

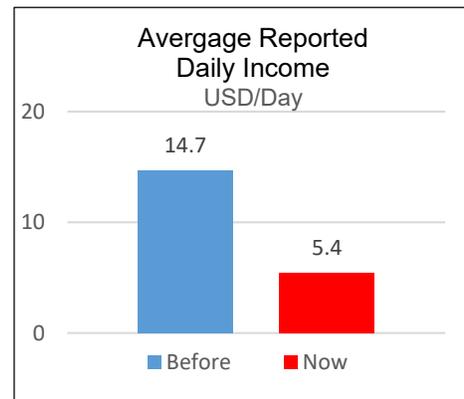


Impacts of Economic Situation in Sihanoukville, Cambodia A Survey by M'Lop Tapang (May, 2020)

Brief Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted families and children around the world and the situation in Cambodia is no different. Schools and training centers have been closed. Many businesses have been forced to reduce operations or shut down, and an increasing number of people have lost their jobs. At the time of writing this report there have been 124 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Cambodia and 0 deaths, with the first case being detected in late January (in Sihanoukville).

For families living in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, the employment situation was already declining in early 2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the government ban of online gambling, many of the hotels/casinos that had been recently opened or were under construction and had fueled a boom in the last couple of years ceased operations. Additionally, the partial EBA withdrawal in early February, 2020 also threatened the long term employment of some factory workers even prior to COVID-19.

During the week of May 25-30, 2020 our staff conducted a short survey of 154 families that M'Lop Tapang works with regularly, asking them about the impact of the economic downturn. These families have a total of 533 children. Following are highlights of that survey:



Survey Findings:

97% of the families we interviewed reported a decreased income over the last two of months. What is significant is the amount of decrease that many families have experienced.

- 77% of the families interviewed report a greater than 50% decrease in income
- 21% of the families interviewed report having zero income at present

The most common reasons reported for decreased income include: no customers because of COVID-19, casinos closed, no tourists coming to Sihanoukville, afraid to work because of COVID-19, business (not casino) closed, no work at construction sites.



Makara* has been a beach vendor in Sihanoukville for more than 10 years. The decrease in tourists has dramatically impacted most of the businesses in the local area.

“Before Covid-19 I used to make about \$10 to \$12.5 a day, but now I can only make about \$5 a day, and sometimes nothing. If the situation stays the same as now, my family will have a lot more problems.”

*names have been changed for confidentiality



Many of the families reported that the economic downturn in Sihanoukville and their loss of income has had an impact in more than one area of their lives. It is apparent that children's health and welfare is being negatively affected; less nutrition and food security, increased lack of access for medical care, more unsafe housing, and more children working to help support their family.



MT Social Workers have also noticed a large increase in the number of children working in the markets and on the streets, particularly since the closure of schools and training centers in the country. This increases the risk of harm to children as they are not supervised by safe adults.

Percentage of families reporting areas of impact from decreased income

Area of impact	%
Less food for family/children	81%
Less quality of food	63%
Not enough money to back debts	32%
Not enough money to pay rent	28%
Have borrowed money	21%
Not enough money to pay for transport to MT for free medical care	23%
Increased violence/arguments at home due to stress	16%
Children now working to help earn income for family	13%
Not fixing urgent house repairs	11%
Started dangerous or illegal work	3%

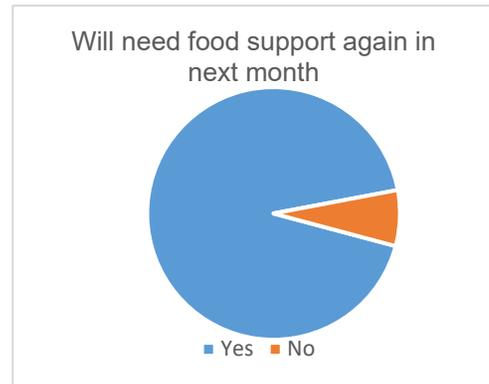


38-year old Sinat* is the mother of 2 girls, aged 10 and 13. Her husband earns money as a moto-taxi driver but with less customers in the local area his income has dramatically decreased.

Sinat, like nearly one in six people we interviewed, reported that having a decreased family income has led to more stress in the household and the stress has resulted in increased fighting and violence.



Due to loss of income, food security is the number one issue faced by the families surveyed. Approximately 84% of the families we interviewed reported receiving food support from an external source in the last month. Not surprisingly, because we interviewed families that M'Lop Tapang works with, most of the families who reported that they have received food report stated it was from M'Lop Tapang. More than 90% also reported that they will need food support again within the next month.



58-year old Maly* lives with her adult daughter, son in-law, and two young grandchildren. Her daughter is the main income provider for the family; she used to sell vegetables on the street near one of the city's casinos, but since the casino closed there are no customers.

“My daughter was the main bread winner for my family and now earns nothing, I cannot help her because I am sick.”

With so many unknowns about the COVID-19 situation, the families we interviewed are also uncertain as to when their economic situation will improve, but interestingly more than half of the families interviewed stated that they expect the situation to improve within the next 3 months.



Sreyda*, is a mother of five children. Her husband is disabled. She tells us before they used to make about \$7.5/day, but now less than \$3/day. They recently borrowed \$50 from a money lender and will have to pay \$10/month in interest. Her children have started begging at the local market to help support the family.

Plans until economic situation improves

Plan	%
Go to MT for help	81%
Try to find other job	64%
Borrow money	14%
Children will start to work	8%
Sell items they own	6%
Move to another city/province	2%
Go to government / village chief for help	2%



The final question of the survey asked respondents how M'Lop Tapang could best help them with their immediate needs (excluding food support).

Not surprisingly, with the levels of unemployment and losses of income reported, the majority of individuals interviewed stated that their most immediate needs were finding jobs and alternative sources of income.



“Now I only earn enough for one day at a time and sometimes nothing. Before I could earn some extra money by washing laundry for people in the neighborhood, but now I cannot do that because they are doing it by themselves to save money too.” – Saka*, mother of 4 children

Areas of request for help with immediate needs:

Immediate needs	%
Help to find employment	40%
Help to set up small business	36%
Help with family issues	10%
Housing support	6%
Other	8%

We are grateful to all of the individuals interviewed for this survey. The information collected in this study will help guide M'Lop Tapang into building an effective strategy to best support these vulnerable families and children, in the local area and in the months ahead.