in love:

Mouykea: The family’s approval of marriage is very important because a marital relationship is a case of having dishes in a basket: most of the time they rattle.\(^{45}\) I used to have a boyfriend; we were in relationship for a year. We talked with each other almost every day over the phone. I discussed marrying him with my sister, but she rejected the idea. She said he was a playful guy and that the relationship would not last long. But I loved him and insisted on marrying him. My sister said if I married him, she would ignore me, and told me not to run to her if something bad happened. Hearing that, I dared not take risk and chose to break up with him. A few months after breaking up, I met another man. We got married after my family accepted his proposal.

In both the above stories, family approval leads to security; as such, compliance with social and cultural norms around marriage is a form of protection.

The consequences of marrying without parental approval are seen in one participant’s experience:

\(^{45}\) The phrase ‘like dishes in a basket: most of the time they rattle’ describes a marital relationship in which there are conflicts and misunderstandings between the couple themselves and the in-law families.
Thavy: I fell deeply in love with a man. My mother didn’t like him and asked me to stay away from him. I did not listen to her and cohabited with him without being married. We lived happily for several months and then I fell pregnant. His family would not allow him to marry me. After that, he changed. He stopped giving me some of his income, he had another mistress, and he committed acts of physical and sexual violence against me. I dared not seek help from local authorities. I felt ashamed and tried to keep quiet and deal with the pain. My family condemned me. They said I deserved this karma and that it was the result of not listening to them or following traditions. Now, a man will never choose a woman like me to be his legal wife. I feel regretful about my actions, and I keep telling my daughter never to fall into this trap and live with a man without being properly married.

The above responses show social and cultural norms are evolving with respect to the process by which women choose their husbands. While parents may have previously made these decisions for women, Khmer women today are choosing their own spouses, and only seeking parental approval for their decision. However, decisions around marriage are still important for parents and families to focus upon, and do not solely belong in the realm of the individual. As some of the participants described, family approval is still required because they will need their families’ support both when they and their partner get along well and when they have conflicts.

The marriages discussed above are traditional marriages normally conducted in a village at the bride’s house. In Cambodia, traditional marriage is more powerful than the legal registration of the marriage in term of social acceptance. Legal registration is viewed only as important for legal reasons, such as sharing property if the couple divorce. It is interesting to observe that of the 20 married participants, only one participant had registered her marriage. One interviewee describes her perspective on the pointlessness of legal registration:

Kunthea: No, we didn’t register because I didn’t think it was important. We don’t have any core property to be shared if we get divorced, and it would have been a waste of time because one month after the traditional ceremony we would need to go back home to do it, and I would need to take leave from work.
Here, the participant views legal registration as a mechanism to distribute property rights after divorce. However, as the interviewee recognises, such legal protections are meaningless when, due to poverty, individuals have few assets.

Another participant notes that obtaining legal registration would only complicate their lives if she and her spouse had to deal with the courts at the end of their relationship:

Sengly: I didn’t register. Just the traditional ceremony is sufficient to prove we are husband and wife. Legal registration is complicated, and I don’t think it is important. Firstly, we have no intention of getting divorced. If in the future we cannot live with each other, we just can walk out without dealing with the courts. It would be a shame to go to court to get divorced. We might need to spend money to do so; I do not know anything about the laws and relevant regulations. I would prefer to stay out of court if it’s not necessary.

From the above responses, it is evident that traditional norms and cultural practices prevail over national laws. To an extent, traditional marriage is seen as a stronger protection than legal marriage; the latter is perceived as unnecessary or burdensome. This may provide one explanation for why parental approval of marriage is still seen as highly important for women: because it relates to deeply ingrained traditions.

7.3.2 Married women’s attitudes towards the Chbab Srey

Chapter 2 discussed how the Chbab Srey shapes the behaviour of women and girls, particularly married women. The main aim of the code in regards to marriage is to mitigate marital conflicts and maintain peace and harmony within a family. As I have discussed, the code is an obstacle to women’s autonomy, at least to the extent that it restricts the ability of women to flourish on an equal basis with men. However, within Cambodia, compliance with the code offers social acceptance by family and community to women. From this positive perspective, it appears the code, for better or worse, can function to protect women who act in accordance with it. Perhaps for this reason we find that the participants with spouses and children appeared to be more attentive to the code (and relevant traditional practices) than single participants. Participants with spouses gave the following responses:
Len: It is never easy to have children and live in a materialist society when one parent cannot afford a decent living. I need to think twice before reacting to any thoughtless or unkind words from my husband. It is better to keep silent and act in a resigned way as recommended by the code because he can easily walk out and find another wife.

Kalyan: After going through life as a couple for some years now, I understand that being silent and patient are the effective means to calm my husband’s anger and minimise our family’s conflicts. Striving for equality with husbands may provoke violence. What the code suggests regarding keeping the three flame(s)\textsuperscript{46} is very good advice. It means the family’s problems should be buried rather than spread out.

Chantha: It’s not hard to do all the household chores and be inferior to my husband. Challenging his authority brings more harm than good. It would be more painful if my husband had another mistress and left me and the children behind. I am satisfied with doing anything I need to as long as my husband still gives me all of his income and stays here with us. It is also very important for my children to have a father to provide support. So, as long as he doesn’t commit violence against me and my children, other things can be tolerated.

These participants are remarkably frank that their marital relationships do not bring value to them in terms of their flourishing: indeed, within the context of patriarchal norms, there is evidently much hardship that comes with the decision to marry. However, these women have made pragmatic decisions to accept the diminished autonomy that comes with traditional marriage, adopting rules from the \textit{Chbab Srey}

\textsuperscript{46} In \textit{Chbab Srey}, from verse 40 to 54, advises that to keep harmonization and peace with a family, a woman shall manage ‘three flames’ properly. The flame is a traditional expression that metaphorically refer to situations that can cause conflicts. The first flame is known as ‘telling other people about internal problems’, woman shall not spread or tell other people about their private problems within their own house because some trivial problems can turn to be bigger when those problems are being heard and retold by other people (people incline to fabricate information to make it interesting for gossiping). The second flame is ‘always showing gratitude towards parents’, taking a good care of their own parents and parents-in-law is strongly recommended because if they get upset it can affect the whole family. The third flame is ‘never fall into adultery’, as a wife loyalty towards only a husband is a must and being a good wife woman need to praise her husband in whatsoever circumstances.
and other relevant traditional advice to keep peace and harmony within families. Married women’s fears of violence and being abandoned are formed by living in a strong patriarchal society coupled with poverty and limited support from government. These women are low-wage workers; while I have noted above that there have been perceivable shifts in social and cultural norms, these changes are insufficient for women to escape potential abuse, alienation and violence from their husbands. These participants seem to suggest that it is always better to comply with the code to keep their husbands home to earn and support their families; for these women striving for equality, while in principle attractive, in this context is potentially a dangerous pathway.

Despite the above-mentioned issues, there are still opportunities for women to gain autonomy within households. As discussed in Chapter 2, and confirmed in this study, women in Cambodia often take on traditional roles in managing household finances. When asked about her family’s financial management process, one participant proudly said:

Kalyan: I manage all the income and spending. It is our tradition.

When asked what would happen if she was not allowed to manage the income, she responded:

Kalyan: It would be very hard for me and I wouldn’t be able to accept it. The wife must be the person who manages the family income. We have a proverb that says: ‘The husband who manages income is one of his wife’s pains’. Managing the family’s income is a wife’s pride. In our society, many people would view a wife who doesn’t manage the family’s income as a basket with a hole at the bottom\(^\text{47}\). It would be painful to be viewed that way. I could not stand it.

\(^{47}\) The analogy of a woman as ‘a basket with a hole at the bottom’ is extracted from a folk tale known as *Mear Yearng*. The story is about a man who earns his living by harvesting shrimp and small fishes from a lake. His wife holds a basket and follows him, but the basket has a hole in the bottom, which the wife doesn’t care to fix, so no matter how hard the husband works, their situation never improves. In contemporary society, this analogy refers to a wife who likes to spend extravagantly or who is sometimes a gambler.
Another participant said:

Pisey: It would be weird if the husband didn’t let his wife manage the family’s budget. I would be very upset if I could not. I think if a husband doesn't let his wife manage the income, he must not consider her his wife. It might even mean he has another mistress. Managing the family's income and expenses is very complicated, like trying to divide one hair into a thousand pieces. So, as long as the husband isn’t hiding anything, I believe he would not want to take on this role.

These responses appear to suggest that female workers with spouses have adopted some advice from the code and ascribed to relevant traditional roles to deal with problems within their marital relationships. Although it may look like they do not have any power, applying rules according to the wife’s role managing the family’s budget can help them to minimise conflicts and keep the family united.

7.3.3 Relationships with spouses and in-laws

Another area in which women with spouses exercise increased autonomy relates to decision making around household chores. Khmer women are expected to serve their husbands and take care of children and elderly family members. As discussed in Chapter 2, while in rural settings women do engage and trade with local businesses, they still to find time to do all the housework, according to a strict division of labour. Factory work appears to change this traditional arrangement of household labour. This study appears to indicate that female workers with spouses are more assertive in asking for shared household responsibilities with their husbands. This kind of proposal occurs because the nature of factory work is completely different from family businesses that operate without specific working hours. The specific schedule to which factories runs allow no flexibilities, providing justification as to why a wife cannot perform all the housework chores. The formal labour of factory work therefore makes asking for help from a husband appear a reasonable and socially acceptable thing to do. As one participant states:
Savin: My husband helps me with many chores including cleaning, washing and cooking. I just ask him not to wash my underclothes as traditionally it is not proper for a husband to do so. I do think now in order for us to have a decent life, as a husband he needs to help as I cannot do it all. I sometimes get angry with him when he doesn’t do some of the chores when he arrives home before me. That’s unfair, I think.

This participant is aware that her husband’s domestic labour occurs against traditional norms, but given the reality of her paid employment, his contribution is considered fair.

Paid employment also helps better the relationships between female workers and their in-laws. Shih and Pike observe in a Chinese context that in many marital relationships, in-law relationships, especially daughter-in-law–mother-in-law relationships, are viewed as ‘inherently conflictual’ (Shih & Pyke, 2010, p. 334). Arguably the situation is the same in the Cambodian context, something I noticed in my study\textsuperscript{48}. Participants indicated they received more respect and support from their in-laws when they earned their own income and were not solely dependent on their husbands. One participant explained how at first her mother-in-law held a negative view of her employment at the factory; however, after she proved she could earn an income and reduce her husband’s burden, she gained more respect:

Choun: My relationship with my family-in-laws is fine, but I have not had a good relationship with my husband’s mother. She did not like me at all at first and did not want her son to marry me. This was because she had a negative attitude towards female workers who work and live in the city. But now she has started to change and helps me when my husband does something bad to me. This is because she knows I migrated to the city for one reason: to earn money. She can see I have not been influenced by the city lifestyle. She has

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\textsuperscript{48} Although Cambodia is characterised as matrilocal society – that is, after marriage the groom moves to live with bride’s side of the family (Ledgerwood, 1995, p. 249) – findings from this study indicate that a number of problems within the marital relationship are still derived from in-law relationships with the husband’s family. The opinion a man’s mother has of her son’s wife is the focus of this relationship, which puts undue pressure on women. Interestingly, for the factory workers in this study, there appeared to be less conflict with mother-in-laws, which could be related to their respect for income earners, as evinced from some of the participants’ responses.
told her friends I am hardworking, that I can earn as same as my husband, and that I am also a devoted wife to her son.

Another participant explained how she supports her husband and is respected by her in-laws:

Savin: My relationship with my in-laws is very good. They like me because I am kind and friendly to them. My husband loves me, and they know it, so they also love me. My mother-in-law knows I work very hard and am good at saving. My husband bought a motorbike and some jewellery after he married me, when he had nothing when he was single. I don’t need to cook when I visit them; my mother-in-law does everything for us. When I am unhappy with my husband, I tell my mother-in-law and she helps me.

Based on the above responses, it is evident that the ability to generate income allows women to gain respect from their families-in-law. Here the traditional perception of wives as financial burdens has shifted: women in employment are able to demonstrate they are breadwinners and attain new status within extended families.

7.3.4 Attitudes towards domestic violence

Another area in which women with spouses might achieve greater autonomy relates to their tolerance of violence – particularly physical violence – from their husbands. As discussed in Chapter 2, gender norms in Cambodia create a tolerance for partner violence; the Chhab Srey normalises the role of husbands as disciplinarians of wives. However, some women in my study, going against these norms, showed intolerance towards domestic violence, and a willingness to leave partners as a result:

Bopha: I tried to stay calm and patient for quite a period of time. But the situation got worse and worse. I used to run to the local authorities for help. They called my husband to ask him to stop the violence, but they could not help me all the time. When the tension reached its limit, I decided to leave him, though I knew how hard life would be alone with many children to take care of and very poor parents. I just could not find reason to stay with a severely
abusive husband who didn't even provide support for our living expenses. My children deserve a better life than one in which they witness all kinds of abusive behaviour committed by their father.

This participant does not appear to worry about how people would view her for leaving her husband, or the potential loss of social status that would follow. She recognises that both she and her children will live a better life without her husband, even if they must depend just on her income as a sole parent. The participant’s response suggests an evolving set of cultural norms that allow women to stand up for themselves. Physical violence is not just a one-off event, but is a repetitive behaviour accompanied by economic violence, emotional violence, and other misbehaviours that cannot be justified by traditional norms that say women should tolerate abuse from their husbands. Such norms are arguably shifting, whereby this participant at least is willing to leave an abusive partner and imagines a better life after divorce, rather than one that is impoverished.

The above interviewee’s experience of leaving a situation of domestic violence was not the only case I encountered in my study. Another participant also showed no regrets about leaving a situation of violence:

Thavy: After divorce, our situation is much better. My daughter and I are free from violence committed by my husband. I took serious action by asking for the local authorities to issue a letter that meant my partner and I are no longer in a relationship. If he dares to hit me again, I will sue him and he can risk going to jail. My daughter lives with my mother now. Her health is improving too. On my income, I can support myself and my daughter. I was so wrong before when I thought life as a widow or a single woman would be very hard, and that people would gossip about me, when in reality nobody cared. They talked about me for a short period of time, then moved on. That kind of thinking was wrong. Now, I feel released. I’ve also opened myself up to a new relationship. Currently, I’m in a relationship with a foreigner. We met at the park and he is currently running a restaurant for western tourists. I told my mother about the relationship and she is fine with it.
The change in circumstances described by this participant occurred between the first and second round of interviews; during the first interview, the participant was still in a relationship with her husband. It is apparent that after she decided to ignore cultural norms and fight for her own dignity, her life changed remarkably. Both the above cases naturally cannot support a generalisable view on changing attitudes towards domestic violence in Cambodia; a larger study would be required to verify this. However, both cases are instructive in so far as they suggest that norms may be altering. Financial support is key here; before entering into the formal labour force the women may have suffered abuse and lived in situations that were detrimental because they solely depended on their husbands financially. After engaging in factory work, they have other options.

7.4 Female workers’ perceptions of their own image

As discussed in Chapter 3, the capacity of a person to have control over their life is partially based on how the person is viewed and accepted in the place where they live. Women who work in factories face a range of social barriers, including social stratification and discrimination. Townspeople, to a certain extent, discredit and degrade female workers from rural areas, which has in turn shaped the ways those women come to see themselves too. This kind of phenomenon, based on the literature, can be considered as social stigma (Becker, 1963; Gilmore & Somerville, 1994; Goffman, 1968; Jacoby, 1994; Kerckhoff, 1964). Stigma is defined by Goffman (1968) as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed” (p. 3). Both Becker (1963) and Goffman (1968) indicate that stigma is an outcome of societal devaluations of differences, and rules and sanctions are set by that society against individuals or groups of people who have been labelled according to those differences. Anspach (1979, p. 768) argues further that for stigma to maintain its hold, individuals who are stigmatised must accept the devaluation imposed upon them by the society. This kind of social stigma happens a lot amongst rural-urban migrants, leading to depression, anxiety, hostility, and social isolation (Kuang & Liu, 2012; Xiaoming, 2006). In Cambodia, there is a stereotype for the terms ‘female factory workers’ and ‘garment girls’ which assumes these women come from rural areas, lack strong connections to family, have low education levels, and are naïve and gullible (Derks, 2008). The term ‘garment girls’ actually
holds a double stigma: firstly, it implies they are peasant girls with low or no education, and secondly, it implies they are temporary workers who belong to a low economic class. There may also be an assumption that garment girls are ‘bad’ or ‘rotten’ because it is assumed that these women, against traditional values, work for money and enjoy living out of sight from their parents. There is often the implication that these women would do another things such as becoming someone’s mistress, engaging with sex work, or losing their virginity outside marriage. With this image in mind, I asked participants directly: “What do you think when you are called ‘garment girls’? In your understanding, what do you think they mean by this?” One participant associated the term ‘garment girls’ with the proverb: “When one fish has rotted, it affects all the fishes in the basket”:

Sarem: I feel upset to hear that. The proverb is perfectly correct in this context. Sometimes when I have heard people say this, I've responded, saying that it is true some female workers have done bad things, but they cannot generalise all female workers.

This response suggests the participant believes there are many factory workers who comply with traditional and cultural norms, and are therefore not ‘bad’. Another interviewee similarly rejects this stereotype:

Bopha: I know many people call us that. It refers to a bad group of girls. The term ‘garment girls’ means peasant girls who are easily deceived by just a small amount of money, who have low education, and who come from poor families. I feel bad whenever I am called that, and I have asked myself: what is so bad about being a worker at a garment factory? I do not ask for food from them. However, I also know that some female workers behave in a bad manner, such as being the mistress of someone else’s husband, working in clubs, or engaging in sex work industry, and having many boyfriends.

Two research participants explained that factory workers are branded as exploitable, naïve and uneducated, and that it is wrong to view them in this way:

49 ‘When one fish has rotted, it affects all the fishes in the basket’ is a proverb meaning that if there is a bad person in a group, that person will spread their bad behaviour to others, affecting the whole group.
Kalyan: It is a bad word. The ‘garment girl’ is a stereotype people view us as. It means we are naïve peasant girls, with no education, easily deceived with just a little treat. Maybe it is true for some. But many of us are denigrated by that.

Phalla: Some people just consider us as easy-going or low-hanging fruit. Every time I hear someone call me this, I always ask them what’s wrong with being a female worker. We are better than some people who have nothing to do but sit along the street and say something bad about us.

The above reactions show female workers are sensitive to the term ‘garment girl’ and its connotations, and feel discriminated against when they are labelled as such. It is evident this term has been used not just to represent the occupation of female factory worker, but is rather a gendered stereotype that posits those workers as gullible, rural women from destitute families with poor education, who are easily deceived.

While the social stigma of factory work remains in place, I noted some changes in the participants’ self-perceptions of being called ‘garment girls’ between the first and second rounds of interviews. The stereotype was appraised critically by those judged by it, and some of the participants reflected a more considered understanding of their own value when reflecting on the term and its connotations. In the second round of interviews, I observed that the perceptions of the participants have changed: these women had stopped feeling bad about being called “garment girls.” Firstly, they cared less about the stereotype associated with the term; secondly, perhaps because of a growing number of women working the factories, the stigma associated with this work was reducing:

Bopha: I am accustomed to it now. It is a waste of time to argue back, so I just let the situation cure itself.

Sarem: I think now people are tired of calling us that and have stopped caring. I never hear anyone call us that using that tone anymore. If they want to refer to a group of us, they just say it in a normal way and not in a sceptical way.
Phalla: I don’t care much about those words now. As a matter of fact, now more and more women are engaging in factory work, so it is just one type of occupation now, and nothing else.

One participant provided an interesting perspective on how views of female workers differ based on occupation, perhaps showing some of her own judgement:

Kalyan: I think now female workers are just referred to as having jobs that are low-income. It is still true that the term ‘garment girls’ refers to poor peasant girls who have migrated from the provinces to the city, but people have started to realise there are ‘good’ women and ‘bad’ women. The ‘bad’ women are those who work at the factory but also work in karaoke bars and clubs which are part of the sex work industry, or who have become mistresses of men.

The participants’ changed responses suggest the self-perceived stigma associated with the term ‘garment girl’ is short-lived. Arguably, the stigmatisation is not solely caused by the way townspeople view female workers, but how the female workers accept or do not accept the branded image of themselves Anspach (1979). After working and living in the city for a period of time, a sense of self-worth was restored and accumulated, and participants started to feel proud of their work. As seen in the above responses, there have been recent changes in how people view female factory workers, while female workers themselves are now confident to defend their own image as a facet of that self-worth.

While the women’s self-perceptions changed, traditional forms of social stratification between people of urban or rural origins living in the city still played a role in determining that level of self-perception. This was revealed when women were asked about their contacts with friends and acquaintances, and their own perceptions of whether they could build relationships with townspeople. Participants shared the view that there is a clear social stratification between themselves as factory workers from rural areas and townspeople, even though they live in the same areas. Only two participants in my study said they had a friend who was a town girl or town dweller. Most people with whom the other participants interacted were from the provinces
and/or lived in the same compounds. It was evident that participants generally only interacted with people of a similar background:

Bopha: I don’t have any friends who are townspeople. All of my friends are from provinces, and we live in the same compound. I don’t think townspeople would befriend us. They are different from me in the way they talk and dress. They are well-off. We are all living in one city, but we are also living in two different worlds in terms of standards of living, styles of living and ways of interacting with one another.

Another two participants responded similarly:

Kalyan: I don’t have any friends who are townspeople. You are the first townspeople I have talked a long while with. Townspeople look modern and I dare not talk to them. We are just different.

Romdol: No, I don’t have city friends. Townspeople are very modern, and they can earn a lot of money. It is hard for me to befriend them, and I don't think they want to interact with female factory workers like me. Sometimes I will go to club, but it is only a cheap club, one where only people from provinces and female workers go.

Figure 1: A residential area where female workers live in the city (Location: Khan Meancheay)

Figure 2: Comparative conditions of living standards for city people (background) and female rural-urban-migrants (foreground) (Location: Khan Russei Kao)

Source: Author's fieldwork in Cambodia, 2016.
The social stratification described does not just relate to attitudes and interpersonal discrimination, but also a material difference in living standards. The above photographs in Figure 1 and Figure 2 depict the different living standards of female factory workers and townspeople. As Figure 2 demonstrates, middle class townspeople live in flats (background) made from adequate building materials, while thousands of female factory workers live in ad-hoc housing (foreground). The two groups may live in the same compound, but the living standards experienced by each are completely different. Female factory workers also live in the sort of housing shown in Figure 1. These places are basic wooden structures that are often unhygienic, do not have adequate sanitation or waste disposal, and flood during rainy season, causing health problems and stress, and warranting safety concerns.

The lifestyles female factory workers experience in the city also put them in a marginalised position compared to people from the city. Female workers’ perceptions of these differences or deviances contribute to a limitation of their autonomy. Freedoms such as wearing revealing clothes, being decisive, having boyfriends, and enjoying the nightlife – freedoms enjoyed by townspeople, mainly women – is not socially accepted in their original communities and considered as ‘going wild or being overjoyed’. Trying to imitate or behave like townspeople is discredited and devalued in rural Cambodia. In one participant’s words:

Savin: The city is full of colourful lights, whereas at home I only saw the nature surrounding my house. There are many women who wear sexy clothes in the city. Some female workers try to imitate the lifestyles of town women by wearing revealing clothes and thick make-up, being decisive and not listening to their parents, and acting arrogantly towards other people in the village. They may think they are cool for acting that way, while people in the village gossip about them. I think those women forget who they are and where they are from.

This participant appears to believe townspeople have different styles of living to rural people, and potentially suggests that while it can be good to look cool, be confident and have a sense of self-worth, it is still important to be accepted by people in their rural communities. Another participant suggests it is important for female workers to
remember where they are from and what they valued at home because they define who they are:

Vanny: Townspeople are arrogant. Some female workers from my village who moved to work in the factories before me have become arrogant towards me and other people in the community. They have changed so much, and they try to imitate the lifestyles of town women. They don’t want to do any farming anymore to protect their fair skin and their beauty. I think it’s ridiculous they behave like that, and I don’t know why they want to be like townspeople when we are not.

The above response has projected the values of country and city life, class, appearance as interconnected with values of work and beauty. Here, relevant to Butler’s discussion of gender roles, as described in Chapter 3, the markers for the performance or reiteration of gender identity occurs through cultural norms and codes. However, the respondent Sayin (above) reflects that there is some level of choice for some women; some can be influenced, while others choose to keep their original codes and norms. For some female workers, the alienation of garment workers in the city means their hometowns remain spaces for renewal and reconnection. A number of female participants said they feel fresh whenever they visit their hometown, noting that the city is only good for generating income and nothing else. Indeed, in acknowledging their living conditions in the city, many factory workers in my study said they planned to return to their hometowns. One interviewee summarises this perspective:

Tei: I don’t like living here in the city. The environment is much better in my province, I can get fresh air and some space. In my hometown, I could ask for some fruits or vegetables from my neighbours and I could grow food in my own garden; but here I have to buy everything. Food quality in the city is very low, everything is full of chemical substances. Some townspeople are not as trustworthy, as I experienced with my house owner that I used to work for. He used to unlock my room when I was sleeping. Luckily, I woke up and caught him – he left quickly. When I can I will go back to my hometown and open my small business. If it doesn’t work well, I would use my saving to buy land and doing farming rather than living in the city.
Choun: Although my living area and people in the city are fine, I also wish to go back home. I feel happy and fresh every time I visit home. For food...[in the city]...it is not good at all. I am frequently sick. And I always eat food in the factory since my house is far from the factory and I am so busy in the morning, which makes me unable to cook food by myself. And after having lunch, I usually eat sour fruits like mango, guava, etc. which often make me get stomachache. I will go back home when I get more savings. My parents have left me a spot of land, I will do farming.

As mentioned earlier, women’s self-image appears to depend partly on how they are viewed by those who surround them. When terms like ‘female factory workers’ and ‘garment girls’ are used disparagingly, they limit the women’s sense of autonomy. The participants in this study seem to acknowledge their positions living in a city that is at once one place and simultaneously two different worlds comprised of a distinction between factory workers and city people. In this context, it is apparent that the participants do not want to imitate city lifestyles as this would mean being arrogant and impudent, rather than independent. Here, independence does not mean a future life in the city. Rather it means the capacity to return to the rural setting, embracing the life and values offered in this setting. The meaning of the returning ‘back home’ is not merely about location: the research participants instead refer to a set of values that they hold to regardless of where they are.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that gaining access to economic resources contributes to Khmer women’s autonomy at individual, household and community levels. The results of this study show female factory workers, by migrating to work in city, receive at least three main advantages: 1) attaining power to generate income and support their families through remittances; 2) becoming accustomed to processes of making their own decisions; and 3) to a certain extent, helping to change the social stigma around ‘garment girls’.
The advantages above have given female workers the power to silently break away from a number of traditional social and cultural norms that advise women not to wander far from home, to play subservient roles to men, to endure pain, both emotional and physical, to obey their parents, and to avoid challenging or confronting men and senior people. This has changed how women view their own lives and their participation in households and their communities of origin, as well as the views of others within those households and communities. These changes have increased women’s autonomy in making decisions at individual, household and community levels.

The above capabilities need to be balanced with other conversion factors for greater autonomy to be realised. In the absence of government social protection schemes, women at certain points of their lives (e.g., during sickness, while bearing and rearing children, in family conflicts such as with husbands and in-laws) need strong support from their families, which means women must follow traditional social and cultural norms to some extent to maintain connections with parents and families. This was clearly seen in this chapter in relation to choosing one’s spouse, and area where women valued parental input. Exercising complete autonomy over their choice of partner risks the withdrawal of family support, such as a mother’s help with childcare, especially because it is difficult for factory workers to work and care for children simultaneously. As such, culture and tradition have been used as safeguards to sustain women’s income-generation capacity while offering a source of support during times of crisis. This balancing, which I have called in Chapter 6 ‘dependence for independence’ suggests that to attain the power to generate income and to be supported, women need to follow some traditional norms, including making allowance for parental involvement in some important decisions.

The ways townspeople view female factory workers limit the latter’s scope for autonomy by making them feel like they should not behave like town women if they wish to be accepted in their place of origin. Female factory workers themselves seem to acknowledge this concern, and some appear to have little desire to behave like town women or attain the same level of autonomy. In this regard, female migrant workers seem to follow the Khmer proverb: “Do not try to defecate like an elephant when you are just an ant”. This situation is also an example of how traditional norms can play a
role in preventing rural women from ‘going wild or being overjoyed.’ These admittedly patriarchal norms aim at protecting women’s well-being and are legible within a Khmer context given that Cambodians still value collectivism over individualism. This means, in conformity with the communitarian approaches mentioned in Chapter 3, the definition of a good life an individual has reason to value hangs on how that individual has been viewed by others within their community, and this value must be shared with other people within that community. However, this study shows a positive trend whereby the sense of self-worth women experienced by working and living in the city helps them ignore stigmatisation as naïve peasantry inferior to townspeople.

In summary, Khmer women’s engagement in paid employment in the low-waged garment sector appears to offer them the capability to make a number of decisions that benefit their well-being and quality of life. In terms of capabilities, female factory workers have experienced unprecedented opportunities to make their own decisions about personal mobility, resources and important household responsibilities such as family finances. In terms of achieved functionings, the characteristics of factory work that require women to work eight to 10 hours a day have reshaped labour division within households, whereby female workers increasingly negotiate with their spouses regarding shared responsibility for household chores. This may seem a trivial change, but as this study shows, this may in fact represent a substantial shift in the gendered division of labour in Cambodia.

Another emerging capability identified in this study is zero tolerance towards domestic violence. The study participants were intolerant of abusive partners, and chose to leave them in recognition that life would be better without them, challenging the norm that women rely on and defer to men.

Finally, another capability identified relates to personal choices about romantic relationships. Marriage decisions previously made solely by parents have shifted, with the participants taking more responsibility for their partner choices, though they still collaborated with their parents and required their approval. This may look like women’s autonomy is being limited; but parental approval is important to women maintaining family support in a context where limited support is provided by the state.
In this sense, marriage becomes a decision taken to swap dependence for independence.

This empirical study aims to examine the implications of women’s access to paid employment on those women’s autonomy at individuals, household, community and workplace levels. This chapter and Chapters 5 and 6 suggest that economic transition associated with the emergence of the garment sector have made dramatic changes in women’s lives. This shifts in how lives are lived and how women make decision started before those women entered paid employment. As explained in the Chapter 5 of this study, the emergence of garment factories has played a role as an instrument that allows women to take the unprecedented step towards making their own decision to migrate and work in city in which, challenging and contesting cultural and gendered norms. This first step provides an important precedent as it leads to substantive changes that lie ahead for these women’s future flourishing. Chapter 6 discusses how these women have been exploited within workplaces. However, these exploitations are considered a bridge that allows those women to gain independence, including financial independence, experience living independently, and resources and opportunities that the city would offer such as training. Importantly, as discussed in this chapter, paid employment has provided a pathway to change in the personal lives of these women, substantially disrupting traditional norms. Paid work has given these women unprecedented power over many important decisions, including decision making capacity in choosing partner; negotiation over the household division of labour with their husbands, and improved capacity to respond to partner abuse and domestic violence.
Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study offers four main findings that shed light on the implications of paid employment for women’s autonomy in Cambodia. The first three findings reflect my use of the capability approach as a framework. They suggest that economic structural change has impacted social and cultural norms around gender roles. The findings also show that while garment work has minimal direct benefits for the flourishing of those women, it is indirectly transformative for women’s ability to gain new opportunities and empowerment in their personal lives. The fourth finding is methodological: an observation of the unexpected value of using a longitudinal approach in a specific cultural context. In order to explain these findings, this chapter has three main sections. The first consolidates the three main empirical findings of the study; the second elaborates upon the usefulness of the longitudinal approach; and the third section proposes specific topics for further research.

8.2 Structural transformation of the economy and gender norms

Capitalism and structural economic change have the capacity to radically shift traditions and societies. Many theorists have observed how, as capitalism has developed, original forms of patriarchal society have undergone structural changes (Dharmalingam & Philip Morgan, 1996; Engels & Morgan, 1978; Kabeer, 2012; Klugman, Hanmer, & Twigg, 2014). We see this reflected in contemporary analyses of the social position of women and their relationship to structural change. Relevant to this study, Kabeer (2000) claims the emergence of garment factory work has changed social and cultural norms, allowing women in Bangladesh to renegotiate those norms, improve their status and gain power within their households. This study further showed that the women needed to work because if they were to follow cultural norms, they would remain in poverty (Kabeer, 2000).

This study shows similar transformations in the lives of Khmer women have accompanied economic structural transformations in Cambodia. Traditionally, Khmer women are expected to behave in certain ways; for instance, they should be passively obedient and submissive to their parents, male siblings, seniors, and husbands. Khmer
women also need to conform to a number of cultural and traditional norms, which include advice from the didactic code for women, the *Chbab Srey*, and other beliefs that have been accepted and practiced within Khmer society over the generations. While these rules are not explicitly codified, women in Cambodia internalise those social norms, and are concerned about the repercussions of behaving against them, whereby members of society may gossip about and criticise them, or that they are excluded from their families and communities. Some may even face violence, in more extreme cases. To an extent, gender norms in Cambodia reflect the model of gender performativity described by Butler (2011):

"Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender (p. 45)."

Gender norms are routinely reinscribed through repeated acts, and secured through exclusion and violence, but do not necessarily rely on a codified law. Indeed, Butler (2011) emphasised that gender is performative based on cultural interpretations of sex; here, sex differentiation is produced through natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and scientific discourses which purport to distinguish sexed bodies as men or women. Norms and discourses produce different gender roles in society, and those social and cultural norms are sometimes stronger than codified laws.

Existing literature, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, often describes gender and cultural norms as barriers for women in realizing their potential, and oppressive in so far as they maintain women in a position of inferiority to men. However, this study shows that gender and cultural norms are both constraining and enabling within particular contexts (see Chapter 7). The norms operate, for better or worse, in a positive sense to protect women from falling into a long-life jeopardy. This is far from an ideal situation; since this protection requires women to accept constraints. Women choose to comply because failure to comply means social isolation. Thus, compliance is enabling, but
happens within the context of patriarchal control. The existence of social and cultural norms that affect Khmer women is complicated by the simultaneous role of these norms as a form of protection. This study found women’s autonomy in Cambodia is not only measurable in terms of women’s capability or freedom to choose, but can instead be viewed as operating in balance with responsibility and compliance. Wolff (1970) defines individual autonomy not just as a form of freedom, but in terms of its alignment with the responsibilities individuals must undertake as a result of their decisions. We certainly see this in operation in the case of women’s autonomy in Cambodia. As noted in Chapter 7, young Khmer women often allow their mothers to make decisions on their behalf as this operates as an act of social approval that guarantees social protection from their parents. This in turn provides these women with the capacity to make choices in other aspects of their lives: something I have described as ‘dependence for independence’.

In line with the view that economic transformation has the capacity to shift traditions and cultures, my study suggests that existing, often archaic social norms shift after women move to the city to undertake factory work. One example of this is the decision to migrate itself, which the participants often made independently, without their parents’ influence. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 5, some participants even ignored their parents’ opposition to their choice to migrate. In both of these situations, the traditional social norms advising women not to wander far from home have been transgressed. This choice was not available to women in Cambodia in previous generations, and is a fairly new phenomenon.

A number of studies have provided plausible evidences that say women’s economic improvement such as entering into workforce is an instrumental tool to achieve gender equality and women’s autonomy over decision-making (see Chapter 3). Key scholars who work extensively on the issues of women’s economic empowerment such as Anderson and Eswaran (2009), Kabeer (2012), and Golla et al. (2011) have acknowledged that women’s economic empowerment has contributedo much to economic growth, upholding women’s autonomy and increasing investment in children’s education and health. Further to these studies, this study found that women’s economic improvement is also considered as an external force that pulls women out of the proverbial box of culture and allows them to contest cultural norms (see Chapter
There were two reasons why women’s migration to work has challenged existing social and cultural norms. It is interesting to note that the women may not have directly intended to contest those norms, and that this was rather an outcome of circumstance, often relating to the impoverishment of their families. In this respect, the patriarchal ideology that restricts and prevents women from leaving their families has been challenged by the need for women to mitigate the consequences of endemic poverty. Essentially, women’s migration and work can mean the patriarchal stereotype of men as breadwinners and women as domestic caregivers loses its power to control and regulate women’s behaviour and movement. This study indicates that when families fall into poverty due to debt and deprivation, the traditional roles of men and women are shifted. As described in Chapter 5, male members of families frequently expressed their dissatisfaction with women’s decisions to migrate to the city. However, these men were not in any position to stop them due to the reality of their families’ financial situation. This phenomenon seems to suggest husbands or fathers lose their ability to influence their wives’ or daughters’ decision making when they alone do not earn enough to support their families. As such, poverty creates an opportunity for the reshaping of established gender norms.

It is important to note that as much as women’s work challenges norms by changing women’s status and roles within their families, it also reinforces other norms, albeit from a different perspective that at least at some level contributes to autonomy. This occurs because women who migrate to the city often send remittances home, meaning they are still acting as dutiful daughters, as per the social and cultural norms that influence their behaviour. Poverty places pressure on rural households, and the emergence of garment work in the city can offer the means to inform household strategies to address this poverty. The decision to work allows women to fulfil a duty to help their families. It is telling that almost all participants described their willingness to help their families as the core reason for migrating to work. Their responses showed that although women’s migration may go against norms for their behaviour, that in fact it provides the means to be more dutiful than ever.

In Chapter 6 and 7, I described the social stigma associated with women’s work in factories and being rural women in the city. Existing literature shows that social stigma normally happens with rural-urban migrants which leads to depression, anxiety,
hostility and social isolation (see Chapter 7). This study also found female rural-urban migrants who are working in garment factories and being called ‘garment girl’ holds another social stigma as the result of cultural norms. The study shows that the perceptions of parents and society around women’s work have evolved over time, reshaping how women who work in garment factories are viewed. The participants in my study confirmed that contemporary movements to the city are different from the first and second waves of female rural-urban migrating that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s: a time when there was antagonism towards women who worked as garment workers. Parents of those workers received substantial criticism from community members because of the perception that garment work was not much better than working in beer gardens or night clubs, two occupations not considered respectable. However, as increasing numbers of women have migrated to work in the city – and sent a considerable amount of remittance home – social norms appear to have shifted, and more people have accepted factory work as a respectable pathway. Such changes have encouraged women to exercise their autonomy in choosing to migrate to work with less concern about being criticised by members of their families or communities. As such, for better or worse, labour migration has become a justification and/or excuse for young women to leave education. As I have discussed in Chapter 5, some research participants dropped out school to seek and immediate income rather than investing their time in education. Failure to complete primary or secondary education may not be a good option for their future career development of these women. Arguably, it is also at odds with Cambodian economic development in a long run.

It is evident traditional social norms, many of which appear permanent in nature, passed down from generation to generation, can be challenged or re-interpreted quickly through economic transformation. In Cambodia, structural transformation through economic change led to the emergence of factory work in the city, which then offered women the potential to upset the norms that traditionally confined them. This does not mean the work is always liberating. As I shall discuss below, factory work is exploitative and dangerous, and robs women of their control and autonomy in different ways. However, as I shall also discuss, there is scope to analyse this work for nuances that can allow us to understand the opportunities offered by factory work. The garment industry can offer young women from rural Cambodia an experience of autonomy and
agency; but this occurs outside the factory and in their personal lives. In this respect, transformation driven by global neoliberal economic restructuring has created an unprecedented shift in gender norms.

8.3 Opportunities for autonomy in the workplace

As discussed in Chapter 6, the interviews demonstrated that undertaking factory work does not directly improve women’s autonomy in the workplace. A number of studies articulate how women in export-oriented industries like garment factories are exploited (Akhter, Rutherford, & Chu, 2017; Alam & Blanch, 2011; Brown, 2017; CARE, 2016; De Silva, Lipscomb, & Ostbye, 2011; Ear, 2013b; Nishigaya, 2002; Perera-Desilva, 2015; Puri & Cleland, 2007; Ross & American Council of Learned Societies, 1997; Warren & Robertson, 2011; Wolf, 1992). In the case of Cambodia, the government’s main priority has been to attract more investors to sustain economic growth rather than to maintain workers’ rights and hold factory owners accountable to laws and regulations. As a result, while female workers play the central production role for some of the most profitable export-oriented companies, they work for very low wages and long hours under difficult conditions. This limits women’s direct opportunities to experience autonomy as workers. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, cultural norms that advise Khmer women to be passive and not to question authority most likely exacerbate this exploitation.

This study shows that while women certainly suffer labour exploitation, there are nonetheless opportunities for them to find autonomy and experience control and flourishing. However, this may only be the case for some women. For example, the study showed that only some women appeared to have the ability to stand up for their rights by exercising their control over their work situation. Fighting back only appears available to those with the ability to read and interpret policy and rules, to approach local authorities, or those who at least have a future plan to support themselves such as through land ownership, the establishment of small businesses or by undertaking study or training in new areas. Such skills and assets constitute the means for women to achieve autonomy, provided there are resources available other than those directly offered through factory work. In some cases, resources such experience and skills can offer women security. It is evident from the experiences of the participants in this study
that while the supply of labour outweighs demand, factories prefer to keep experienced workers to ensure high productivity. In these cases, factories will treat higher-skilled workers better than they do lower-skilled workers to retain them and avoid having to train new employees. These cases suggest that when women have more resources and opportunities available to them, they can experience greater autonomy and bargaining power against the oppression imposed by factory team leaders, supervisors and owners.

8.4 Implications of factory work on women’s autonomy at individual, household and community levels

In Chapter 2, this study had discussed labour relations in Cambodia, and the context where government tends to treat workers as commodity to serve political power, attract foreign investors through low wages and loose enforcement laws and relevant regulations. Within the terrain of these structural factors, there is limited scope for women to improve their access to choices and autonomy through garment work itself. Nevertheless, despite these problems, this study has found paid employment contributes to women’s autonomy at individual, household and community levels. When city-based work provides women with a greater sense of self-worth, and increased opportunities to better their conditions, they have been able to challenge if not completely change how they engage with traditional social and cultural norms, and to enhance their ability to make important decisions both at individual and household levels.

The study showed participants experienced changes in their autonomy in four distinct areas: firstly, it affected their capacity to choose partners; secondly, it transformed patterns of household labour distribution; thirdly, it changed attitudes towards domestic violence; and finally, it altered the perceptions of garment workers held by both communities and the women themselves.

In terms of choosing partners, while women are still expected to seek parental approval for marital arrangements, my study suggests female workers have increasingly become the main decision makers in relation to partner choice. Parents have also shifted their roles in marital arrangements, moving away from a more active match-making role to instead symbolically authorising their daughters’ decisions. This symbolic approval
from parents, when supported by traditional wedding ceremonies, allows women to prove they have conformed to certain social norms even as they have exercised their own autonomy in choice of partner. This in turn provides women with necessary social acceptance within their families and communities. Such acceptance serves as a source of legitimacy and support for women when they are confronted with domestic challenges and require family support, including conflicts with their spouses.

Chapter 3 explores scholarly literature which highlights that women’s economic empowerment has been acknowledged not only as an instrumental tool for economic growth as a whole but also for upholding women’s autonomy both at individuals and broader level (see for example, Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Kabeer, 2012). Further, engaging in the workforce was found to provide women the opportunity to contest the cultural norms that believes home is women’s place. This study confirms this scholarly work, but also notices some intriguing results in the context of Cambodia. As discussed in Chapter 7, for the women interviewed in this study, working full-time has implications for gender labour division within households. Working for eight to 10 hours per day, married female workers have no choice but ask their partners to share some of the household chores in order to keep their daily routine. Here, women challenge social norms by asking for a change in traditional relations. That their husbands have agreed to such changes, and show an understanding of the difficulties their wives face juggling work and domestic duties, tells us something about shifting gender roles in the home. In Cambodia, where women traditionally do not have a voice or the capacity to challenge their husbands’ authority, the willingness of husbands to help suggests a significant generational change in gender roles. Although it holds true that the participants still took care of a larger proportion of domestic tasks – as has been seen in similar studies about women working a “double shift” (Leung, 2016) – paid employment appears to have altered perceptions of these traditional responsibilities.

This study suggests that the capability to earn income gives women a sense of self-worth, which leads to a change in how women might respond to domestic violence and the Chhab Srey. At least some of the women in this study broke their silence about domestic violence and challenged their oppressors, which could be the result of the increased autonomy experienced through work. Silence is the result of social norms,
whereby women are encouraged to not speak out against violence, and gender roles shield and protect perpetrators (Romito, 2008). This study suggests contemporary Khmer women have become more courageous in reporting physical violence to local authorities, and, if unavoidable, leave abusive partners as a result50.

As discussed in Chapter 2, existing literature suggests that Chhab Srey still has a strong influence on how Khmer women behave, whether consciously or unconsciously (see for example Brickell, 2007). This study found that, after having opportunity to work and live in the city, women appear to contest the norms contained within the code. Certainly, the young and single female workers I interviewed show a strong objection toward the code. For example one of my participants, Sarem, says that “only older people still refer to the code, whilst the situation is changed now people care more about how to earn and fill our stomachs and the behaviour recommended by the code is not compatible with the working environment in the factory”. Resistance to the code was certainly not universal amongst my interviewees. Instead, it appeared to be shaped by marital status and age; in my study, female workers with spouses and children seemed to give more value to the code and other relevant traditional practices.

This study had too small a sample to provide a generalisable answer as to why partner status should dictate observance of the code. But we could speculate. In the context of Cambodia, women with children need more support, particularly in a context where the government doesn’t provide social protection to women with children. The first source of financial and other material support would be from the husbands. However extended families also play a role, not only in childcare but as mediators to reconcile the conflicts between husbands and wives. Therefore, to some extent, a marriage which is validated by the family, as strongly recommended by the code, becomes, for better or worse, a shield to protect women. Again, this conforms with the thesis I have put forward that the women interviewed in my study made use of a mode of autonomy which I have called “dependence for independence.”

50 In terms of women’s changing attitudes towards and tolerance of domestic violence, this study recommends taking a closer look at the real reason the number of domestic violence cases have increased over the past few years. It is possible this increase is connected to women becoming more confident about reporting domestic violence; this is a topic that warrants further investigation.
This does not mean that married life protects women from violence or abuse, or that socially sanctioned marriage ensures social protection if the marriage fails. But having paid work tangibly improved the ability of the women I interviewed to resist traditional gender norms. It is here we see how paid work and autonomy can provide an alternative form of protection to women. In this context, having economic power, even in a low-wage sector, provides some capacity to women to make a decision to leave abused partners. To the extent working women choose to leave husbands, against prevailing traditional norms, shows the way in which paid work provides a mechanism to invalidate the code and other traditional practices A sense of self-worth derived from an increased capacity to earn has changed how female workers view themselves, as well as how others view them. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Khmer women have been compared to ‘fermented fish’, meaning they are perceived as long-term financial liabilities for their families. Engaging in garment work has fundamentally changed this perception, because daughters have become the main generators of income for their families, which has raised their status in their families. As I have noted above, this shift could be seen as the result of changing gender norms; but the same phenomena may also be interpreted as intensifying existing norms that stress daughters must serve their families. Participants were proud of sending a large proportion of their wages home in the form of remittances than their male siblings. As dutiful daughters, women keep only enough of their income to afford their rent and food, while their male siblings tend to send home a small proportion of their earnings, instead spending more money on partying with friends and girlfriends. The participants viewed their employment as a means to repay their parents’ debts, showing an enduring connection between daughters and domestic responsibilities.

The interviews showed there is a profound social stigma connected to Khmer women’s rural-urban migration. Participants described feeling alienated by city people, and explained they faced difficulties in making friends with or finding acceptance among them. This stigma related both to city people’s perceptions of them as naïve peasants, and their work as somehow inferior to other forms of employment. However, the situation appears to be changing. One aspect of this change appears to relate to the women’s self-perceptions: while they may once have felt defeated by the discrimination they experienced, the participants’ responses showed they no longer necessarily accepted how city people treated or viewed them. Interestingly, there were
apparent shifts in these perceptions between the first and second round interviews, perhaps showing how quickly the stigma is changing. As Anspach (1979) explains, in some respects, social stigma holds firm when vulnerable groups accept the discrimination imposed on them by others. The empirical evidence from this study confirms this theory, as the interviews showed participants did not necessarily accept their treatment by city people, but had their own rather strongly held perceptions of themselves and their work that were quite positive. As discussed in Chapter 7, female workers who have experienced living in the city long changed their attitude towards the apparent stigma of being regarded as ‘garment girls’; these women moved from being upset at being denigrated (in the first round of interviews) to being confident and willing to defend themselves (as appeared to be the case in the second round of interviews). These sorts of changes in perceptions are critical steps towards fighting social stigma, which might assist in changing social norms around how female factory workers are viewed in Cambodia.

I note the capabilities approach proved useful in helping this study untangle the phenomena examined. This research is the first Cambodian study that employs the ‘capability approach’ framework to assess and evaluate the relationship between paid employment and women’s autonomy. I found that the ‘capability approach’ was beneficial for two reasons. It is a causal mechanism framework to answer the questions of ‘how and why people choose to do what they are doing in a specific context’ rather than to just evaluate individuals’ capability of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value. In the case of women in Cambodia, this framework allowed me to take account of a range of relevant factors that shape autonomy for women and their work workers, and understand why female workers’ participants in this study choose to, or choose not to, exercise their capabilities. The approach has allowed me to understand problems which are, on the face of it, complex to untangle. For example, we might wonder why it is that though the women I interviewed have much apparent freedom, including the freedom to choose their own marriage partners, that they would still defer to their parents on this and other decisions. The answer, and one we can only arrive at through understanding capabilities and autonomy, is that strategic deferral to parents is, within this cultural context, enabling of relative autonomy for these women, allowing for the achievement of flourishing. It happens so because their parents’ approval is protection for these women; for example, if their
relationships with their partners have problems, parental support will allow them to sustain their earning power. To understand this phenomenon, social norms need to be understood in context with capabilities and freedom. As Robeyns explains, capabilities is about context and subjective decision, and there are no universal principles (Robeyns, 2005). This study has shown the importance of the capabilities approach, in so far as universal principles of autonomy are less useful than a nuanced understanding of autonomy in context.

A longitudinal qualitative cohort study approach proved to be an applicable and useful method to collect realisable data about the lives and experiences of female workers in Cambodia over a year-long period. Longitudinal research is a compelling and powerful form of social research because it allows us to understand social change, its causes, how change is created and the consequences of change (Kuper, Reeves, & Levinson, 2008; Neale, 2011; Schramm, 1971). As Neale (2011) explains, we might be aware of transitions in people’s lives and circumstances, but to understand how such transitions occur, we need research that measures such phenomena over time.

As well as tracking such transitions, this study demonstrates how following a cohort over time helps eliminate errors associated with “one off” survey methods. Through the course of the research, it became evident that qualitative data collected in the Cambodian context regarding the experiences of a marginalised group of women can be only generated through trust. The findings of this study indicated issues of trust affected almost half of the data collected in the first round of interviews. The Chhab Srey advises women not to interact with strangers; further, a Khmer proverb advises that sharing personal information or perceptions with strangers is “like opening your chest for a crow”, meaning strangers could use such information to cause harm. These social norms may have impacted the first round of data collection. This was evident in the nature of the answers between the rounds, which changed dramatically during the second round of interviews, one year later. It was hoped that conducting the interviews in Khmer, as a Cambodian national, would mean participants would be more comfortable with me than a researcher unfamiliar with Khmer or of a different cultural background. However, there was a high rate of error or inaccuracy in the first round of interviews, evident because participants changed or amended their answers in the second round as they gained a stronger affinity with the researcher. As trust between
participant and researcher developed, the richness and reliability of the data was also enhanced. From this experience, I learned that, despite also being a Khmer woman, I was still a stranger to the participants, and that as such, based on cultural norms, they were discouraged from sharing their personal stories. This showed me how invaluable a longitudinal approach can be, as it allows for trust to build over time, therefore giving the researcher access to data that may not have been accessible in the initial stages of research.

8.5 Limitation of the Research

While this research offered new insights into the relationship between economic transformation and its implications on women’s perception towards autonomy, there are always some limitations. Below are the identifiable areas of the weakness.

The first and probably the biggest limitation came from the relatively small sample size (40 female participants out of potential population of approximately 600,000). This means that although the study has produced in depth accounts of the lives of women in the garment industry in Cambodia, the results cannot be generalised to account for all the experiences of the over half a million women employed in this sector. Gaining such results would be possible with a large-scale population study or a large-scale questionnaire; however, this data would come at the cost of the depth generated by the present study.

Secondly, this research focuses mainly on the existing literature and in-depth interviews. This focus was deemed necessary due to the lack of published research on the cohort, particularly in the form of in-depth studies of experiences. However, the orientation of the research means that the study does not focus on the experiences of men, and thus perhaps fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of all the actors.

51 In undertaking this study, I learned that successfully applying the chosen data collection method depended not only on having a strong understanding of the participants’ backgrounds and experiences, but a good command of the local language and culture, and a certain level of informed judgement. In addition, there were advantages to my gender identification as a woman in gaining the participants’ trust. These factors played crucial roles in breaking through strict social and cultural norms and building a rapport with the participants.
within the field which the female garment workers interviewed occupy. Thus, there is scope in an expanded study to include other relevant actors such as representatives from the factories, spouses and male members of the families. If time and resources had allowed, the perspective from those actors would provide a more comprehensive analysis to understand additional factors that shape women’s perception towards autonomy at workplace and at household level.

A final limitation is this study is the constrained application of the longitudinal elements within the study, namely the two phases of interviews, paced one year apart from each other. Thus, due to time and resource constraints, this study can only trace change over a year. This meant the study could not observe significant changes in trajectories as might be possible over, for example, a five-year study. However, as discussed above, even the short two phases approach to interviews was beneficial in building rapport with the participants and yielding stronger data than through a single one-off interview.

8.6 Building on this research

As discussed above, this study had natural limitations. However, the study will hopefully inform future work in this area, Social research can play an invaluable role as a way to affect an in-depth analysis of a topic or issue. This section offers some suggests for further research. My hope is that this study will contribute and lead to further research. At least one possibility is to expand the current study to a larger cohort over a longer period. This would help to gain maximum benefits from the longitudinal approach employed. As my study derived its findings from a modest number of participants, a larger, ongoing study would be very promising in understanding changes in Khmer women’s lives as a result of opportunities gained through paid employment. A study of this nature could build trust with Khmer women over time, and yield valuable information that could not be gained by using one-off surveys. Such a study could track changing gender roles in households, and women’s experiences of violence. It could also explore the impact of structural factors such as economic downturns and unemployment. When Cambodian workers experienced economic retrenchment during the global financial crisis, many women lost their jobs; however, several studies have shown that almost of half of these female workers chose not to go
back home, but to keep searching for other jobs in other sectors besides factory work, including working as “beer girls”, KTV (Karaoke TV) hostesses and even in sex work (Derks, 2008; Hoefinger, 2013; Sothat, 2010). Tracing these changes using a longitudinal cohort study over an extended period on changing patterns of employment could obtain interesting and important data about women’s perceptions of their self-worth, opportunities and autonomy, and could lead to clearer understandings about how female workers’ lives, social and cultural norms and gender roles are affected and influenced by economic change. This research can also inform studies that look at the challenges that hinder female workers gaining access to support mechanisms, stronger recognition in governmental policies, and increased responsiveness from organisations such CARE, ILO, and UN women.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews with single female workers

1. Please tell me briefly about yourself:
   a. Age: ……………………
   b. Marital status:………………
   c. Where are you from?
   d. What is your level of education?
   e. Why did you drop out school at that time?
   f. What did you do when you were home?

2. Could you please describe your migratory journey, and how you got the job?
   a. When did you migrate here?
   b. Did you inform your local authority about your migration?
   c. What were the push factors that influenced your decision to migrate?
   d. Were your family members happy about your decision to migrate?
   e. What were your family members doing for a living?
   f. Did you come to the city alone or did someone accompany you? If so, who, and what is their relationship with you?
   g. What were the main challenges involved in migrating here?
   h. How did you get the job here?
   i. When did you start working? Is it your first workplace? If no, where did you work before this, and why did you change your workplace?
   j. Thinking about how much you earn, do you think it is enough to survive on? Do you have any savings?
   k. If you are happy to share, could you tell me what your salary is, and how you manage that salary?

3. Could you please share some information about your living situation in your hometown?
   a. Who were you living with?
   b. Did you have any relatives living nearby?
   c. Who was the head of the family?
   d. What were the relationships like between your family and your neighbors, and other people in the community?
   e. What were the safety and security issues within your community?
   f. What were the roles and responsibilities of each household and your local authority and how did they maintain the safety and security of the community?
   g. What have been your typical roles as a daughter in your family?
      Probe: What do you know about the code of conduct for women?
      Probe: Has the code been applied in your family? If so, how?
      Probe: What do you think about the code of conduct?
      Probe: After living here in the city for a while, do you think the code of conduct could be changed in relation to how women should behave?
**Autonomy**

4. Could you please describe your roles and responsibilities when you were home?
   a. What household chores did you need to do?
   b. What were your responsibilities towards your family members?
   c. How did you manage your time when you were home?
   d. What did you do in your free time?
   e. Were there any activities you were prohibited from doing that you wanted to do? What were those activities? And why were you prohibited from doing them? What were the reactions if you did those activities?
   f. What were your reactions when you were prohibited from doing those activities?
   g. Thinking back to that time, how did you feel about your roles and responsibilities?
   h. After having migrated and worked here for quite a while, how do you feel about those roles and responsibilities?
   i. In your experience, how have your roles and responsibilities changed after working at the garment factory?

5. Thinking about decision making at home/in your hometown, how were decisions made in your family on the issues of:
   - Children’s affairs (education, discipline, health care);
   - Spending money (for the whole family and for your own needs)
   - Saving money
   - Family planning
   - Selling or buying property
   - Migration
   - Marriage
   a. Was there a main decision maker in your family, or were decisions made by more than one person?
   b. What were your shared responsibilities in relation to decisions made on the above issues?
   c. To what extent has your voice been heard and accepted in your family?
   d. What did you do when you felt your voice was not being heard?
   e. How has the situation changed since you entered the workforce?

6. How were decisions made in relation to your individual freedom, including:
   - Mobility (visit friends or relatives, join in community events, go on a trip)
   - Self-development (undertake short training courses or continue your study), both with and without pay
   - Earning income (engaging with the workforce in your local area and outside)
   - Migrating to the city
   - Engaging with the garment factory
a. Have you noticed any changes in relation to the level of your freedom and decision-making since moving to the city?
Safety

Safety at home and experiences of changes

7. What does the term “home” mean to you?

8. Describe the relationship amongst your family members (mother, father and children)

9. What protection, prevention and support did you receive when you were living at home?
   a. For instance, if you had a disagreement or argument with your neighbours, what actions were taken by your family?
   b. If you had a disagreement or argument with your family members, what was the solution to that problem?
   c. Did your household have specific rules and regulations you had to follow? If yes, who set them and what happened if you didn’t follow them?

10. Thinking about your health when you were at home, please describe your physical and emotional health:
    a. How was your physical health when you were home?
    b. What were the main causes of problems with your physical health?
    c. How was your emotional health?
    d. What were the main causes of problems with your emotional health?
    e. How did you cope with those problems?
    f. From whom did you seek help (friends, relatives, local NGOs, local authorities and others...)?
        Probe: What made you think that person or organisation could offer help regarding your problems?
        Probe: If you didn’t seek help, what were the main reasons?
        Probe: How often did your relatives or neighbours intervene when your family had problems?

11. As of now, do you notice any changes in relation to:
    a. Your relationship with your own family and other people in the community
    b. Your voice in the family
    c. Your freedom to make your own decisions
    d. Your approach to cope with unsafe situations

Safety in the city and in the workplace

12. Could you please describe your current living situation in the city?
    a. Have you informed the local authority here about your new residency?
    b. What do you think about the living areas, people and food here in the city?
    c. How is life here different from your hometown?
    d. How long does it take to get from your house to the factory?
e. How do you feel about your safety when traveling back and forth to work or the shops?
f. Do you have more or fewer friends compared to when you were home?
g. What do you do in your free time?
h. What places in the city have or haven’t you been?

13. Could you please briefly describe the conditions in your workplace?
   a. What were the conditions of your employment, as stated in your contract?
      Have all the conditions been applied?
   b. What do you do during your working hours?
   c. Have you felt unfairly treated at work by your bosses or colleagues?
   d. How do you feel about the general safety of your workplace?
   e. What are the factory’s rules and regulations? Are there any specific rules about safety at your workplace that cover sexual harassment?

14. Lately in the news there have been many articles about the poor health of garment workers. How would you describe the health of yourself and your colleagues, both physical and emotional?

   Physical health
   a. How often do you and your colleagues have problems with diarrhea?
   b. Have you and your colleagues ever had typhoid fever?
   c. Are there any incidents involving fainting, or physical accidents in your factory that cause injuries?
   d. What support do you get when faced with the above problems?

   Emotional health
   a. Could you describe the relationships amongst your colleagues and between employers, employees and supervisors?
   b. Have you or your colleagues ever have problem with colleagues, supervisors or other employees?
      - If, yes: What are the main causes of these problems? How do you or your colleagues cope with these problems? Are there any support services available at your factory?
      - If you have problems but you don’t seek support, why? What holds you back?

Life’s impacts

15. What are the positive and negative changes you have experienced as the result of migration and participation in the workforce?
   a. Has your relationship changed with your family members? If yes, can you tell me more about how it has changed?
   b. Because of the demands of their families, some female workers cannot stop working despite facing many challenges. Have you had this experience?
   c. Apart from gaining specific knowledge about the work you do at the factory, have you obtained any additional knowledge (both technical and general) since migrating to live and work in the city?
d. Apart from earning income, what other aspects do you like or not like about life in the city?

16. What will you do if there are no jobs available in the garment sector in the future? Why?

17. What would you recommend to young women who are faced with the dilemma of taking the risk of migrating, or playing it safe and staying at home?
Appendix 2: Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews with female workers with spouses or partners

1. Please tell me briefly about yourself?
   a. Age: ........................
   b. Marital Status:..................
   c. Number of children:............. If you have children, where are they now?
   d. Where are you from?
   e. What is your level of education?
   f. Why did you drop out school at that time?
   g. What did you do when you were home?

2. Could you please describe about your migratory journey and how did you get the job?
   a. When did you migrate here?
   b. Did you inform your local authority about your migration?
   c. What are the pushing factors of your migration?
   d. Was your partner / husband or any other family members happy with your decision of migration here?
   e. What is your partner / husband’s job? And where is he now?
   f. Did you come to the city alone or has someone accompanied you? If yes, who and what is the relationship of that person with you?
   g. What were the main challenges involved in migrating here?
   h. How did you get the job here?
   i. When did you start working? Is it your first workplace? If no, before this where did you work and why did you change your workplace?
   j. Thinking about how much you earn, do you think it is enough to survive and do you have some savings?
   k. If you are happy to share, may I know your salary and how do you manage the salary?

3. Could you please share some information about your living conditions in your hometown?
   a. Who were you living with?
   b. Did you have any relatives living nearby?
   c. Who has been the head of the family?
   d. What was the relationship of your family with your neighbors, and other people in the community?
   e. What were the safety and security issues within your community?
   f. What were the roles and responsibilities of each household and your local authority in order to maintain the safety and security in the community?
   g. What have been the typical roles of being a wife and a husband in your family?
      Probe: To what extent did you know about the code of conduct for women?
      Probe: How has the conduct been applied in your family?
      Probe: What did you think about the code of conduct?
Probe: After being here in the city for a while, are there any ways the code of conduct could be changed in relation to how women should behave?

**Autonomy**

4. Could you please describe your roles and responsibilities when you were home in your hometown?
   a. What were the house chores that you need to do?
   b. What were your responsibilities towards your husband and children, your family and family-in-law?
   c. How did you manage your time when you were home?
   d. What did you do for your free time?
   e. Were there any circumstances that you were prohibited doing what you want to do? What were those activities? And why were you prohibited from doing it? What were you reactions when you were prohibited?
   f. Thinking backward to that time how did you feel about the roles and responsibilities that you had?
   g. After having migrated and worked here in the city, how do you feel about the roles and responsibilities that you had at that time?
   h. From your experience, how have your roles and responsibilities been changed after working at the garment factory?

5. Thinking about decision making at home in your hometown, how was decision-making made in your family on the issues of:
   - Children’s affairs (education, discipline, health care);
   - Spending money (for the whole family and for your own need)
   - Saving money
   - Family planning (number of children, running a new business)
   - Selling or buying property
   - Doing migration
   - Married
   a. Was there a main decision maker in your family or were decisions made by more than one person?
   b. What were your shared responsibilities in relation to the decision making on the above issues?
   c. To what extent, has your voice been heard and accepted?
   d. What did you do when you felt your voice was not heard?
   e. How has the situation been changed after you enter into work force?

6. How were decisions made in your household in relation to your friends, education, and work?
   - Mobility (visit friends or relatives, join community’s events, and go for a trip)
   - Self-development (join short trainings or continue your study) with pay and without pay
   - Earning income (engaging with workforce in your local area and outside)
   - Doing migration to the city
   - Engaging with the garment factory

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a. Now, have you noticed any changes in relation to the level of your freedom and the decision-making?
Safety

Safety at household level and experience of changes

7. What did the term HOME really mean to you?

8. Describe the relationship amongst your family members (wife, husband and children)?

9. Describe the relationship with your own family and your family-in-law?

10. What had been the support that you received when you were home?
    a. For instance, if you had a disagreement or argument with your neighbors, what was the action taken by your family?
    b. If you had a disagreement or argument with your husband, what was the solution to that problem?
    c. Did your household have some specific rules and regulations to follow? If yes, who set it and what happened if you don’t follow the rules?

11. Thinking about your health condition when you was home, please describe your physical and emotional health:
    a. How were your and your children’s physical health when you were home?
    b. What were the main causes of problems relating to your physical health?
    c. How were you and your children’s emotional health?
    d. What were the main causes of the problem of the emotional health?
    e. How did you cope with the problems?
    f. Whom did you seek help from (friends, relatives, local NGOs, local authority and others…)?
       Probe: What made you think the person or organization can offer help on your problems?
       Probe: If you didn’t seek help, what were the main reasons that hold you from seeking help?
       Probe: How often did you relatives or neighbors intervene when you had problem with your husband?

12. As of now, do you notice any changes in relation to:
    a. The relationship between you and your husband, family-in-law, your own family, and other people in the community
    b. Your voice in the family
    c. Your freedom to make your own decision
    d. Your approach to cope with unsafe situation

Safety living in new community and at workplace

13. Could you please describe your current living situation in the city?
    a. Have you informed the local authority here about your new residency?
    b. What do you think about the living area, the people, and the food here in the city?
    c. How is it different from your hometown?
d. How long does it take from your renting house to the factory?

e. How do you feel about the safety during traveling back and forth to work or the shops?

f. Do you have more or less friends compared to when you were home?

g. What do you do for your free time?

h. What places in the city have or haven’t you been?

14. Could you please describe briefly about the condition at your work place?
   a. What are the points that have been stated in your contracts? Have all the points been applied?
   b. What have you been doing during the whole working hours?
   c. Have you felt that you have been unfairly treated at work by your bosses or colleagues?
   d. How do you feel about the general safety at your workplace?
   e. What are the rules and regulations in the factory? Are there any specific rules about safety at workplace in which include the sexual harassment?

15. Lately in news there are many articles about poor health of garment workers, how do you describe about your health condition and your colleagues both physical and emotional?

   Physical health
   a. How often do you and your colleagues have problem with diarrhea?
   b. Have you and your colleagues ever had typhoid fever?
   c. Are there any accidents in your factory that may cause injuries?
   d. What support do you get when facing with the above problems?

   Emotional health
   a. Could you describe about the relationship amongst your colleagues and between employers, employees and supervisors?
   b. Have you or your colleagues ever have problem with colleagues, supervisor or employees?
      - If, yes: What are the main causes of the problems? How do you or your colleagues cope with the problems? Is there any support services available at your factory?
      - If, you used to have problems but you don’t seek support, why and what hold you from seeking support?

   Life’s impacts

16. What are the positive and negative changes that have happened as the result of migration and participation in the work force?
   a. Has you relationship changed with your husband, and if yes, can you tell me more about how it has been changed?
   b. What have been the impacts on your children’s well-being and education that caused by migration and living apart from you?
   c. Apart from gaining specific knowledge on your work, what are the additional knowledge both technical and general that you think you have obtained from doing migration, living in the city and working?
d. Apart from earning income, what other aspects that you like and do not like about life in the city?

17. What will you do if there is no job available in the garment sector? What are the main reasons to do so?

18. What is your recommendation to young women who are faced with the dilemma of whether to take risk and migrate to the city or play it safe and stay home?
Appendix 3: Approval letter from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney

Dear Dinesh Joseph

I am pleased to inform you that the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved your project entitled “Economic empowerment of women and its implications for women’s safety and autonomy: The case of Cambodia”.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2015/337
Approval Date: 4 June 2015
First Annual Report Due: 4 June 2016
Authorised Personnel: Wadiwel Dinesh Joseph; Pak Soheang;

Documents Approved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27/03/2015</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Interview questions (Tool B for single female workers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/03/2015</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Interview questions (Tool A for female workers with partner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/05/2015</td>
<td>Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>Participant Consent Form both in English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/05/2015</td>
<td>Participant Info Statement</td>
<td>Participant information statement both in English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/05/2015</td>
<td>Recruitment Letter/Email</td>
<td>Invitation letter both in English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/05/2015</td>
<td>Other Instruments/Tools</td>
<td>Brief information about the project in English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the approval date stated in this letter and is granted pending the following conditions being met:

Condition/s of Approval

- Continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.
- Provision of an annual report on this research to the Human Research Ethics Committee from the approval date and at the completion of the study. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of ethics approval for the project.
- All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.
• All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

• Any changes to the project including changes to research personnel must be approved by the HREC before the research project can proceed.

• Note that for student research projects, a copy of this letter must be included in the candidate’s thesis.

Chief Investigator / Supervisor’s responsibilities:

1. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms (if applicable) and provide these to the HREC on request.

2. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Glen Davis
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), NHMRC and Universities Australia Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.
Subject: Invitation to participate in a study research of the University of Sydney, Australia

My name is Soheang PAK, a Ph.D. candidate of the department of Sociology and Social Policy of the University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Currently, for my Ph.D. dissertation I am conducting a research study titled “Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Implications on Women’s Safety and Autonomy: the Case of Cambodia”. I would like to invite you to participate in the research project.

The purpose of the study is to discover and explain the positive and negative impacts on women’s safety and autonomy related to entry into the workforce. This study is particularly interested in the experience of women in the garment sector in Cambodia. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked about your experiences of change include individual’s safety within household and with the public spheres, individual’s autonomy over decision-making and resource within the households. The expected duration of the interview would take around 1 hour to 2 hours. If you agree, a follow up interview will be conducted in 2016. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any stage without having any negative consequence by choosing to do so. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential.

The outcomes of this research will be used as a partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. It is expected this research will lead to a better understanding of the experience of female workers in Cambodia, and lead to better policies and protections for women. If you are willing to participate please suggest a day and time that suits you.

Thank you and should you have any question about the research project please feel free to contact at spak1327@uni.sydney.edu.au and telephone number 097 928 2928 for Cambodia and +614 31 590 333 for Australia contact. You can also contact directly to the Chief of Investigator at the contact details above.

Sincerely Yours,

Soheang PAK
Appendix 5: Institutional support from CARE on this research

Human Ethics Committee
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

Phnom Penh, 29 January 2015

CARE is an International Development Organisation fighting global poverty, with a special focus on working with women and girls to bring lasting change to their communities. As a non-religious and non-political organisation, CARE works with communities to help overcome poverty by supporting development projects and providing emergency relief.

I would like to confirm that CARE International in Cambodia will provide institutional support for the research project titled "Economic Empowerment of Women and its Implications for Women’s Safety and Autonomy: the case of Cambodia", conducted by Mrs Soheang PAK between May 2015 and August 2015. We will assist Mrs Soheang Pak to meet the female workers involved in our projects and will ensure that any interviews conducted are done in an appropriate, safe, and considerate manner.

Should you need further information or have any questions about the support, please feel free to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Trish McEwan
Program Coordinator a/c
Appendix 6: Participant consent form

Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Implications for Women's Safety and Autonomy

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, .................................................................................[PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.

✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.

✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don’t wish to answer.

✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

I consent to:

- Audio-recording
  - YES ☐ NO ☐
- Photographs
  - YES ☐ NO ☐
- Reviewing transcripts
  - YES ☐ NO ☐
• Being contacted about future studies
  YES ☐ NO ☐

• Receiving feedback about my personal results
  YES ☐ NO ☐

As mentioned in the Participant Information Statement, you are invited to participate in the second interview which will be conducted next year between April 2016–July 2016. Would you like to participate in the follow up interview?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered YES, please kindly give me your contact number and address where I can communicate with you:

Telephone number: __________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________

☐ Email: __________________________________________________________

Would you like to recommend several of your peers who share similar profiles with you to participate in the research project?

YES ☐ NO ☐

...................................................
Signature
...................................................
PRINT name
...................................................
Date
Appendix 7: Participant information form

Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Implications for Women’s Safety and Autonomy

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study titled “Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Implications for Women’s Safety and Autonomy”. The study aims to explain the association between the economic empowerment of women through labour force participation in Cambodia and experiences of safety and autonomy. The study aims to understand whether women who gain employment feel a sense of safety and can exercise control over their lives. The study is particularly interested in the experience of women who work in clothing manufacturing in Cambodia.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are considered as one of the target participants. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. So it’s up to you whether you wish to take part or not.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
- Understand what you have read
- Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below
- Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher:

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel
Chief Investigator (Supervisor)
Director, Master of Human Rights

Room 413
Old Teachers College A22
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 4811
Facsimile: +61 2 9036 9380
Email: dinesh.wadiwel@sydney.edu.au
Web: http://www.sydney.edu.au/
• Soheang PAK, a Ph.D. candidate of The University of Sydney

Soheang PAK is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts and Social Sciences at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of Chief Investigator, Dr Dinesh Wadiwel, Director of the Masters of Human rights.

This study is being funded by an Australia Awards Scholarship.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

You will be asked to participate in two interviews: the first will be carried out in 2015, the second follow up interview will be held in 2016.

The interviews will last approximately one hour to 2 hours. The interviews will take place at the public places such as café shops, pagodas, and other places where you feel comfortable. The interviews will be conducted at a time convenient for you. Audio recording will be used to record the whole interview; however, audio recording will only be used if you have provided consent.

You will be asked to share your experience before engaging in the garment sector. The questions will include: (i) your routine activities when you were living in your hometown; (ii) decision-making over resource, your mobility and other relevant activities within your household; (iii) your relationship with your husband and other people living in your communities; (v) your new experience after enter into workforce; and (vi) your opinion about your previous situation and current situation.

At the end of the first interview’s session, I would like to ask for your participation for the second interview that will be taken place in 2016. If you agree to participate in the 2016 interview, you will be asked to provide your contact details (permanent residency, telephone number, and closed relative’s contact number if possible). This information will be used only for purpose of reconnecting with you for the purposes of this research project.

Your personal information will not be identified in my research or any related published document. All sensitive information will be kept securely by myself or the Chief Investigator at the University of Sydney.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

It is expected that each interview will take between 1 hour to 2 hours. It will include relaxation breaks in between to make you feel comfortable and to make the conversation more productive.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

As part of my research, I am interested in interviewing with women who meet the following criteria:

i. The target participants’ age range should be between 18-35 years old;
ii. They have been working in garment sector between 1-2 years;
iii. They migrate from other provinces;
iv. They are now working in garment factories;

(6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I’ve started?

Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Implications for Women’s Safety and Autonomy
Version 1.0, 8.12.14
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by telling me directly, in a written form, or making a request to CARE international.

Data from the interview will be securely stored in my personal computer and recording device. All data collected in this research will be password protected. After the research is completed, all the data will be stored with the Chief Investigator at the University of Sydney.

During the interview, you are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

We cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

(9) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

The participants will be asked to provide their background information (place of birth, age, marital status, number of years of marriage (for participants with spouses), number of years engaging with garment sector), and their own perceptions of safety and autonomy. The interviews will be recorded with the consent from the participants. Apart from me, only my supervisor Chief Investigator Dr Dinesh Wadiwel will have access to participants’ identity information. All the personal information of all participants will keep confidential, no name of the participants will be revealed in any publications. A research assistant will assist with collating the interviews, but will not have access to any information that will identify people who participate in the study. The findings of the study will be presented in my thesis to fulfil the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney. The results of the study maybe also presented in forums and conferences, and be published in academic journals. The participants can request to access their own information.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

(10) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.
What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Soheang PAK will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. She can be reached at spak1327@uni.sydney.edu.au or Tel: +85597 928 2928 for Cambodia and +61 431 590 333 for Australia. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Dr Dinesh Wadiwel, the University of Sydney, tel: +61 2 9351 4811 or email address: dinesh.wadiwel@sydney.edu.au.

Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. You will receive this feedback after the first interview and after the study is finished. The results from the first interview will be written in one page Khmer summary and sent directly to you. For the whole study result, the student researcher will share with CARE International and it will be disseminated to all female workers who are engaged in CARE’s program in which you are one of them.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney: project number 2015/337. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:
• Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176
• Email: ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au
• Fax: +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

Or you can also contact an independent local contact whose name is Mrs. Bophana Ros, she is currently working as a judge and a lecturer at the Royal Academy for Judicial Profession in Phnom Penh. You can contact her at bophana@gmail.com and Tel: +855 92 567 746. Here below are a list of several organizations that offer support to women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organization</th>
<th>Provided services</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARE International</td>
<td>Consultation, Training</td>
<td>6, Street 446, SK Toul Tom Pong, Phnom Penh Tel: (+855) 23 215 267/8/9 Email: <a href="mailto:khm.info@careint.org">khm.info@careint.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO)</td>
<td>Mental and Psychological treatment, Trainings, Mental health first aids</td>
<td>No 2 &amp; 4, Oknha Vaing Street, SK Phnom Penh Thmey, KH Sen Sok Phnom Penh Tel: (+855) 23 63 66 992 Email: <a href="mailto:admin@tpocambodia.org">admin@tpocambodia.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid</td>
<td>- Legal support to both children and women</td>
<td>51, street 608, SK Beoung Kok 2, KH Toul Kork, Phnom Penh. Tel: (+855) 23 883 914 Email: <a href="mailto:lac@lac.org.kh">lac@lac.org.kh</a></td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banteay Srey</td>
<td>- Shelter</td>
<td>#198, Street 145, Sangkat Phsar Doeum Tkov, Khann Chamcar Mon, Phnom Penh Tel:(+855) 23 216 922 Email: <a href="mailto:banteaysrei@online.com.kh">banteaysrei@online.com.kh</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Trainings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Consultation</td>
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</table>

*This information sheet is for you to keep*
## Appendix 8: A brief history of Cambodia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Period</th>
<th>Legal system</th>
<th>Economic system</th>
<th>Political system and power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonial era 1863-1953</td>
<td>French-based civil code and judiciary</td>
<td>Followed colonial system</td>
<td>Under French protectorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kingdom of Cambodia 1953-1970</td>
<td>French-based civil code and judiciary</td>
<td>Market and then rationalisation</td>
<td>Held by King Norodom Sihanouk (until he abdicated in 1955); then as Prince Norodom Sihanouk alternately as Prime Minister or Head of State of an elected government known as the Sangkum Reast-nyum (People’s Socialist Community: 1955-1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Khmer Republic 1970-1975</td>
<td>French-based civil code and judiciary</td>
<td>Market, war economy</td>
<td>Held by General Lon Nol Nol and Sirik Matak with support from the US. Cambodia suffered intense bombings, internal political crises and riots due to US involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979</td>
<td>Legal system destroyed</td>
<td>Agrarian, centrally planned</td>
<td>Held by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge with Chinese and North Korean support. The period is known as Year Zero in Cambodia. More than three million people were killed and Cambodia was isolated from the region and the rest of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People’s Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989 (A rehabilitation phase)</td>
<td>Vietnamese communist model</td>
<td>Soviet-style central planning</td>
<td>Held by Kampucheans People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP), Hun Sen as Prime Minister from 1985 (Vietnamese backed w. 100,000 troops; Soviet)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **The State of Cambodia**  
**1989-1993**  
**(A rehabilitation phase)** | Greater economic rights | Liberalised central planning | Held by Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), (formerly KPRP); Vietnamese troops withdrawn, shared with UNTAC, led by SRSG Yasushi Akashi from 1992-1993. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **The Kingdom of Cambodia**  
**1993-1998 (first mandate)**  
**(This period is often seen as an emergency phase; Pol Pot died in 1998 and the Khmer Rouge disbanded completely in 1999)** | French-based civil code combined with common law in certain sectors | Transition to a market economy under pressure from international organisations; Growth in textile, tourism and construction industries | Shared between Ranariddh (Funcipec) and Hun Sen (CPP) in a unique arrangement of co-prime ministers with a required two-third supermajority for governing coalition. In July 1997, in order to restore power the CPP committed an outright ‘coup’. |
| **The Kingdom of Cambodia**  
**1998-2013 (second, third, and fourth mandates)**  
**(This period is often seen as a development phase)** | French-based civil code combined with common law in certain sectors | Market economy; Heavily dependent on foreign aid; Growth in textile, tourism and construction industries; Economic land concessions grew remarkably, especially for Vietnamese and Chinese companies. | Held by Hun Sen (CPP), the CPP enjoyed major domination in government. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Kingdom of Cambodia 2013-2018 (fifth mandate)</th>
<th>French-based civil code combined with common law in certain sectors</th>
<th>Market economy; Heavily dependent on foreign aid; Growth in textile, tourism and construction industries; Economic land concessions grew remarkably, especially for Vietnamese and Chinese companies.</th>
<th>CPP is still a ruling party but the opposition party, which is becoming more popular and powerful, monitors its activities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Kingdom of Cambodia 2018-present (sixth mandate)</td>
<td>French-based civil code combined with common law in certain sectors</td>
<td>Market economy; Heavily dependent on foreign aid; Growth in textile, tourism and construction industries.</td>
<td>Hun Sen is still the Prime Minister; however, the legitimacy of the 2018 election has been called into question by various commentators and media outlets. On 3 September 2018, the leader of opposition party was arrested and charged of &quot;treason&quot;.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Chandler (1991), Ear (2013a), and Ung (2006)