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Contact with early childhood education programs and child abuse in Cambodia: The role of mothers' agency and involvement in early stimulation activities

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Contact with early childhood education programs and child abuse in Cambodia: The role of
mothers' agency and involvement in early stimulation activities

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Certificate of Approval

This dissertation of Kelly Ranae Grace is approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

With nearly half of Cambodian children experiencing physical violence before the age of 18, the Cambodian government is turning to early childhood education programs to decrease child abuse and support child protection. Globally, and in Cambodia, ECE programs support mothers' involvement in ECE early stimulation activities to improve child development. However, feminist theory suggests that by supporting mothers' involvement in ECE early stimulation practices, these programs could further oppress women, which in turn can negatively impact their child rearing practices. Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework suggests that through empowerment gained through contact with ECE programs mothers can expand their understanding of power dynamics legitimized through violence, address oppressive parenting practices, and embrace positive child rearing practices. This study tested the roles of mothers' agency and involvement in early stimulation activities as mediators of mothers' contact with ECE programs and their justifications of child abuse using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The sample of this study is drawn from the 2014 Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey and consists of 1809 women. Results indicate that mothers' agency is a significant mediating factor in decreasing mothers' justifications of child abuse through contact with ECE programs. Mothers' involvement in early stimulation is significantly increased through contact with ECE programs, however this does not lead to significant effects on mothers' justifications of child abuse and results in an insignificant mediating effect. This suggests that child abuse, and justifications of child abuse, is intertwined with patriarchal power dynamics and oppressive practices, which can be transformed through contact with ECE programs. These findings indicate that ECE policy and programs in Cambodia could better address issues related to child protection by supporting mothers' agency and engaging mothers as advocates in child protection.

Chapter I Introduction

Nearly half of Cambodian children report experiencing physical violence before the age of 18 (Miles & Thomas, 2007; Miles & Varin, 2003; UNICEF-Cambodia, 2013). This high rate of child abuse likely is related to Cambodia's recent violence of genocide and gendered social norms, which justify domestic violence (Antai, Braithwaite, & Clerk, 2016; Berckmoes, Eichelsheim, Rutayisire, Richters, & Hola, 2017; Eisenbruch, 2018) and place women and children at the bottom of a patriarchal system (Miles & Thomas, 2017). Supporting the perpetuation of family violence are cultural expectations which ensure that abuse within the family remains a domestic affair (Brickell, 2011; Brickell, 2017; Eng, Li, Mulsow, & Fischer, 2010), bind women to the patriarchal ideals of the Cambodian society and ensure that children are expected to remain without a voice (Ogisu, 2016; Miles & Thomas, 2007). This aligns with a feminist perspective of child abuse, which situates mothers, both as perpetrators of child abuse and perpetrators of child abuse through acceptance of child abuse, within the context of patriarchal family dynamics in which violence legitimizes power (Namy, et al., 2007). This perspective also asserts that women's attitudes towards, and use of violence against, their children cannot be disentangled from the dynamics of oppression which they experience under patriarchal values and institutions such as marriage and motherhood (Dougherty, 1993; Featherstone & Fawcett, 1994; Gordon, 1986;).

Child Abuse and Child Protection in Cambodia

Globally, defining child abuse is complicated by issues of agreement regarding what constitutes child abuse and conceptual distinctions between corporal punishment and child abuse (Finkelhor & Korbin, 1988; Lansford & Deater-Deckard, 2012). Family violence can often be normalized, and, in Cambodia and in many other socio-cultural contexts, hitting or beating children can be viewed as appropriate forms of discipline, corporal punishment or as a means of

teaching children (Ripoll-Núñez & Rohner, 2006; Save the Children Sweden, 2005). Despite these complications, the Cambodian government contends that corporal punishment is a violation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and is a form of child abuse (Nho & Seng, 2017), and that corporal punishment can lead to child abuse and the perpetuation of violence in society (Holden, Brown, Baldwin & Cadero, 2014). Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (Butchart & Harvey, 2006). This work adopts the view of the Cambodian government that hitting or beating a child in any context or situation is detrimental to children and their development (Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, 2014), and therefore can be considered child abuse. Additionally, this research focuses on mothers’ attitudes about, or justifications of, physical abuse of children in the form of hitting or beating a child, as these justifications are an important point of intervention in preventing child abuse, particularly through the educational engagement of mothers (Nho & Seng, 2017).

A recent focus on Cambodian laws and policies addressing violence against children indicate that the Cambodian government considers child protection and the reduction of child abuse a critical area of concern (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2017). The Royal Government of Cambodia ratified the UNCRC in 1992 and established a number of laws, policies and tools to support child protection and combat violence against children, which address child protection and violence against children (World Vision Cambodia, 2017). Additionally, the *National Action Plan on Early Childhood Care and Development* (2014) outlines the need to protect children from harm by addressing domestic violence against women and “excessive child discipline” through parenting programs provided by ECE services. The Cambodian government

asserts that prioritizing community and home-based preschools is a means for reaching marginalized children and their families, and for protecting children from child abuse and indicates that ECE programs are a critical path to addressing issues of family violence (Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, 2014).

The Cambodian government lacks the economic and human resource capacity to provide critical ECE and child protection services (Rao & Pearson, 2009; Rao, et al., 2012). This has resulted in the uptake of the provision of these services by a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations such as Save the Children, Plan International Cambodia and Cambodian Children's Fund work to implement programs supporting child protection and parent education regarding child abuse (Rao & Pearson, 2009; Rao, et. al, 2012). While these programs operate at community levels, parenting programs supporting child protection are also found in early childhood education programs, which engage parents and communities in reducing child abuse and maltreatment. Participation in ECE is neither mandatory nor universal, however, ECE programs have expanded rapidly in Cambodia with the number of children participating in ECE programs increasing from 14 percent in 2005 to 33 percent in 2014. Many of these programs rely on mothers as either volunteer teachers or participants in parenting programs (UNICEF, 2016).

Women and ECE Programs

Women play an important role in ECE programs as teachers and as mothers who support early childhood development through early stimulation and learning activities such as reading to, singing songs, counting, and playing with their children (Bouguen, Filmer, Macours, & Naudeau, 2013). In Cambodia's expanding ECE programs, 99.3 % of ECE teachers are women (MoEYS, 2017) and Cambodian mothers are predominantly responsible for their children's education (Smith-Hefner, 1999). ECE programs create a space in which women are the primary adults and

caretakers involved in supporting early childhood development, making them important actors in supporting ECE child protection aims and decreasing child abuse. While mothers may be perpetrators of child abuse, or perpetuate child abuse through justifying the hitting or beating of a child, they can also serve as advocates for child protection through interaction with ECE programs leading to the transformation of their attitudes toward or justifications of child abuse.

Despite the important role of mothers in ECE programs, these programs are primarily concerned with child outcomes and consider mothers and families as instruments of ECE learning approaches and knowledge as legitimized through international “best practices” (OECD, 2011; Shonkoff, 2010). This is evidenced by a focus on parent education regarding child abuse and increasing participation in early stimulation activities such as reading to children, singing songs, counting with children, etc. (Britto, et al., 2017; Walker, et al., 2007), without consideration for the impacts of these programs and educational expectations on mothers (De Carvalho, 2000). Although the government aim of reducing domestic violence against women through ECE programs is an important step in moving away from mothers as instruments of “best practices” in child development and ECE programs, it falls short of investing in mothers’ empowerment and agency and misses a critical opportunity to support mothers and reduce child abuse.

Women’s empowerment has been shown to have important implications for early childhood development (Cunningham, Ruel, Ferguson, & Uauy, 2015; Kishor, 2005; Lavy, Lotti & Yan, 2016). While freedom from domestic violence is an important part of women's empowerment (Mason, 2005), focusing only on decreasing domestic violence in ECE policy and practice, both globally and in Cambodia, neglects the opportunity to support child protection and child development through supporting mothers’ agency, or their ability to make choices in their own lives (Kabeer, 2005). The positioning of families, and primarily mothers, as key

components in early childhood development and ECE programs suggests that these programs could center women's empowerment and agency as a solution to reducing child abuse. Moving beyond the view of mothers as instruments for early childhood educational practices and towards programs which embrace the empowerment of mothers as a means for protecting children is particularly relevant in Cambodia, where the unique structure of ECE programming is centered around community and parent involvement (Pearson, 2015).

ECE programs in Cambodia place family and community engagement at the center of a "quality" ECE system (Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, 2014; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014a), and women may be impacted by contact with early childhood education (ECE) directly through parenting programs or indirectly through collective interaction with teachers and other women at the school level. ECE programs in rural areas are often at the center of the community, where mothers come to drop their children off for ECE programs, and may remain for the lessons and watch and interact with the teachers and each other. Some ECE programs enlist parents in the building and maintenance of the schools, mothers cook for breakfast and feeding programs, and parents serve as volunteers for parenting groups. This contact with other women and indirect involvement and contact with ECE program components can impact mothers and their justifications of child abuse as knowledge regarding child protection and positive parenting practices is passed on indirectly from women in shared communities with ECE programs (Grace, 2018). Social networks and connections with other women have been shown to impact women's empowerment, including justifications of domestic violence (Larance & Porter, 2004), as well as parents' likelihood to abuse their children (Coohey, 1996; Gaudin & Pollane, 1983; Thompson, 1995). This study centers around this direct contact and indirect contact with ECE programs, which is a unique component of ECE programs in Cambodia and other developing contexts, and examines whether mothers' contact with ECE programs could

serve as a means through which women alter their justifications of child abuse, through knowledge regarding women's agency and early stimulation practices.

In development contexts, early childhood education involves families in children's educational experiences through early stimulation activities, for example reading to and counting with children, which are accepted as supporting early childhood development and incorporated into ECE frameworks (Britto, et al., 2017; OECD, 2011; Walker, et al., 2007). While parent involvement in early childhood education has been shown to be beneficial for children (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000), the task of childcare and parental involvement in education often falls to mothers (Asian Development Bank, 2015; Miller & Rodgers, 2009), with little research considering the impact of this role on women. In Cambodia, the inclusion of families and communities in ECE programs has been stressed in ECE policy as paramount to supporting early childhood development (Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, 2014), but as most of the work of educating children falls to women, it is possible that the added labor of ECE participation could limit women's ability to engage in other aspects of their lives that might improve their ability to make choices regarding their own life. Considering that 76 percent of Cambodian women are in the workforce (Asian Development Bank, 2015) and the patriarchal structure of society which assigns a majority of domestic and childcare tasks to women, women bear the weight of working, maintaining household duties and educating children (Brickell, 2014; Jacobsen, 2010).

Therefore, participating in early stimulation activities could be an added unpaid, domestic task which limits women's ability to participate in other endeavors and which could be deemed as "women's work." This is supported by CDHS data indicating that only two percent of Cambodian fathers participate in early childhood stimulation activities with their children (National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International, 2015) and

suggests that these activities are viewed as women's responsibilities and that maternal participation in these activities is gendered work. If an important goal of ECE programs is to engage parents in more positive parent-child activities (Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, 2014), placing increased burden on mothers in the form of educational activities could negatively impact the way that mothers interact with their children and support their justifications of child abuse. Despite increasing focus on issues of child protection in international development and in ECE programs, as well as increased interest in issues of women's empowerment, and women's involvement in ECE programs in Cambodia, the mediating role of women's agency in their justifications of child abuse remains largely unexplored.

Research Problem/Issue

Over 70 percent of Cambodian women agree with at least one reason for beating their son or daughter. This is coupled with nearly 50 percent of women agreeing with at least one justification of domestic violence (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ICF International, 2014). For some women in Cambodia, the patriarchal social structures that place women and children below men are maintained through domestic violence (Brickell, 2017). Despite decades of policy focusing on gender equity and women's empowerment, for example the adoption of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 (United Nations, 2011) and the National Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Neary Rattanak) which was initially adopted in 1999 and is now implemented as Neary Rattanak IV (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014), women and children continue to suffer under societal influences which support the subjugation of women and children through physical violence (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014). Recently, policy has focused on addressing inequitable attitudes and beliefs within the Cambodian society (Ministry of Women's Affairs,

2014a), however even in policy, this is coupled with statements such as “together with the promotion of social morality, women and family values” (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014, p. 7) and the collaboration with The National Committee for Upholding Social Morality, Women’s and Khmer Family Values which includes a statement on ensuring harmony in the family (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014). While these statements may seem innocuous, they are reflections of the discourse of Chbab Srey, or the rules for women, which calls for women to maintain harmony in household by deferring to her husband and tolerating domestic violence (Brickell, 2017). Policy that focuses on gender equity while reinforcing inequitable sociocultural beliefs about women, particularly those which condone domestic violence, could undermine efforts towards women’s empowerment by supporting conflicting messages regarding expectations for women in Cambodian society.

Expectations of mothers’ involvement with ECE learning activities is an added layer of women’s agency which could benefit ECE children but place additional burden on women regarding child rearing, entrenching beliefs about child abuse further. Conversely, maternal involvement in early stimulation activities, as often promoted in ECE programs, could strengthen positive mother/child interactions and provide mothers with positive parenting approaches (Green, et al., 2018). The relationship between contact with ECE programs and women’s agency, mother’s involvement and early childhood stimulation activities remains unclear.

Ignoring the relationships between women’s empowerment and agency and justifications of child abuse leaves women and children at risk for continued subjugation to the violent patriarchal forces of control that are prominent in Cambodian society. The link between mothers’ empowerment and agency, including literacy, freedom from domestic violence and the ability to participate in household decisions, has been shown to have important implications for young children, as mothers who are empowered are more likely to divert resources towards

children's health and education (Cunningham, Ruel, Ferguson, & Uauy, 2015; Kishor, 2005). Improving children's health and educational outcomes is a major aim of ECE programs, both globally and in Cambodia, as early childhood programs that seek to improve the lives of young children through education and child protection (Rao & Sun, 2015). To support this, the Cambodian government is taking steps to focus on child protection, for example the recent "Child Friendly" approach to education which removed corporal punishment from school and focusing on decreasing the violence committed against children (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014), and some ECE programs also include parenting programs which focus on decreasing child abuse within families (Grace, 2018; Save the Children, 2012). However, much ECE research in Cambodia continues to primarily focus on outcomes for children related to physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development indicators (Bouguen, Filmer, Macours, & Naudeau, 2013; Dowd, Pisani & Hsiao, 2018; Rao & Pearson, 2009). Despite the important participation of mothers in these programs, there is little focus on the impacts of these programs on mothers, and in particular, on their attitudes towards child abuse.

Significance

Examining the impacts of ECE programs on mothers and their justifications of child abuse challenges the current ECE paradigm in which mothers are instruments of "best practices" whose sole function in ECE programs is to support child development. By including mothers' agency and involvement in early stimulation activities as mediating factors in mothers' justifications of child abuse, this research also challenges the narrow consideration of mothers as perpetrators of child abuse, by examining how ECE programs impact mothers' issues of agency and perhaps positioning mothers as advocates against child abuse. By considering women's empowerment issues, ECE policy and programs can embrace mothers as part of the solution for the elimination of child abuse while supporting the important goal of empowering mothers and

women. The significance of this research reaches beyond individual impacts for mothers and children and includes impacts on communities, society, Cambodian and global ECE policy, impacts on the field of CIE and specifically CIE theories.

Mothers. Understanding the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE programs, women's empowerment and justifications of child violence will shed light on an unexplored avenue in which educational programming could improve the lives and social status of women. Mothers in these programs will be seen as more than an instrument for improving children's education and well-being, and will be highlighted as agentic individuals. Findings from this study will help ECE programs support women in challenging the patriarchal power, particularly within family dynamics, through carefully constructed and appropriate ECE programming that is sensitive to local sociocultural beliefs and practices. Given the central role of communities in Cambodian ECE policy and programs, findings will bring a focus to mothers in these programs and highlight the possibility of impacting entire communities of women by calling for the support of women's issues through ECE programming.

Children. The findings of this research are significant to children who attend ECE programs in Cambodia. Women's empowerment has been linked to improved child health and education outcomes (Blumberg, 1991; Hobcraft, 1993; Mason, 1986; Presser & Sen, 2000). Bringing women to the center of early childhood and education research and considering how ECE program contact is related to women's empowerment and justifications of child abuse could highlight important ways to support the reduction of child abuse in Cambodia. Addressing issues of child abuse in Cambodia is critical in supporting the well-being of children.

Communities. In Cambodia, as well as other developing contexts, early childhood programs are integral parts of communities, particularly in rural areas, with village chiefs, local NGOs and local authorities supporting their implementation, with strong capacity building

initiatives which seek to educate the communities on child development, health, child protection and education (Britto, Engle & Super, 2013; Pearson, Jin, Uttara, Pheak, Bunsor, Sovannary, & Siyan, 2017). ECE programs contribute to communities by raising awareness about education and supporting education of the youngest learners within the community. Capacity building of communities regarding ECE has an important impact on how communities are able to engage educational programming that has the potential for creating social capital within and among people in the communities. By considering women's empowerment within the realm of ECE, this research could further support ECE initiatives and programming centered around community engagement of issues of women's empowerment and child abuse through mothers' participation in ECE programs.

Policy. This research could impact policy as there is currently no policy that encompasses ECE, women's empowerment and child abuse issues. Instead, Cambodia's policies, and practices, currently focus on these issues separately, while emphasizing the importance of family and community involvement, thereby overlooking a holistic approach that combines ECE, women's empowerment and agency, and child protection. These issues have not yet been outlined inclusively, with a recognition of the ECE system as more than a system which impacts children. This research could initiate the consideration that the relationship of women's empowerment and agency and child abuse could be influenced by contact with ECE programs, which is particularly important as the Cambodian government attempts to expand and standardize early childhood education programs. This would reconceptualize mothers' participation in ECE by moving away from programming in which mothers are instruments of child development and towards programs which work to directly empower women and support their agency through ECE programs as a means for decreasing child abuse. This intersection of ECE and women's empowerment policy, both held as important initiatives by the Cambodian

government, would strengthen the services provided to women and children through integrated policy initiatives.

Field of CIE. The significance of this research is the potential to impact on the body of knowledge regarding women that have contact with ECE programs through their children's participation in early childhood education programs. Research regarding the ECE system in Cambodia is largely conducted by international organizations and non-governmental organizations, with limited studies conducted with a critical comparative and international education perspective in mind that challenges global normative frameworks of child development and early childhood education. While some reports, and a few peer-reviewed journal articles, exist, these organizations generally keep findings internal to the organization, with limited sharing and reach of the results of these studies. This work seeks to add to academic research conducted from a Comparative and International Education perspective, in order to contribute to the body of literature regarding Cambodian ECE preschools. The study uses the Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS), a national survey which is part of a larger body of worldwide Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in more than thirty countries. This research would bring the CDHS, and its unique data on both women and early childhood education, into the field of CIE and contribute to an understanding of the national situation of ECE, women's issues, and justifications of child abuse in Cambodia. Currently, this dataset is used primarily in areas of maternal and child health indicators, with limited application in the field of education. Given the paucity of national research regarding education and women in Cambodia, the dataset provides an opportunity to explore gender and early childhood education at a national level.

CIE theories. This research is significant for the expansion of feminist and empowerment theories of CIE, beyond the traditional applications to adult women's formal and

informal education interventions and programs, into a broader application of women's contact with their children's educational programs. This research extends feminist and empowerment theories in CIE beyond the realm of educating mothers directly, in which theories consider how adult education programs impact women's agency and empowerment, to include an understanding of how education programs can impact mothers' agency and empowerment, both directly and indirectly, as primary caregivers.

Additionally, this work uses a recently developed theory within the field of international education development and CIE. Few studies have tested and applied Stromquist's (2015) theory of empowerment, and in particular her conceptualization of knowledge empowerment. This study contributes to the development of feminist/empowerment theory within the field of CIE by applying this framework to an untested development context and testing its application using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data. This application of theories is important in extending feminist and empowerment theories within CIE that can be useful to international education development contexts and within the practical field of international development. The application of this theory in the Cambodian context is significant in testing whether the theory is applicable to developing contexts such as Cambodia, particularly given the country's unique situation regarding women, women's empowerment and women's agency.

CIE Context

This research is situated within the field of comparative and international education by contributing to the literature regarding the global issues of early childhood education and gender equity. Global initiatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), place gender equality and education at the forefront of issues that are studied across and within nations, and which are considered global issues within education (Britto, et al., 2017). SDG target 4.2 makes access to quality ECE a global issue and goal. Recent interest in gender and child protection in

ECE programs around the world points to the issue of women's agency and empowerment and child abuse and ECE programs as international issues. Community and home-based preschools models are adapted across contexts (Wiley, Hodgen, Ferral, & Thompson, 2006) with common global "best practices." The adaptation of early childhood education models across contexts and the rise of ECE as a global issue, points to the comparative and international nature of ECE programs.

Epstein (1994) characterizes CIE as a "field of study that applies historical, philosophical, and social science theories and methods to international problems in education" (p. 918). With a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing education issues around the world, CIE encompasses a broad range of research using a range of methods. Yet within this broad scope lies a specific goal to understand and compare important educational issues around the world. Bray and Thomas (1995) suggest a framework for examining global issues that occurs in comparative education research, yet are limited to a single context or country. Their framework illustrates educational comparison in three prospective areas, and suggests that the intersection of any of these areas provides a means of comparison beyond traditional geographic boundaries. These areas include: geographic locations, aspects of education and society, and non-locational demographic groups. This framework allows for an opportunity for micro-level studies within studies with a global understanding and approach to education issues. While this research is bound within a single context, the international nature of gender issues such as ECE, women's agency and empowerment, and child abuse require a comparative and international approach to the examination of these factors in Cambodia.

The 2014 Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) data used in this research also is situated within an international perspective. DHS data are collected in multiple countries and UNICEF works closely with the DHS framework to develop the Multiple Indicator Cluster

Survey (MICS) in order to offer comparative data sources and methods across a broad range of countries. Therefore, the CDHS is developed, and data are collected, with the intention that findings can be compared across countries, even when individual studies are not comparative studies in and of themselves. This research speaks to the international perspective of a CIE approach. All of these factors intersect to form a research question that is best answered through the theories and methods of Comparative and International Education.

Chapter II Literature Review

The complex relationship between contact with ECE programs, women, and justifications of child abuse is supported by a body of research that is broadly dispersed across a number of disciplines including social work, psychology, health, international development and comparative and international education (Bower-Russa, Knutson, & Winebarger, 2001; Featherstone, 1999; Hobcraft, 1993; MacMillan, Wathen, Barlow, Fergusson, Leventhal, & Taussig, 2009). Research regarding justifications of child abuse remains elusive in the literature and mothers' perpetuation of child abuse remains a controversial topic in feminist research, due to the potential of stigmatizing women further (Wise, 2013). A review of family violence research, mostly conducted in Western contexts, indicates that several factors are related to mothers and child abuse, but that exercising control in families where they are oppressed is important in understanding mothers and child abuse (Keiski, Flinck, Kaunonen, & Paavilainen, 2016). The following chapter explores the broad body of literature related to mothers and child abuse and examines the limited research which considers the role of patriarchal power, particularly within families, on mothering and child abuse.

This literature review also explores the research surrounding early childhood education and mothers with a consideration of mothers' involvement in early childhood stimulation and three aspects of women's agency: decision-making, justifications of domestic violence and access to information. This chapter also reviews the scant literature related to women and their involvement in the burden or "joys" of supporting children's educational development in early childhood and encompasses an examination of literature, which moves away from the established analysis of the benefit of parental, and in particular mothers', involvement in educational activities as important for child's academic achievement and development. Instead, this body of literature expands into the realm of the impact of parental involvement on mothers.

Research includes early childhood education programs with and without parenting programs as well as an exploration of the social learning possibilities of early childhood education programs for parents. Centering all of this research around the Cambodian context is challenging as the literature related to Cambodia is sparse. However, explorations of other developing contexts are considered.

The Cambodian Context

History. Cambodia has a recent history of violence and genocide, which initiated in 1975 with the takeover of the Khmer Rouge and the establishment of the regime under the title Democratic Kampuchea (DK). In the violent years from 1975 to 1979, the DK regime was responsible for the death of over 20 percent of the Cambodian population through starvation, overwork, disease and execution (Kiernan, 1996). Although the regime was overthrown in 1979, the Khmer Rouge continued to control portions of Cambodia, accompanied with outbreaks of violence, until 1996 when the last members surrendered to the government. This period in Cambodian history was shown to have traumatic effects on children, many of whom are now parents themselves (Realmuto, Masten, Carole, Hubbard, Groteluschen, & Chhun, 1992), which can play a role in the lives of women and children in early childhood programs. The experience of violence during childhood can perpetuate cycles of violence into adulthood, and can be linked to increased family violence and child abuse (Heyman & Slep, 2002; Whitaker, et al., 2008), as women who experience violence during their childhood are more likely to perpetuate or justify family violence as adults (Heyman & Slep, 2002; Maker, Shah & Agha, 2005). Cambodia's recent history involving the Khmer Rouge plays a role in understanding the acceptance of violence against women and children in Cambodian society (Brickell, 2014; Chang, Rhee & Berthold, 2008; Field, Om, Kim & Vorn, 2011; Miles & Thomas, 2007). Patterns of intergenerational violence have been examined as a result of genocide and war and research

indicates that these experiences can perpetuate intergenerational family and societal violence (Palosaari, Punamaki, Qouta, & Diab, 2013; Rieder & Elbert, 2013; Weingarten, 2004), including child abuse and domestic violence (Cantani, 2010; Saile, Ertl, Neuner, & Catani, 2014).

Cambodia's collectivist and patriarchal society continues to struggle with issues of gender inequality, traditional attitudes regarding gender and domestic violence (Brickell & Chant, 2010; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014a; Smith-Heffner, 1999). Gender-based attitudes and beliefs are an obstacle to gender equity, as highlighted in Cambodia's National Strategic Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, the Neary Rattanak IV (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014a). Specifically, parents' gender-based attitudes and beliefs are cited as significant barriers to gender equality as parents consider girls' education less valuable due to the traditional role of women as wives and mothers (Velasco, 2004). The Ministry of Women's Affairs in Cambodia has stressed the need to address these attitudes in Cambodia in order to affect changes in a multitude of areas, including education and domestic violence, and has recommended educational interventions as a potential solution (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014b).

The violence of the Khmer Rouge lives on in the lives of many women in Cambodia and is an important aspect of history that is relevant to the prevalence of domestic violence and child abuse. Cambodia's recent genocidal history, particularly violence against women such as rape and forced marriage, can impact the level of domestic violence in years following the conflict (Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000; La Mattina, 2017) and genocide compounded Cambodia's long history of traditional women's roles and expectations through forced marriages and violence against women (Yount & Carrera, 2006). Additionally, during this time education ceased to exist (Clayton, 1998), and many women's educational experiences were interrupted, causing

widespread illiteracy and hindering advancements in women's equality (Brickell, 2011; Frieson, 2011).

Cambodia has made significant strides in rebuilding its education system after the Khmer Rouge and the rapid expansion of ECE programs and women's empowerment initiatives reflect a focus on education and development (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014b). As Cambodia continues to rebuild its education system, the government relies on the proliferation of NGOs and INGOs to fill the gap in government capacity to provide educational services. This has resulted in numerous programs and initiatives related to education, gender and education, and gender in ECE programs. Currently, the Cambodian government seeks to bring this multitude of ECE programs, under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) through a sub decree establishing minimum standards for early childhood programs and bringing organizations together for a common goal of quality ECE programs in Cambodia (MoEYS, 2017). It is an important time for influencing and establishing policy and standards related to ECE programs. As the development of quality of early childhood programs continues, the impacts on mothers should be considered and the parent education component of the programs should be utilized to support women.

The state of ECE in Cambodia. The Cambodian preschool system serves students from age 0 to 6 years old and their families. As of 2016, 190,000 children in Cambodia attend early childhood programs, with approximately 33 percent of Cambodia's children under six years old attending some form of early childhood education (MoEYS, 2017). The Cambodian government provides nine years of free compulsory education in primary and lower secondary grades, however, early childhood education is not part of the compulsory education system (Ogisu & Williams, 2016). State preschool programs are fully regulated by the MoEYS including infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum, learning materials, etc., and do not contain parenting

programs. These are mostly located in urban areas, but are expanding in order to make up for the lack of state and private preschools in Cambodia in rural areas (UNICEF, 2016).

The MoEYS has expanded the early childhood education programming with an emphasis on investing early and focusing on communities and families in ensuring equitable and quality education for young learners (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2010). A challenge remains in providing early childhood education for families in rural areas, which has led to the establishment of a system consisting of four types of preschools: state preschools, private preschool providers, community-based preschools and home-based preschools. In particular, the home-based and community-based systems of ECE evolved to address the gap in early childhood services available in rural areas (Rao & Pearson, 2009). Recently, the Cambodian government has increased focus on the expansion of community and home-based preschool in order to fill this gap in services (Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, 2014a).

The distinction between community and home-based preschools is difficult to discern and the terms are often used interchangeably. Community-based programs have teachers from the community who do not have teaching credentials, but who often receive training to implement curriculum. Home-based preschools utilize “core mothers” who are also participants in the programs as teachers. Both of these forms of preschool focus on a parenting curriculum that centers around child development, nutrition, health and parenting skills while also accommodating young children and providing pre-primary learning experiences. There is limited research on the services that home-based preschools provide (UNICEF, 2016), as many of these services are provided through international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Kamerman, 2002), which only publish findings within the organization. These organizations often provide community-based preschool services, which are similar to home-based preschools. The proliferation of organizations outside of the government providing

ECE services has resulted in a variety of program curricula offered to children, families and communities.

In addition to domains related to child development such as cognitive, physical, social and emotional development, some government ECE programs and international organizations, such as Save the Children and Plan International, have strong family and parenting programs which seek to educate parents about early childhood development, nutrition, parenting practices and participation in early stimulation activities such as reading and counting with children as an attempt to stimulate early cognitive development and learning (Howell, Pisani, Kou, & Hok, 2017; Pearson, et al., 2017). Some programs implement gender transformative approaches, which seeks to alter gender inequity and power imbalances between men and women and girls and boys (Plan International, 2017). Some of these programs are implemented within government schools and focus on child friendly approaches to education which seek to reduce child mistreatment and strengthen parenting skills (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2014a; Reimer, 2012; UNICEF, 2011). While not all ECE programs have gender equity and child rights focuses, or parent education components, strong parent involvement in early childhood programs in Cambodia create points of interaction for women as they pick up and drop off their children, interact with teachers, and potentially strengthen their social networks with other women (Aaltio-Marjosola, 2008; Alfred, 2009), creating multifaceted and holistic approaches to ECE and engaging mothers to varying degrees.

What follows is an examination of previous research, as well as gaps in the literature, related to the key factors of this dissertation. A review of the literature considers the relevant empirical research in the areas of child abuse, ECE, women's agency and mothers' involvement in learning activities and research that investigates how these factors interact. Related to these concepts is the concept of women and mothering as later framed by feminist theory.

Child Abuse

Child abuse, also discussed in the literature as child maltreatment or child violence, can be defined as “any acts of commission or omission by a parent, caregiver or other adult resulting in harm, potential for, or threat of harm to a child (0-18 years of age) even if the harm is unintentional” (Antai, Braithwaite, & Clerk, 2016). Numerous factors predicting child abuse have been identified in an effort to provide preventative measures and interventions for children and families. These factors include parental stress (Peltonen, Ellonen, Pösö, & Lucas, 2014), parents’ history of abuse in childhood or a history of interpersonal violence (Chen & Chan, 2016; Milner & Chilamkurti, 199; Stith, et al., 2009), poverty and low education (Jackson, et al., 1999) and a lack of access to resources (Keiski, Flinck, Kaunonen, & Paavilainen, 2016) and approval of the use of physical abuse as a form of discipline (Bower-Russa, Knutson, & Winebarger, 2001; Jackson et al., 1999). A history of domestic violence also plays a role in the perpetuation of child abuse, with women who witnessed domestic violence as a child or are victims of domestic violence in their interpersonal relationships as adults, being more likely to abuse their children (Damant et al., 2010; Jouriles, McDonald, Slep, Heyman, & Garrido, 2008; Peled, 2011). The factor of interpersonal, or domestic, violence against women as a risk factor for child abuse is particularly relevant to this research and is discussed in detail later as it relates to women’s agency. However, the factors associated with the perpetuation of child abuse are far from clear. Additionally, many studies focus on factors associated with the immediate family or individuals perpetuating child abuse, and often ignore broader socio-cultural factors such as women’s agency and empowerment.

Belsky (1980) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggest that the consideration of child abuse requires a delineation of individual, family, community and cultural factors which converge onto the perpetuation of child abuse and highlights the complexity of factors involved in child abuse.

They argue that factors associated with child abuse include socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes, and social institutions along with family and individual factors such as history of abuse in the family and individual characteristics. Recently, research has examined child abuse from this ecological perspective to take into account the role of broader social influences, as well as social networks (Maguire-Jack & Showalter, 2015; Rodriguez & Tucker, 2015). This perspective suggests that institutions such as education as well as beliefs surrounding the role of the child and socio-cultural acceptance of violence within the family plays a role in child abuse.

Conversely, this research indicates that communities and educational systems can provide support in parenting and social networks that mitigate some aspects of child abuse (Maguire-Jack & Showalter, 2016; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2010). In Cambodia, this is particularly important given the history of violence, the prevalence of family violence, and the cultural norms which keep family violence “within the family.” This approach also suggests that educational systems could be important in the relationship between mothers and justifications of child abuse by providing support and education regarding child abuse. This framework does not provide a feminist perspective which specifically considers women’s empowerment and agency as facets of child abuse, and therefore leaves power dynamics unexamined.

Although there is an extensive body of research on the topic of child abuse, few studies consider justifications of child abuse. Dietrich, Berkowitz, Kadushin, and McGloin, (1990) considered factors that influence justifications of child abuse, including parental stress and child transgressions, and found that parents were less likely to justify child abuse if the abuse was committed out of anger or emotional duress. The study did not explore if particular child transgressions were considered as justifications of child abuse. Research on child abuse and justifications of child abuse research is largely conducted in Western contexts where issues of

child abuse and child protection are well-researched, community programs and interventions are available, and reporting systems for child abuse are in place to protect young children and to prosecute child abuse on a broader community and society level (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotnick, 2017).

A recent quantitative study in Cambodia uses 2014 CDHS data to explore gender differences between mothers and fathers regarding justifications of child abuse and to explore predictors of justifications of child abuse. Results indicate that mothers were more likely to agree with justifications of child abuse than fathers and that parents who agree with justifications of domestic violence were also significantly more like to justify child abuse (Nho & Seng, 2017). The findings indicate that, in Cambodia, examining mothers' justifications of child abuse is critical in addressing child protection and that mothers are important agents in decreasing child abuse. However, to date there are limited studies considering mothers' justifications of child abuse in Cambodia and a significant gap in the understanding of child abuse in Cambodia and similar contexts.

Maternal child abuse. The consideration of mothers and child abuse is a recent phenomenon in the literature. Early research focused on parents, without regard to gender, parental psychological factors associated with child abuse (Cicchetti & Carlson, 1989; Wolfe, 1985), on fathers as perpetrators (Guterman & Lee, 2005), or on women as victims of domestic violence alongside victims of child abuse without consideration of their own agency (Edleson, 1999; Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Moylan, 2008). Although women are often primary caretakers and spend more time with children, until recently, the potentially unique experiences of women as perpetrators of child abuse was widely ignored (Featherstone, 1999; Wise, 2013). Some literature tended to place women and children together as victims of domestic violence, while other research in social work and intervention research tended to place women as

a “culpable victim,” acknowledging them as victims of domestic violence while also blaming them for not protecting their children (Featherstone, 1996; Featherstone, 1999). The role of women as mothers is intimately linked with social constructions of the feminine and with women’s agency indicating that women’s experiences and factors related to child abuse differ from men’s (Featherstone, 1996; Glenn, 2016). While consideration of the gendered experiences of mothers who abuse their children have become more prominent, maternal child abuse remains on the fringes of literature surrounding family violence, child violence and child protection research. However, research suggests that examining maternal child abuse as a gendered experience is crucial for child protection in order to fully understand the role of gender in family violence and power dynamics, as factors associated with maternal child abuse might differ from those of fathers.

Predictors of maternal child abuse have been examined, though largely in Western contexts, indicating that potential factors related to child abuse are numerous and gendered. A study of 2,716 Finish mothers, Peltonen, Ellonen, Pösö, and Lucas, (2014) found that prior experience of abuse as a child, use of violence as a form of discipline, and a lack of support were predictors for child abuse, while Ateah and Durrant (2005) added maternal acceptance of abuse, perceived gravity of child’s behavior and level of anger to a developing list of potential factors contributing to maternal child abuse. However, Keiski, Flinck, Kaunonen, and Paavilainen (2016) suggest that women who abuse their children suffer a crisis of conception of self which centers on experiences of female identity and gender role expectations. This qualitative study of female perpetrators of child abuse concluded that abuse stemmed from feeling a sense of “losing themselves,” particularly when mothers felt that they were unable to fulfill expectations surrounding motherhood, and that feelings of worthlessness surrounding the loss of self-surfaced when children, for example, disobeyed them. The authors noted that women who had “feelings

of worthlessness led to the women feeling invisible or voiceless in the family” (Keiski, Flinck, Kaunonen, & Paavilainen, 2016, p.422), pointing to a connection between child abuse and issues of women’s empowerment and agency, as women used violence to exert their power over their children and to have a voice in the family.

Few studies regarding maternal child abuse have been conducted outside of Western contexts and take into account broader social influences such as community attitudes towards family violence, culturally accepted child discipline approaches, or societal violence, such as genocide (Berckmoes, Eichelshaim, Rutayisire, Richters, & Hola, 2017; Miles & Thomas, 2007; Tajima & Harachi, 2010). This indicates a gap in the research in applying broader contextual influences, as suggested in ecological approaches to child abuse, particularly when considering mothers in non-Western contexts. It is noted that justifying child abuse and perpetrating child abuse are not the same, however scant research on justifications of child abuse despite the collection of this data in numerous countries administering the DHS limits a review of the literature on justifications of child abuse.

While the factors associated with maternal child abuse are complex and varied, issues of women’s power, or powerlessness, and victimization within family structures, play a role in maternal child abuse. This is supported by a large body of research linking domestic violence, a critical component of much of the women’s empowerment data explored by the DHS datasets (See Kishor & Subaiya, 2008), and maternal child abuse (Antai et al., 2016; Dalal, Lawoko, & Jansson, 2010; Guterman, Lee, Lee, Waldfogel, & Rathouz, 2009; Herrenkohl et al., 2008; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). Studies using the Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey data (Antai et al., 2016; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988) found that women who agreed with justifications of domestic violence were more likely to be perpetrators of maternal child abuse. Considering that justifications of domestic violence and exposure of domestic violence both predict child abuse,

justifications of child abuse might have factors similar to the perpetration of child abuse. Importantly, women's justifications of domestic violence and child abuse might be more susceptible to social learning and educational influences, as compared to the ability to decreasing incidents of domestic violence and child abuse (Chen & Chan, 2016; MacMillan, Wathen, Barlow, Fergusson, Leventhal, & Taussig, 2009). By placing power at the center of justifications of child abuse, the ability to change justifications of child abuse by changing women's understanding of family dynamics and issues of power supports placing women and women's empowerment and agency as a centerpiece for this research (Stromquist, 2006a).

Early Childhood Education and Mothers

Missing in the literature surrounding women and early childhood education is a holistic consideration the relationship between early childhood education programs, women's empowerment and justifications of child abuse. The proliferation of early childhood programs in Cambodia, the strong parenting component and/or parent involvement discourse related to early childhood education and the high levels of child violence in Cambodian society warrant an examination of how ECE programs impact women's empowerment and agency and their justifications of child abuse. While this literature is lacking, the evidence discussed above disjointedly considers the relationships between mothers and early childhood education. Within this fractured body of literature is an examination of women's contact with or participation in early childhood education programs and maternal involvement in ECE programs, feminist concepts of mothering and maternal involvement, as well as literature surrounding mothers, mother-child relationships, and mothers and child abuse.

Studies which consolidate these concepts and consider the relationship between them are sparse and are primarily focused in Western contexts such as the United States. Ellenbogen, Klein, and Wekerle (2014) reviewed the impacts of early childhood education programs on child

abuse and suggested that ECE programs provide support for abused children, but also provide support for abusive families in terms of respite from the stress of childrearing and a monitoring system in the form of ECE teachers who are able to intervene and/or report abuse in families. This review of literature surrounding ECE and child abuse lacks a focus on women as mothers and maternal child abuse, though Zoritch, Roberts, and Oakley (1998) reported positive benefits for mothers whose children were in day care in the form of educational gains, increased employment opportunities and improved relationships with their children in a review of preschool program interventions.

Specifically, mothers whose children participated in early childhood education programs were able to pursue educational goals and obtain gainful employment (Berrueta-Clement, 1984; Ramey, MacPhee, & Yeates, 1982). Videotaped interactions of mothers and children participating in early childhood education programs showed improved quality of assistance, meaning that mothers were better able to provide developmentally appropriate stimulation and instruction (Spiker, Ferguson, & Brooks-Gunn, 1993). Additionally, mothers in Head Start Programs provided increased quality support for their children and decreased use of physical discipline in the form of spanking (Green, et al, 2018; Love, et al., 2005). This body of research indicates that ECE programs can provide support for mothers and that mother-child relationships can improve due to more skillful interactions between children and mothers (Zoritch et al., 1998), even if the ECE program does not have a parenting intervention component. Important to this research is an underlying feminist approach which considers how women are impacted by contact with early childhood education programs and how this relates to their justifications of child abuse and serves as an underlying current or approach to understanding how women's issues are related to ECE programs in Cambodia.

Maternal involvement in early stimulation. Within the field of education exists a “parent involvement” script which touts parent involvement in children’s educational endeavors as universally positive (De Carvalho, 2000; Fernandez & Lopez, 2017; Lareau, 1996). In early childhood education parent involvement, also called early stimulation, includes educational activities involving parents such as reading books, playing, singing, counting and is an integral part of many early childhood education programs with important implications for child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Fowler, 2017; Gordon, 1971; Grindal, et al., 2016). While research indicates that parent involvement and early stimulation benefits children, there is little consideration of the impacts of maternal involvement in early childhood education activities on the women who are primarily responsible for engaging in early stimulation.

A large body of research supports the argument that parent involvement is important in children’s academic attainment and achievement (Dimmock, O’Donoghue, & Robb, 1996a) and defines and explores the impact of parent involvement on a myriad of aspects of children’s educational experiences, socio-cultural factors impacting parent involvement, and advocating for increased parent involvement through interventions and school-based approaches (for reviews see Castro, Esposito-Casas, Lopez-Martin, Lizasoain, Navarro-Asencio, & Gaviria, 2015; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Dimmock, O’Donoghue, & Robb, 1996). In early childhood education, parent involvement is widely examined and considered a critical aspect of early childhood education (Duch, 2005; Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000; Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015) and parents’ ability to support “early stimulation” through activities such as reading, counting and language development is incorporated into early childhood education programs supported by international organizations around the world (Grace, 2018; Chinen & Bos, 2016; Sayre, Devercelli, Neuman, & Wodon, 2015). Parent involvement is beneficial for children and clearly important, however it is one piece of a complex puzzle

regarding student achievement. Eng, Mulsow, Kostina-Ritchey, and Zvonkovic (2017) found that, in Cambodia, parents played an important role in the educational outcomes of young adults, although a lack of parental support could be mitigated through other social support and networks to support academic achievement. This brings into focus a broader understanding of the implications of parental involvement and critically examines the parent involvement script touting its universal necessity, importance and benefits by considering its impact on women as increased domestic duties.

Research in CIE and International Educational Development (IED) broadly supports parent involvement in children's education, however, this body of research focuses on “parents” as a unit, often overlooking the reality that it is usually mothers who are involved in these activities and ignores the importance of child-rearing and educational practices on women’s social identity (Davies, 2003; New & David, 1985; Reay, 1998; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). This label of “parental” involvement ignores the implications of the role of women as primary education workers (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Luttrell, 2016; O’Brien, 2008; Polakow, 1993; Reay, 1998; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) which has important ramifications, particularly in patriarchal contexts such as in Cambodia, and is sometimes used interchangeably for mothers in the research related to parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2006).

However, parent involvement is a gendered activity (O’Brien, 2007) that varies based on maternal education level, class and culture (Griffith and Smith, 2005; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Reay, 1988), and which has complex implications for women and their identities, and can serve to reproduce deeply internalized gender ideologies (O’Brien, 2007). A qualitative study conducted in Australia with middle-class mother/child-dyads examining mothers’ involvement in homework also showed that “parent involvement” was not only gendered work, but also created

a stressful environment and strained mother/child relationships, countering the “parent involvement” narrative that more parent involvement is inherently good for children (Hutchinson, 2012). Quantitative data examining mothers and parent involvement is limited, with most quantitative studies focusing on parents, and ignoring the gendered nature of the parent involvement script.

Reay (1998) places gender and social class at the center of parent involvement by examining the ways in which women are held responsible for the work of parental involvement. By acknowledging the role of this work in the reproduction of inequalities in education Reay gives recognition to intersectionality in feminism and mothers’ involvement in children’s schooling. She asserts that ignoring a feminist perspective and feminist intersectionality in parent involvement supports the reproduction of inequality. Because this work does not involve direct contribution to market forces, it is overlooked and reinforced as a “labour of love.” The realities of mothers’ involvement in children's schooling are complex, but ultimately serve to reinforce the status quo of gender, ethnic, and economic inequalities.

A focus on mothering and maternal involvement in children’s educational activities indicates that while parent involvement in educational activities may support children, the implications for women, particularly those of lower class and education levels, as the added requirements of parental involvement for women could translate into negative interactions and relationships with their children. This is particularly important in Cambodia, where less than two percent of mothers indicated that fathers participated in educational activities with their children at home (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ICF International, 2014). This gendered- division of educational labor indicates that women in Cambodia are held primarily responsible for the educational care of young children, along with occupational and traditional domestic duties. This could have implications for women’s

empowerment and the added stress of educational support placed on mothers could have implications for their relationships with their children, given that stress is a key predictor of maternal child abuse.

David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, and Standing (1996) suggest that the dominant discourse of “parent involvement” is a form of oppression that mothers face in which they either comply with the dominant discourse or fall into the “good-enough -mothering” dominant discourse. This discourse casts everything that mothers do as either hindering or enhancing a child’s education. While they note that race, socioeconomic status and education levels affect the experience of this oppression differently, with white, middle class women being closer to the theoretical norm, they found that guilt is the common structure that solidifies women’s adherence to these discourses. They also indicate that it is women who must adhere to the “parent involvement” discourse, as mothers are primarily responsible for addressing children’s educational needs.

The body of research investigating mothers and parent involvement in children’s education provides important understandings of women’s experiences as educational workers, however, the research relies heavily on qualitative approaches and is primarily focused on mothers in Western, middle-class contexts. There is no research examining the effects of maternal involvement in educational activities on women or on their relationships with their young children in Cambodia or in similar developing contexts. This presents a significant gap in the literature given the complexities of developing contexts, such as poverty and strong patriarchal beliefs.

Women’s Agency

Defining the concept of agency is complicated by a myriad of definitions and operationalizations of the term. Kabeer (2005) describes agency as “the processes by which choices are made and put into effect” (p.14) and includes it, along with resources and

achievement, as one of three components of women's empowerment, which are all nearly inseparable from one another in the concept of women's empowerment. In her discussion of agency, Stromquist (2006a) leans heavily on Kabeer's conceptualization of agency but also expands on her own earlier understandings of a need for individual agency in the conceptualization and measurement of women's empowerment and to include women's engagement "in collective forms of support, organisation, and mobilisation" (p. 308). A more expansive discussion of agency is addressed in the theoretical framework of this work, however, the following review of relevant literature related to CIE and the conceptualization of agency is necessary for thorough discussion of the literature related to women's agency, child abuse and contact with early childhood education programs. It is important to note that women's empowerment and women's agency are conceptualized differently within the DHS literature (Kishor & Subaiya, 2008), with the following factors defined as women's empowerment in DHS literature, but conceptualized as women's agency in CIE literature. What follows is a review of the three key factors related to women's agency used in this research: justifications of domestic violence, decision making and access to information.

Justifications of domestic violence. For many Cambodian women, domestic violence is considered an appropriate response to perceived transgressions of gender norms (Ho, 1990; Jack & Astbury, 2014; National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ICF International, 2010) and as a "normal" part of the experience of women (Brickell & Chant, 2010). Cambodian law supports these beliefs with a system that focuses on reconciliation, and harmony and tends to blame the victim for incidences of domestic violence (Brickell, 2017). Nearly fifty percent of women in Cambodia agreed with at least one justification of domestic violence, citing that reasons such as burning food and neglecting the children were justified reasons for a husband physically abusing his wife (National Institute of Public Health, National

Institute of Statistics and ICF International, 2014). In recent years, the number of Cambodians accepting domestic violence has declined, with 32.8 percent of Cambodian women and twenty-seven percent of Cambodian men agreeing that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten (Fulu, Jewkes, Roselli & Garcia-Moreno, 2013).

In Cambodia, justifications of domestic violence are linked to gender and patriarchal social forces. It is noteworthy that more women than men agree with justifications of domestic violence, which could be related to the codification of gender norms in the Chbab Srey (Brickell, 2011; Nho & Seng 2017). The Chbab Srey also suggests that women should quietly bear the burden of domestic violence and ensure that issues of domestic violence remain in the home, embedding a culture of silence around the issue of domestic violence and reinforcing its acceptance (Anderson & Grace, in Press; Brickell, 2014; Zimmerman, 1994). Decreasing acceptance of the justification of domestic violence is a positive sign, but a smaller decrease in acceptance of domestic violence for women is troubling and underexplored. Findings regarding the acceptance of domestic violence are linked to inequitable gender attitudes (Yount, Halim, Hynes & Hillman, 2011) as well as perceptions of domestic violence as a private, family affair (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010).

Research regarding domestic violence in Cambodia is expanding, though current studies are limited with a gap between large national surveys exploring the topic and qualitative studies examining the experiences and attitudes of women in depth (Eng, Li, Mulsow, & Fischer 2010; Eng, Szmodis, & Grace, 2017; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010; Yount & Carrera, 2006). The Cambodian Demographic Health Survey (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ICF International, 2014) also provides information regarding domestic violence and attitudes regarding domestic violence, but this data is descriptively analyzed in the form of a CDHS report. One study examined the role of remarriage in domestic violence in

Cambodia using CDHS data (Eng, Szmodis & Grace, 2017), but this study provides only a view of the interaction of marital status and domestic violence. While some research examines justifications of domestic violence, there is no research considering how these justifications might be impacted through educational settings. Modeling the latent concept of agency requires a multi-faceted understanding of women's ability to make decisions in their own lives, particularly at the level of household or family. For this reason, household decision-making is considered a crucial aspect of measuring women's agency and empowerment.

Decision-making. Household and interfamilial relationships are a focus of the disempowerment of women, and decision-making within the family and home encompasses the ability to make choices and decision, which lies at the heart of agency (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). Literature which looks at women's decision-making ability considers outcomes in a wide variety of fields including education, health, and international development (Grabe, 2012; Kabeer, 2005; Mabsout & Van Staveren, 2010; Stromquist, 2015) indicates that decision-making and implications for women's agency, particularly regarding domestic violence, are mixed. In general, women who participate in decision-making in their own lives are seen as having more agency, though Malhotra and Schuler (2005) caution against making broader claims about empowerment based on a single dimension such household level factors. Vyas and Watts (2009) found that that financial autonomy could be a protective measure against domestic violence or could be associated with increases in domestic violence when financial autonomy transgresses patriarchal assumptions regarding male roles and leads to domestic violence as a means to maintain control over resources. In this way, financial autonomy could also threaten women's agency and overall well-being. Additionally, decision-making as an indicator of women's agency is highly contextual. What might be a heavily weighted indicator of women's agency in one

context, for example women's mobility in a public domain, might be less relevant in another context where women's mobility is less restricted.

The contextual nature of decision-making is important in Cambodia, as female-only household decision-making can be disempowering. Seventy-six percent of Cambodian women are in the workforce (Asian Development Bank, 2015) and Cambodian women are often responsible for budgeting for the household, which could indicate that women have significant levels of decision-making regarding finances. However, this level of control over family finances also opens the possibility for household conflict, as men are excluded from the decision-making process. While women may have the possibility to make these decisions, the consequences of female-only decision-making could negatively impact other areas of agency, such as freedom from domestic violence, and create a source of conflict and potential abuse. Joint decision-making in Cambodia, particularly in the area of decision-making regarding finances, could be a better indication of women's power in household bargaining/decision-making and women's agency (Eng, Li, Mulsow, & Fischer, 2010). A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that married couples who jointly made decisions regarding finances had the highest level of gender equal decision-making between men and women. In households in which women controlled financial decision-making, women had a higher level of decision-making but did not protect them against financial deprivation (Vogler & Palh, 1994) Other areas of decision-making, such as health care decisions, decisions to visit family and friends could better indicate female-only decision-making and agency if considering women's participating independent from their husbands in the ways that previous literature suggests.

However, defining agency only in terms of freedom from domestic violence and ability to participate in decision-making is limiting. In order to make choices in attitudes and decision making, women must also gain access to information that could influence these choices. An

understanding of how women gain information that can ultimately support their choices in attitudes and decision making is critical in examining women's agency (Hassim, 1999; Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

Access to information. Kishor (2005) described women's empowerment as the ability to "access information, take decisions, and act in their own interests, or the interests of those who depend on them" (p.1). Yet much of the literature surrounding women's empowerment and agency focuses on their ability to make decisions and act upon them. The ability to access information is an overlooked aspect of women's empowerment and agency and their ability to expand their own understandings of how to make decisions and act upon them. Literacy is a key component in accessing print information and is a key indicator in Cambodia where only 50 percent of women are literate (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ICF International, 2014). This low literacy rate stems from the destruction of the education system by the Khmer Rouge and the view that education was a threat to the state (Ogisu & Williams, 2016). Low levels of literacy decrease women's ability to access health care services, educational services, and other key institutions which support their agency and empowerment (Gallaway & Bernasek, 2004; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005; Plan International Cambodia, 2017). When speaking of Cambodian women under Colonial France, Frierson stated that "Becoming literate enabled women to negotiate their claims to the public domains of power" (Frieson, 2011).

Literacy is an empowering starting point for being able to access information in print. Zubair (2004) explains that uses of literacy, or literacy practices, help women "resist, challenge and negotiate change in the traditional gender ideologies" (p. 85) and that women can find agency and voice through literacy practices. However, women's literacy is also a stepping stone into supporting women's agency. Literacy can be used as a gatekeeper to empowerment and

agency as illiterate women are more reliant on their husbands or other literate males, to access health care and educational opportunities for their children (Rockhill, 1987). Literature surrounding women's empowerment, agency and literacy previously focused on programs which support women's literacy, thereby supporting women's agency, but the debate surrounding women's literacy has moved beyond whether women read and write to encompass how they are using literacy in their daily lives (Graff, 1981; Robinson-Pant, 2004). Agency lies in women's choice to access information. To be literate or illiterate does not mean that women are engaging information that might support their ability to make their decisions for themselves or for others. While literacy is not the only step in supporting women's agency, it is a crucial skill in accessing information.

Justifications of domestic violence, decision-making and access to information are key factors in conceptualizing women's agency in CIE. This understanding of women's agency also informs a broader theory of women's empowerment. What follows is an exploration of theoretical considerations related to women's empowerment, agency and knowledge transformation as a feminist framework for examining the relationship between ECE programs, mothers and their justifications of child abuse.

Theoretical Framework: Empowerment, Agency and Knowledge Transformation

This study examines mothers' contact with early childhood education programs and women's justifications of child abuse within a feminist theoretical framework and in particular women's empowerment and women's agency. For this work, Stromquist's (2015) framework of knowledge empowerment is useful in examining changes in women's justifications of child abuse, as it provides a consideration of how education and knowledge impacts women's understandings of oppressive power relations in their lives. Centered around Kabeer (2005) and Stromquist's (2006a) definition of agency, discussed in the previous section, this framework

moves from a strictly individual understanding of empowerment to an approach that includes the social and institutional influences of contact with education programs. Understanding the usefulness of a knowledge empowerment framework requires a broader look at critical feminist theory and theories of women's empowerment with encompassing understandings of agency, power and knowledge. The involvement of international development actors such as INGO's, NGO's and international initiatives surrounding the largely separate spheres of women's empowerment and early childhood education intersect at a local level with sociocultural beliefs and practices regarding power in families, communities and society as it relates to women and children in Cambodia. A Comparative and International Education (CIE) perspective is critical for understanding how global issues such as women's empowerment and the internationally influenced institution of early childhood education impact women and their justifications of child abuse.

Although women's empowerment has been a global priority in CIE and international education development (IED) research for decades, the global expansion of early childhood education initiatives is a relatively new, though rising, priority (Britto, et al., 2017; Norres & Barnett, 2010; Shawar & Shiffman, 2017). A women's empowerment theoretical framework is rarely applied to local ECE programs, despite the impact that these programs may have on the lives of women. This research challenges the assumption that ECE programming serves only the needs of the children involved in programs and that the women who interact with these programs are mere instruments of appropriate early childhood "best practices" supporting the developmental needs of their children. It is possible that contact with ECE programs supports mothers' agency and knowledge empowerment, as well as their children, however this has not been systematically studied. However, given the power of patriarchal forces in the lives of

women, it is also possible that this lack of examination of women's agency in Cambodia results in the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo.

What follows is a brief look at the history of women's empowerment, particularly in the field of international development, followed by an examination of women's empowerment and feminist theory as conceived and applied in comparative and international education and international education development research. This includes an examination of the core concepts of women's empowerment relevant to education and women's empowerment, namely agency, power and knowledge. Within these concepts, a Foucauldian discussion of power and knowledge, and Freire's approach of liberation pedagogy provide an essential, yet insufficient, critical lens for considering how global education institutions, such as ECE programs, and knowledge acquired from contact with these institutions, impact women's agency and power relations with their children.

The influential frameworks of women's empowerment developed by Kabeer (1999), Sen (1999) and Stromquist (2006a) provide conceptualizations of women's empowerment which are frequently applied to CIE and IED research, as they provide considerations of the role of education and knowledge in the transformation of power and empowerment in women's lives in developing contexts. These frameworks develop an understanding of women's agency and explores the possibilities of transforming unequal power dynamics through education and knowledge that can then be applied to formal education systems and the non-formal education and learning that is often a part of programming for women in contexts such as Cambodia. These frameworks are the foundation of Stromquist's (2015) most recently developed women's empowerment framework and, in particular, her development of knowledge empowerment as a component of women's empowerment, which places transformative learning and educational institutions as key to the processes involved in the conceptualization and measurement of

women's empowerment. This work expands on Stromquist's (2006b; 2008; 2015) focus on the ability of literacy programs to support women's empowerment and agency, by examining women's non-formal education through contact with ECE programs.

Finally, this research considers the application of Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework to Cambodian mothers' justifications of child abuse and the paths related to mothers' contact with ECE programs, agency, involvement in early stimulation activities, and justifications of child abuse. Particularly important is how internationally influenced institutions of education intersect with local socio-cultural beliefs and practices related to gender roles and stereotypes, mothering and children to influence mothers' justifications of child abuse. Critical to this conceptualization is the lack of attention and research related to mothers who come in contact with these programs and the lack of formal intersection between the two global issues of women's empowerment and ECE in CIE and IED. This is particularly relevant in ECE programming which uniquely intervenes in the lives of families, teachers and children in ways that other educational programs and institutions do not.

In Cambodia, the international development sector is a powerhouse in education, as the MoEYS lacks infrastructure and capacity to support educational programming, and international and local organizations have proliferated in an attempt to fill this gap. This influence of international education forces creates a context in which a knowledge empowerment framework can help predict the ways that ECE programming is impacting mothers and the way that they conceptualize their relationships with their children using a women's empowerment lens. Examining mothers' justifications of child abuse using this framework predicts that mothers' contact with ECE programs will result in increased knowledge regarding the forces in their lives which decrease agency and empowerment, including the use of child abuse as part of these

disempowering gender dynamics. This knowledge empowerment will lead mothers to re-evaluate, and abandon, justifications of child abuse.

Historical Origins of Women's Empowerment in International Development

Beginning in the 1980's, and with origins rooted in the debate of the global women's movement, the concept of women's empowerment was conceived by activists and theorists, and in particular the self-termed group of 'Third World Feminists' (Batiwala, 1994; Moser, 1989; Sen & Grown, 1985;) of the Global South. Stemming from the feminist movement, women's empowerment was envisioned to challenge and re-conceptualize women's role in power relationships within developing societies and to counter the western, middle class feminist movement, which has been criticized for its Western focus and lack of intersectionality acknowledging the diverse experiences of the group labeled "women" (hooks, 2001; Mohanty, 1988). While the concept was developed in the Global South, western frameworks of empowerment quickly developed, with empowerment becoming a "buzzword" in the 1990s in the field of international development.

Waves of feminist thought have influenced international education development since the 1970's. The first, the women in development (WID) approach, focused on women's access and contribution to national economic development and women as an untapped resource (Fennel & Arnot, 2007). Sometimes called the "mix women and stir approach," WID focused on access to education and supporting women's engagement in the workforce and economic development, leaving the multiple sources of women's exploitation unchallenged (Unterhalter, 2005). Replacing WID, was the Women and Development Approach (WAD).

WAD moved towards a consideration of the mutual construction of development processes of gender and development, and that opportunities for women to contribute to development were shaped by economic development (Fennel & Arnot, 2007). This approach

was quickly replaced with the Gender and Development (GAD), which moved the focus from women to the concept of gender. At this point, in the early 1990's, the concept of empowerment began to play a role in international education development as a path towards poverty alleviation, welfare and community participation within the GAD framework. With this, several women's empowerment frameworks were developed which indicated that schooling could either reproduce gender inequalities and disempower women and girls further or that it could be a transformative institution in which women and girls could begin to examine the patriarchal systems in which they lived (Kabeer, 1999; Longwe, 1998; Monkman, 2011; Stromquist, 2001, 2006). Additionally, the focus on girls' and women's access to education, or parity, began to shift towards a discussion of quality in education and a consideration of privileging women's experiences and voices within education systems (Unterhalter & Aikman, 2005) to break down the socially constructed notions of gender that are reproduced within education, explore the interplay between micro and macro perspectives, and emphasize the transformative nature of empowerment (Stromquist, 2015). In development contexts, women's empowerment also differentiates itself from concepts of gender equality, women's status, or women's autonomy, often used indiscriminately, through the distinct features of "process of change" and "agency" (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

In Cambodia, the call for gender equality and women's empowerment in international education development has been strong. While organizations and the government continue to call for changes in women's empowerment through education (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014a), the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of a patriarchal society continue to intersect locally with internationally inspired initiatives related to women's empowerment. Cambodian parents increasingly consider the education of girls and women as a valuable endeavor for families and national development (Velasco, 2001; 2004). However, there remains strong socio-

cultural beliefs and practices that reinforce practices of domestic violence, place men as heads of households and limit the educational opportunities of women (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014b). While this historical approach to women's empowerment has parallels in international education development in Cambodia, Cambodia's unique sociocultural context, along with a rapidly expanding education system, infuses internationally influenced initiatives regarding women's empowerment with local and contextual issues.

Conceptualizations of Women's Empowerment

Stromquist (2015) focuses on the definition of women's empowerment developed by Kabeer (2001), which contains the concept of process of change and agency, and distinguishes empowerment from general "power" by specifying that one cannot be empowered if one were not disempowered to begin with. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as "the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (p. 437). Stromquist (2015) expands upon this definition, adding that women's empowerment as "a set of knowledge, skills, and conditions that women must possess in order to understand their world and act upon it" (p. 308). Kabeer (1999) also identifies three levels of empowerment which help conceptualize the levels on which the process of change can occur. At the individual level, or immediate level, change can occur at the inner level, or in the concept of self, as well as access to material resources. At the intermediate level, change can occur within the family or household level, or change can occur at the "deeper" level which affects positionality within wider hierarchies of structural relations, such as in the economy or state.

Differentiation of these levels of empowerment disentangles the complexities and the numerous opportunities and approaches to conceptualizing and measuring women's empowerment, and highlights the complexity in defining and measuring agency as a process of women's empowerment. It also focuses the processes related to agency in order to acknowledge

the complexities of women's empowerment and support its conceptualization and measurement. The development of a "deeper" level of women's empowerment was necessary as it is often excluded from conceptualizations and measurement of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer also developed the need for subsequent action in women's empowerment, which aligns with Stromquist's (2001) assertion that awareness and action must be intimately linked. As she asserts that empowerment is 'the expansion of people's ability to make strategic choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437), it is through the term "ability" that education and knowledge present opportunities to support women's empowerment.

The ability to make strategic choices is understood through three interrelated concepts: resources, agency and achievements (Kabeer, 1999). It is through agency that women are able to engage the process of women's empowerment, thereby affecting what they can do with the resources which are conducted and acquired through the social relationships within the various institutions (family, schools, communities) that make up a society. While resources and achievements, or the outcomes of the combination of resources and agency, are integral to Kabeer's exploration of women's empowerment, her definition of agency provides a deeper understanding of the processes associated with women's pathways to increased choices in contexts in which they were previously denied. In this conceptualization of agency, Kabeer (2010) expands the notion of agency beyond observable action to include the meaning, motivation and purpose that women bring to their activity. In other words, women's *power within*. In this way, her definition of empowerment and an expanded concept of agency are useful for this work, however, Kabeer limits discussion of agency to decision-making conceptualizations of agency. While this is justified as the most frequently measured aspect of

agency and a central tenet to the concept of power (Lukes, 1974; McElroy, 1992), it is limiting and overlooks important components of agency that support women's empowerment.

At the heart of women's empowerment is the desire to change the power dynamics of social relationships involving women. Women's empowerment challenges the embedded power dynamics related to gender, yet also considers the processes involved in empowerment and the requirement that women be agentic in the transformation of these power dynamics (Kabeer, 1999). According to Kabeer (2010), often power is considered in its negative sense, or *power over*, which allows dominant groups to control the choices of others. However, women's empowerment theories embrace and seek to expand or transform women's *power within*, a cognitive aspect of power engaging how women view themselves. The concept of power within is concerned with women's sense of agency and their self-esteem and is critical for their conception of their ability to bring about change. Finally, a third conceptualization of power related to women's empowerment has a behavioral dimension, the *power to*, pertaining to women's ability to make empowering choices for themselves and to exert influence within their own lives and broader society (Kabeer, 2001a). The extensive use of the women's empowerment framework in international development has supported a number of conceptualizations, operationalizations, and approaches to measuring women's empowerment and women's agency, leading to strong practical applications to the theoretical concept of women's empowerment.

Women in developing contexts were initially viewed as passive players of social power dynamics, and therefore passive recipients in need of "empowering". In conceptualizing women's empowerment, Sen challenged this conception of women as "passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help" (1999, p. 191) by focusing on women's agency in the process of achieving well-being. Within this approach, of a woman's valued functionings and the resources

to achieve those functionings, i.e. their capabilities, women became active participants in their own empowerment. Kabeer describes this conceptualization of women's empowerment as resources combined with agency (Kabeer, 1999). Sen also differentiates between "realized" agency, in which women's agency is achieved through another, and "instrumental" agency in which women are active participants in the realization of their own conceptualized agency (Crocker & Robeyns, 2009). Factors such as women's ability to earn an independent income, secure employment outside of the home, obtain levels of literacy and education are all contributing factors to women's well-being, and therefore play an integral role in women's empowerment in international development (Sen, 1999).

While this approach has been lauded for its inclusivity and ability to establish women's well-being based on their own values and local contexts, this flexibility also makes it difficult to define and measure women's empowerment as conceptualized with the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2003; Robeyns, 2009). Sen's (1999) development of the capabilities approach to women's empowerment avoided an easily measurable set of outcomes defining well-being, as women uniquely define their own concept of well-being, which is clearly problematic for policy makers at a national level, who seek to measure empowerment outcomes and must choose how to support women's empowerment initiatives. Additionally, Sen does not consider women's capability to exercise freedom, which circumvents that the problem facing women is that it is not "what you are able to do or be with the goods at your disposal" but "your command over goods that may be circumscribed in the first place" (Iverson, 2003, p. 105). While Nussbaum (2003) builds on this conceptualization of women's empowerment and agency by providing a central list of capabilities, the capabilities approach continues to lack an explanation of the processes that support women's agency and empowerment. However, Sen's consideration of agency highlights

the central tenet of women at the helm of their own empowerment, which drives an understanding of knowledge transformation and empowerment.

While Kabeer and Sen's conceptualizations of women's empowerment and agency provide an important foundation, education and knowledge are not central to these theoretical and methodological frameworks. In response to this, Stromquist (2015) outlines a theoretical framework of women's empowerment which places knowledge and education at the center of the process of women's empowerment with women's agency driving social transformation through the transformation of women's knowledge of the social, cultural, political and psychological processes enabling or hindering their empowerment. She contends that this focus on process places women's empowerment as a theory of social change and emancipation in which processes and outcomes are intertwined. While this considers a broad and multi-faceted approach to women's empowerment, development of the concept of knowledge empowerment is particularly relevant to understanding how educational institutions and experiences with these institutions can transform women's agency and women's empowerment.

This work focuses on the single concept of knowledge empowerment within Stromquist's larger women's empowerment framework to consider the pathways and processes impacting agency and women's empowerment through contact with early childhood education programs. It is assumed that pathways between the key concepts in the literature review would impact knowledge empowerment primarily through knowledge transformation and education (formal or informal) of mothers. This is particularly relevant when considering justifications of child abuse, as justifications relate to the meaning, motivation and purpose discussed by Kabeer (1999) and expanded upon by Stromquist (2015) indicating that changes in women's agency can result in changes in their understandings of power dynamics in their own lives that are reinforced through violence.

This research does not seek to measure women's empowerment as a whole, but instead uses the knowledge empowerment framework within a larger understanding of women's empowerment to explore the impacts of knowledge and the institution of early childhood education on individual agency within the broader realm of women's empowerment. In Cambodia, women's agency, or their ability to make choices in their lives, is uniquely contextualized with high levels of women's employment, the sociocultural practice of placing women as managers of household finances, though not as breadwinners, and Chbab Srey which insists that women are the keepers of the home and supports women's silence in matter of domestic violence (Anderson & Grace, in press; Brickell, 2017; Eng, Szmodis & Grace, 2017).

The collective nature of Cambodian society, which places communities and social networks at the center of family life coupled with the proliferation of early childhood education programs and women's contact with early childhood education programs (Eng, Szmodis, Muslow, 2014), emphasizes the potential impacts on mothers through formal (i.e. parenting programs) and non-formal channels (i.e. social networks and informal interactions with teachers and mothers) of women's education and knowledge transformation. The transformation, or lack of transformation, of power and agency in the lives of mothers with children in ECE programs in Cambodia can be explained through the paths of knowledge and education using a knowledge empowerment framework (Stromquist, 2015). This recently developed framework supports the examination of the intersection of international issue of ECE programming, including child protection initiatives, with women's empowerment within the unique context of international education development surrounding and informing the beliefs and practices of Cambodian mothers related the power dynamics with their children.

Knowledge Empowerment Framework: Power, Agency and Knowledge Transformation

The knowledge empowerment component of Stromquist's (2015) women's empowerment framework places education (both formal and non-formal) and knowledge transformation at the core of supporting women's agency and empowerment. While education can be an institution that reinforces gender inequality, it also holds the possibility to transform knowledge and support women's acquisition of intellectual skills and habits needed for social change. Through these skills and habits women gain "the power to reflect, calculate, analyze, draw conclusions and see beyond the immediate environment" (Stromquist, 2006a, p. 149) and are able to transform their lives, communities and, possibly, societies. Through collective non-formal education programs, such as the parenting program available in some ECE programs and greater social interactions through increased communication among women, can "promote knowledge exchange and induce important changes in behaviors and attitudes" (World Bank, 2012, p. 76-77).

Knowledge empowerment does not operate in isolation, but is linked to economic, political, and psychological dimensions of women's empowerment in that transforming women's knowledge about the oppressive social structures and power relationships in their lives. Agency is at the center of knowledge empowerment as acquiring skills and knowledge regarding the disempowering structures and relationships transform women's ability to act on their own behalf. The broadest and perhaps most influential aspect of women's empowerment that can be influenced is the political component and the ability to change participation in political spheres and transform political power. However, this component does not diminish changes in women's agency which influence their economic empowerment or their ability to change power relationships within their home and private spheres. This research contends that contact with ECE programs can be a transformational education experience for women that impacts their

understandings of the power dynamics in their homes and with their children, such as justifications of child abuse. This transformational experience is fostered by increased agency and hindered by the burdens of expectations of involvement in early stimulation activities leading to complex impacts on mothers' justifications of child abuse.

Formal and non-formal education for knowledge empowerment. Stromquist's theory of knowledge empowerment considers the potential of formal and non-formal education to transform women's understandings of power relationships. She asserts that formal education institutions and experiences fall short in providing gender-transformative information and curriculum which can support women's empowerment and that informal education, such as women's empowerment and literacy programs, can provide the skills and knowledge needed to understand and change patriarchal forces which disempower women. She also asserts that adult women have more experience with and a better understanding of those forces in their daily lives, and could therefore be more conducive to transformative learning opportunities (Stromquist, 2006a; Stromquist, 2015). This centers the potential for supporting women's empowerment and agency in ECE programs, and centering women as champions for child protection, particularly as some early childhood education programs in Cambodia provide parent training which include a gender-equity component, which could be considered a non-formal education program.

However, beyond non-formal education such as these programs is also the possibility of non-formal learning, which can result from contact with education institutions and programs such as early childhood education. This non-formal learning can occur through social networks, dialogic processes between women (other mothers and teachers, for example) and through the potential paths of learning that Stromquist cites as the hallmarks of empowering non-formal education programs. It is through these non-formal education programs that she considers the empowering consequences for women acquired "through access to the public sphere and by

engaging in group discussions that individual experiences can be shared and social networks developed (Stromquist, 2015, p. 315). Through non-formal education and non-formal learning, women who have children in ECE programs may learn about, discuss and transform their understandings of power relationships within the family and in broader society. Knowledge empowerment theory, therefore, predicts a transformation in women's understandings of power dynamics and agency through contact with educational programs, such as ECE programs.

Power and Knowledge Empowerment

Integral to an understanding of the evolution of women's empowerment is its roots in feminist theory and the interrogation and reconceptualization of power in social relationships based on gender. In particular, a feminist perspective on the Foucauldian (1980) consideration of knowledge and power is helpful in bringing women's social learning through contact with educational institutions into focus within the broad and diffuse framework of feminist theory. Although Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge lacks key components which support the transformation of power in development contexts, specifically the concepts of process and agency, a discussion of the conceptualization of knowledge and women's empowerment would be incomplete without a brief consideration of Foucault's examination of power and knowledge.

Power is central to feminist theory, yet the embedded nature of power in feminist theory results in underdeveloped theoretical conceptions which do not provide concrete understandings of power in feminist theory, particularly when applying these understandings to research and practice (Allen, 2018). An overview of power and feminist theory can be described through power as a resource, power as relation, and power as empowerment (Deveaux, 1994). Power as a resource views power as a social good that is unequally distributed in society and feminist theory and practice works to redistribute the resource of power. Power as relation considers power as a source of male domination and female subordination. From this perspective, the goal

of feminist theory is to dismantle the system of domination entirely. Finally, power as empowerment develops a conceptualization of power as a positive capacity that “grows out of feminine traits, capacities, or practices” and “becomes the basis for a wholesale revision of the masculinist conceptions of social and political life that have been at the fore of Western political thought” (Allen, 2018, p. 7). Each of these considerations of power have been criticized for offering a distorted understanding of women’s situations and reifying power into a unidimensional concept. However, women’s empowerment as a conceptualization of “power as empowerment,” is a widely-employed concept in international development and offers a diverse investigation of how women gain the ability to choose and re-conceptualize social, political, and economic life for greater well-being (Robeyns, 2005).

Important to a feminist conceptualization of power is a Foucauldian consideration of power as productive and intimately intertwined with knowledge (Foucault, 1980). These power relations are bound within social interactions and are “constituted in a network of social relationships among subjects who are free to act to at least a minimal extent; without power those relationships cannot exist” (Rowlands, 1989, p. 14). Yet, Foucault has been criticized for his lack of focus on the power relations pertaining to gender and feminist scholars have struggled to apply Foucauldian theory to practice in international development. Discourse analysis, rooted in Foucault’s theory regarding power, language and knowledge, is applied by feminist scholars in policy analysis and qualitative research, while Foucault’s theoretical concepts may be broadly and conceptually applicable to research in some international development contexts, rarely has it been applied to large-scale datasets (Wodak & Meyers, 2009). Additionally, while power and knowledge are at the center of theories of gender reproduction and transformation in education, Foucault’s development of theories of power and knowledge lack the critical component of

process and agency, leaving women beholden to the social forces of gendered power dynamics with little room for empowerment or the notion of women's agency.

While Foucault lacked a consideration of individual's ability to engage in their own empowerment through agency, Paulo Freire centered his liberation pedagogy around the ability, and the necessity, of those laboring under the constraints of oppression to liberate themselves. Freire is one of the first scholars to argue that education is political and that its institutions create and reinforce power dynamics and solidifies or transform the relations among knowledge, power and domination, stating that education can be used for the "domestication of learners" or for their "liberation" (Freire, 1985, 2018). Freire suggests that education can be emancipatory, but only through the process of the "oppressed" liberating themselves from the "oppressor" through a mutual dialogic process of knowledge and learning about the forces of oppression. His pedagogy of liberation focuses on *conscientization* in which the oppressed come to understand the political and economic forces of oppression in which they work, live and learn, and are moved to political action to free themselves from these forces. This speaks to a transformation of power relationships via education and learning, and Freire, along with others, have suggested that education programs, particularly adult education programs, and literacy are key ways to engage learners in the dialogic process of emancipatory learning and support conscientization.

In addition to a theoretical contribution to an understanding of power in education, Freire also contributes a pedagogical approach to adult education with the intention of shifting the relationships surrounding power, knowledge and education, by relinquishing the banking concept of education, in which students are an empty vessel and transferring the power of knowledge, learning and education back to the "oppressed", constructing education as a tool of liberation. "Conscientization -a deliberate examination of our economic and political environment — serves as a prerequisite to envisaging how knowledge can serve to eliminate oppression and create a

just society” (Stromquist, 2005, p. 93). Freirean concepts of education, power and pedagogy are applied to feminist studies in which women’s empowerment was conceptualized as a process of conscientization meant to bring awareness to the importance of fighting patriarchal ideologies and through women’s literacy programs.

Through literacy training and formal and non-formal education, transformative education programs have the potential to raise women’s awareness of exploitation and patriarchal oppression by supporting women in the examination of oppressive power dynamics in their lives (Stromquist, 1990; 2014). Feminists have learned that this awareness and literacy itself, however is not enough to empower women. However, awareness of the patriarchal constraints of women and literacy are critical precursors to women’s empowerment (Stromquist, 2014). Freire’s conceptualization of empowerment, as well as knowledge, power and education as a tool for liberation and empowerment, is a foundational contribution to critical theory in CIE, which calls for the critical examination of power relations within education, both formal and informal, and a consideration of the powerful forces of international education institutions such as ECE programs on local actors and in particular women participating in or with these programs. Freire’s (2018) liberation pedagogy has influenced women’s literacy and education programs in international education development and is a critical undercurrent supporting the knowledge empowerment framework, as well as conceptualizations of women’s power, agency and empowerment.

An examination of a national dataset such as the CDHS requires a theoretical underpinning centered on an understanding of women’s empowerment and knowledge. While the Foucauldian approach to an analysis of knowledge and power, and Freire’s (2018) liberation pedagogy, have been applied to gender issues, they focus on class, as opposed to gender and women’s issues. Foucault and Freire provide critical understandings of power, knowledge and

empowerment. However, their approaches fall short in being able to provide a full consideration of how women are impacted by contact with education programs such as ECE.

Agency and Knowledge Empowerment

Knowledge empowerment serves as both an outcome and a process in women's empowerment. Non-formal education programs, for example literacy programs in international education development, have been shown to be effective in creating a space conducive to the development of personal agency and critical reflection to oppressive power relations, such those reproducing the feminization of care and domestic responsibility (Eldred, Robinson-Pant, Nabi, , Chopra, Nussey, & Bown, 2014), and providing an ability to break away from violent relationships (Schuller, Preston, Hammond & Brassett-Grundy, 2004). Additionally, non-formal education programs for women have also been shown to foster self-confidence, critical thinking, and an increased ability to negotiate relationships with their spouses (Murphy-Graham, 2012). Stromquist's (2015) conceptualization of agency within the knowledge empowerment framework includes individual agency as well as "engaging in collective forms of support, organisation, and mobilisation; it includes the recognition that organisations working on gender issues at micro and national levels must play a crucial role in women's empowerment" (p. 308), building upon Kabeer's (1999) definition of agency as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (p.438). It is through this collective support that women can move from awareness to action, thereby centering gains in agency as central to the processes supporting women's empowerment.

Agency can also be defined in a positive sense related to power, as in the *power to*. In this sense, agency is defined as "people's capacity to define their own life-choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others" (Kabear, 1999, p. 438). Building the capacity to define and pursue goals is rooted in knowledge and education as a source for

increasing women's agency. While education does not inherently increase agency, increasing knowledge and skills is a central goal of educational institutions. Formal learning can increase women's agency, as can social interactions which lead to increased access to information, support and an opportunity for the expansion and transformation of knowledge regarding gender and power relations (O'Neill & Gidengil, 2013).

A knowledge empowerment framework examines processes related to changing women's *power within* and potentially giving them skills and knowledge to transform the behavioral component, or their *power to*, by supporting agency. Through knowledge and skills regarding their own agentic possibility, women can develop the skills and knowledge needed to shift power relationships in private and public spheres. Programs offering a space for discussion and social networking as well as access to transformative knowledge about gender and power have been shown to impact women's agency and empowerment in private and public arenas (Warner, Stobenau & Glinksi, 2014; Stromquist, 2006b), as have informal social interactions that provide the opportunity to network and interact with other women (O'Neill & Gidengil, 2013).

The knowledge empowerment framework can be used to consider how knowledge transformation, i.e. a transformation in women's knowledge about power structures and relationships, can change women's agency and support the transformation of power relationships at a family level. However, this framework does not propose ways to measure knowledge empowerment, agency or the impacts that increased knowledge and skills about disempowering structures and relationships have on power relationships within the lives of women. Additionally, because Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework is relatively new and, as a component of a larger women's empowerment framework, there is limited research using and testing the framework or solidifying the conceptualization of knowledge empowerment within the broader feminist and women's empowerment literature.

Conceptual Framework

What follows is an examination of the intersecting factors related to women's agency and empowerment, early childhood education and international education development actors and local socio-cultural factors related to the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE programs and justifications of child abuse as mediated by women's agency and mothers' involvement in early childhood stimulation activities within the Cambodian context. Contexts such as Cambodia, which place high priority on national development through education, support initiatives related to women's empowerment in policy and program practice, yet maintain patriarchal structures and practices which impact women at the household and societal level. The interplay of international initiatives, policies, programs and practices with local, contextual socio-cultural beliefs and practices creates a complex situation in which mothers, teachers who are primarily women and mothers, and children are impacted by ECE programming. These factors, international and local, intersect at mothers' beliefs and practices regarding their understandings of patriarchal power relations both individually and as related to their beliefs regarding justifications of child abuse, providing an understanding of how knowledge via these factors can impact mothers and potentially their children.

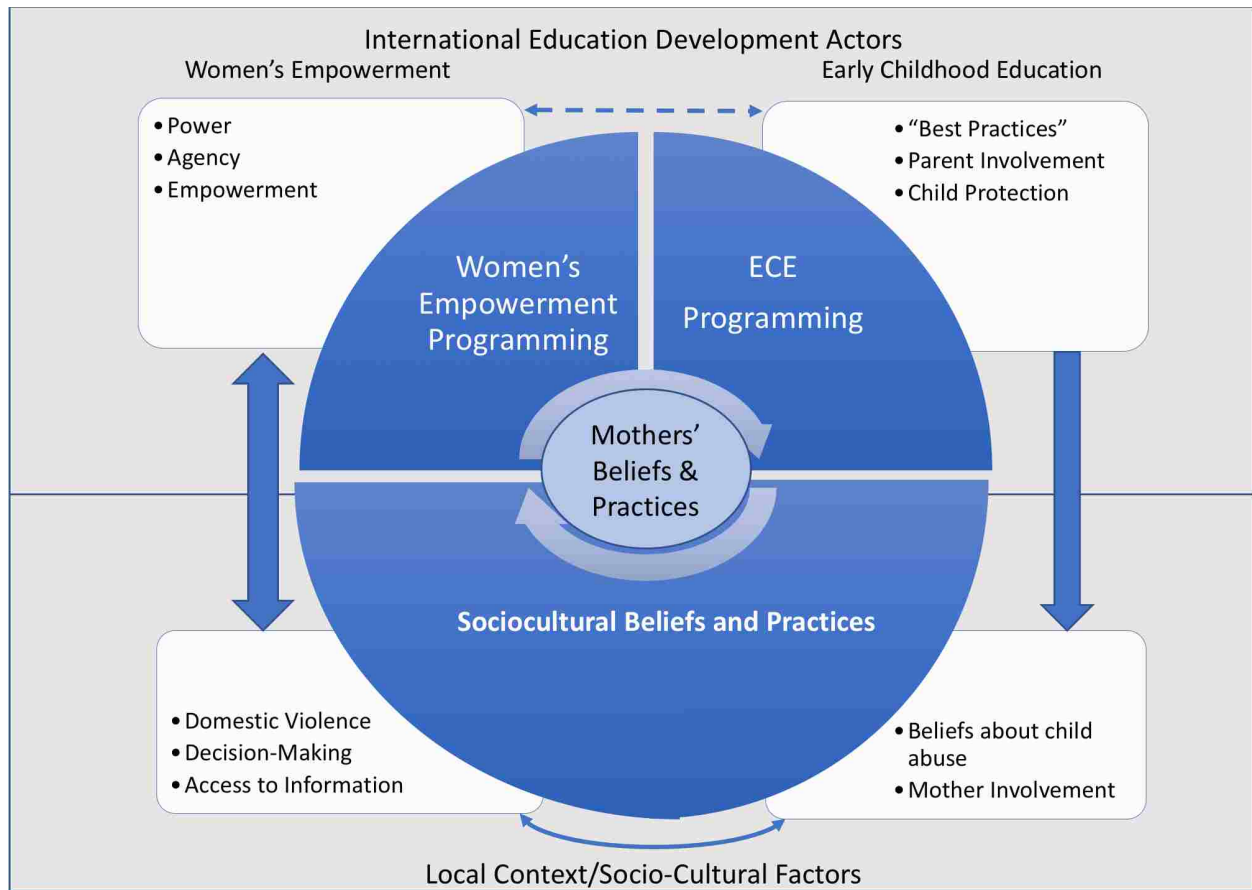


Figure 1. Conceptual framework, depicting the international and local forces, and directionality, involved in women's empowerment and ECE programming.

Figure 1 indicates the interaction of international education development actors and local socio-cultural factors involved in the relationships between mothers' contact with ECE programs, mothers' early stimulation practices, and mothers' justifications of child abuse in Cambodia. What follows is a description of the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1, and the conceived international and local forces and their directionality in women's empowerment and ECE programs. Women's empowerment and ECE are both international issues that are taken up at the macro, meso and micro- levels of education in Cambodia by international agencies, the Cambodian government, and local NGOs through policies and programs related to women's empowerment and ECE. These two international issues are largely compartmentalized in programs that either address issues related to ECE or issues related to women's empowerment,

but which rarely overlap, for example with programming that directly addresses mothers' empowerment. However, some international organizations such as Plan International Cambodia and USAID include programs which center on gender equity and gender transformation as it pertains to children, schools and family violence. While issues of women's empowerment are largely excluded from ECE programs, non-formal learning regarding women's empowerment and agency could occur through the interactions that women have with each other and teachers and with ECE program components in which they learn about gender equality for their daughters. This potential interaction of women's empowerment and ECE programming is represented by the dashed arrow.

Women's empowerment is recognized as a highly contextual concept and local sociocultural attitudes and practices are often considered in the conceptualization and measurement of women's empowerment (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016), with some indicators being common across contexts and other indicators adapted to local context. Therefore, women's empowerment programs are internationally influenced by larger conceptualizations and measurements of key concepts of empowerment such as agency and power, but local sociocultural beliefs and practices are at least considered in the conceptualization and measurement of concepts such as power, agency and empowerment. While this may or may not translate into a locally sensitive understanding, conceptualization, and measurement of women's empowerment and women's empowerment programming, there is at some level recognition of local sociocultural beliefs and practices as important and influential. Therefore, this relationship is indicated in Figure 1 as a bidirectional relationship. However, the incorporation of local beliefs and practices regarding child development, family relationships, and parent involvement in ECE by international education development actors is often lacking (Subramanian, 2015).

Programs and practices involving child development, parent involvement, and child protection operate largely from a top down, international “best practices” approach. Parenting programs and ECE programs and “best practices” are largely centered on western frameworks of child development, with little consideration of family beliefs and practices, and in particular mothers’ beliefs and practices, in program development (Pence & Marfo, 2008; Tobin, 2005). In general, the approach to ECE programming involves transferring ECE “best practices” and programs into local Cambodian contexts, with the assumption that the uptake of ECE programs will benefit all involved (Gupta, 2004; Pence & Marfo, 2008; Subramanian, 2015; Viruru, 2005). This is particularly relevant to holistic ECE programs which focus on child development, and on family and parent “best practices”, parent involvement, and child protection. For this reason, Figure 1 indicates a unidirectional interaction between international education development actors and local socio-cultural factors.

What ECE programs, and women’s empowerment programs, often miss is the connection between local context and sociocultural factors regarding women and children. Patriarchal societies place women and children at the bottom of the social hierarchy and beliefs about mothering, mother involvement in children’s education and justifications of child abuse are entwined with socio-cultural constructions of women and gender stereotypes, roles and gender-based beliefs (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). The potential to transform women’s understandings of child abuse lies in the ability to transform their understandings of power and the use of violence to reinforce dominant power structures. While ECE programs may not focus specifically on women’s empowerment as it pertains to transforming local socio-cultural beliefs regarding women, it is possible that as women’s understanding of their justifications of child abuse transforms, so do their understandings of patriarchal power structures as they pertain to their own

positions in family and in society. Therefore, this is represented by a curved bidirectional arrow resembling a correlation.

The interaction of international and local factors is critical in the Cambodian context given the role of international organizations participating in ECE and women's empowerment programs in developing and shaping the Cambodian education system. However, local contextual factors cannot be ignored, particularly when considering the importance of sociocultural beliefs and practices in the lives of mothers who are charged with the care of their young child's education and development. In Cambodia, the interaction of international education development actors and local sociocultural practices and beliefs shapes a unique situation in ECE programming which often brings together mothers, teachers and children in a common educational setting (Rao & Pearson, 2009; Grace, 2018).

The Current Study

This research examines the pathways through which mothers' contact with ECE programs, defined as whether women have children attending ECE programs, impacts their justifications of situations in which beating their son or daughter, i.e. child abuse, as mediated by changes in agency and mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities. By transforming women's knowledge about power dynamics within the family, either through direct education within ECE programs or through social interaction and communication with other women or community members involved in the early childhood education system, it is possible that women can increase their agency- or their ability to choose and act- and thereby change the way that they understand the abusive power dynamics and interactions with their children. Stromquist's (2015) framework guides an understanding of how contact with early childhood education programs could be linked to changes in women's agency, their involvement in children's educational activities and their justifications of child abuse. This study uses Kabear's definition

of agency, “people's capacity to define their own life-choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438), coupled with the knowledge empowerment framework, which places knowledge, learning and the potential of the institution of education to increase women’s agency, to examine changes in the relationships and interactions of Cambodian mothers and their children.

The knowledge empowerment framework and its explanation of changes in women’s understanding and adherence to power dynamics within their own lives, is particularly relevant in considering changes in justifications of child abuse. Transformation of knowledge about power relationships linked to family, culture and society, which is intimately bound to women’s agency, through contact with early childhood education programs is central to this research. As women learn about power and disempowering structures and relationships, they are better able to make choices regarding their own lives and justifications of those disempowering power structures and relationships within their own lives. In other words, they are able to shift the *power within*, become more aware of their own agency and are able to make choices regarding their relationships and interactions with their children that transform the traditional parent-child power relationship in which child abuse is justified.

Within the Cambodian context, this framework is particularly relevant given the patriarchal nature of Cambodian society and the low level of father’s involvement in children’s educational activities which leaves mothers to support the additional work of children’s education. The increasing focus on education in development in Cambodia and with high number of Cambodian women in the workforce, which supports the expansion of early childhood education programs, could be a path through which women’s agency and empowerment influences relationships and interaction with their children. Additionally, ECE programs are increasingly focusing on child protection and child abuse, particularly through parenting

programs, which provide alternatives to violence discipline. Increasing policies and programs via collaboration through international organizations and the Cambodian government signifies an increasing interest and focus on child protection, decreasing child violence and abuse, and indicates that this aspect of ECE programming could also play a role in women's understandings of and justifications of child abuse (UNICEF, n.d., World Vision, 2017).

Through contact with education parenting programs or social networks with teachers and other women also engaging early childhood education programs, Cambodian women's knowledge and skills regarding gender could be impacted and justifications regarding child abuse could be shifted. Mothers' involvement, or early stimulation, could either be an empowering aspect of their experience of contact with ECE programs as they learn how to interact with their children or could be a disempowering experience as this aspect of parenting becomes another duty of care that is "assigned" to mothers. In this way, mothers' involvement also could be related to women's agency, giving them more power to act within the private and public spheres, or diminishing their agency by decreasing free-time, employment opportunities and the ability to choose and engage in activities that might foster more involvement in public spheres. Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework of this research and examines the potential paths of transformation that are related to contact with early childhood education programs, mothers' agency and involvement and justifications of child abuse.

Research questions and hypotheses. This research builds on the existing body of literature examining the relationship between the impacts of the educational institution of childhood education, women's agency, mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities and impacts on justifications of child abuse. The primary research question asks, "how does contact with early childhood education programs impact mothers' justifications of child abuse, and what is the role of mothers' agency and mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities in

justifications of child abuse?”. Additionally, mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities as a gendered duty of care could be correlated with maternal agency as a factor that further defines women as caretakers and domestic laborers. An exploration of these paths answers the following two research questions and the related hypotheses:

- 1) Do the three latent constructs access to information, decision-making and justifications of domestic violence adequately measure latent construct of mothers' agency?

H1: Latent constructs access to information, decision-making and justifications of domestic violence will adequately measure mothers' agency.

The “processes by which choices are made and put into effect” (Kabeer, 2005, p. 14), or agency, is related to a woman's ability to access information, make decisions within her household and be free of power dynamics related to domestic violence.

- 2) How does mothers' contact with early childhood education programs relate to decreases in mothers' justifications of child abuse, and what are the roles mothers' agency and mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities in justifications of child abuse?

H2a: Mothers' contact with an ECE program will be negatively associated with justifications of child abuse.

Often, mothers are involved in early childhood education programs and the MoEYS had emphasized parenting programs and parent involvement in ECE. Mothers also can have increased contact with other parents and teachers and early childhood education programs are focused on broader child development, such as health and well-being, as well as academic skills. Parenting programs in particular include positive child discipline. And the MoEYS and other international organizations have begun to focus on child protection. For this reason, it is hypothesized that child ECE program enrollment will be

negatively associated with justifications of child abuse. This will be examined as a direct pathway from ECE to justifications of child abuse.

H2b: Mothers' contact with an ECE program will be positively associated with women's agency.

Contact with teachers and other women could expand women's social networks and facilitate access to information which could increase women's agency through contact with ECE programs. Research shows that mothers often have smaller social networks than men and women without children (Lin, 2000), and ECE programs could provide an avenue through which women gain increased information regarding women's empowerment factors such as access to information, information regarding decision making and domestic violence. Women's agency could also be correlated with mothers' involvement in learning activities.

H2c: Enrollment of a child in an ECE program will be positively associated with mothers' involvement in child's learning activities.

ECE contact will increase mothers' involvement in learning activities. Given the focus on early stimulation and parent involvement in ECE programs, it is likely that mothers whose children are in early childhood education programs will be more likely to engage in learning activities with their children than mothers whose children are not in ECE programs.

H2d: Mothers' agency will be negatively associated with mothers' justifications of child abuse.

Within a feminist framework, child abuse, and it is assumed justifications of child abuse, is part of a symptom of a patriarchal system in which mothering becomes an oppressive state and in which power in the family is related to child abuse and justifications of child

abuse. Women's agency, here defined as access to information, decision making and justifications of child abuse, could be indicative of power structures within the family and greater society. In particular, domestic violence and child abuse are related, with increasing domestic violence and justifications of domestic violence related to increased child abuse and justifications of child abuse (Jouriles, McDonald, Slep, Heyman & Garrido, 2008; Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Bornstein, Putnick, & Bradley, (2014). Therefore, it is hypothesized that increases in agency will be related to decreases in justifications of child abuse.

H2e: Increased involvement in early stimulation activities will positively associated with justifications of child abuse.

Feminist theory and a women's empowerment framework would hypothesize that increased burdens related to supporting child educational activities and mothering would support oppressive and patriarchal power structures which would increase justifications of child abuse. By increasing the workload of mothers, learning activities would support a parent/child/ family power dynamics in which women are oppressed by motherhood and children become victims of these power structures.

Chapter III Methodology

Participants

This study uses the 2014 CDHS women's survey with a sample of 1,809 Cambodian women between the ages of 18-49. This sample derives from a larger national which includes 15,825 households with 17,578 women between the ages of 15 and 49 and 5,190 men between the ages of 15 and 49 years old. Table 1 outlines the background characteristics of the participants. Mothers' level of education varied significantly depending on their contact with ECE programs $\chi^2(2) = 103.57$ ($p=.000$). Of mothers with contact with ECE programs 7.13% had no schooling 43.04% had finished primary school and 28% had finished secondary school or higher education. Amongst mothers without contact with ECE programs, 16.74% indicated that they had no schooling, 55.27% indicated that they had completed primary school, while 28% indicated that they had finished secondary school or higher education. There were significant differences regarding participants' husbands' level of education depending on contact with ECE programs $\chi^2(2) = 113.62$ ($p=.000$). Amongst mothers with contact with ECE programs, 4.99% of husbands had no schooling, 30.08% had completed primary school, and 64.92% had completed secondary school or above.

Location between groups of mothers was also significantly different $\chi^2(1) = 118.48$ ($p=.000$), with 54.70% of mothers with contact with ECE programs from rural areas and 78.72% of mothers with no contact from rural areas. Participants' wealth index also varied between groups $\chi^2(2) = 143.50$ ($p=.000$). Of mothers who had contact with ECE programs 22.59% had a wealth index of poor/poorer, 13.67% had a wealth index of middle, and 63.73% had a wealth index of rich/richest. This is compared 46.80% mothers with no contact who had a wealth index of poor/poorer, 16.53% with a wealth index of middle and 36.67% with a wealth index of rich/richer. There were no significant differences between groups regarding employment or

number of children under five years old. None of these control variables had a Pearson's correlation coefficient of greater than .60, indicating that they are not highly correlated and circumventing issues of multicollinearity amongst control variables.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of ECE Participation by Background Characteristics

	Contact with ECE % (n)	No Contact with ECE % (n)	χ^2
Education Level of Participant			
No Schooling	7.13 (60)	16.74 (162)	103.57***
Primary Education	43.04 (362)	55.27 (535)	
Secondary/Above	49.82 (419)	28.00 (271)	
Education Level of Husband			
No Schooling	4.99 (42)	11.67 (113)	113.62***
Primary Education	30.08 (253)	48.14 (466)	
Secondary/Above	64.92 (546)	40.19 (389)	
Location			
Rural	54.70 (460)	78.72 (762)	118.48***
Urban	45.30 (381)	21.28 (206)	
Wealth Index			
Poorest/Poorer	22.59 (190)	46.80 (453)	143.50***
Middle	13.67 (115)	16.53 (160)	
Rich/Richest	63.73 (536)	36.67 (355)	
Employment Status			
Not Working	26.16 (220)	24.38 (236)	0.76
Working	73.84 (621)	75.62 (732)	
Children under 5 Years Old			
0-1 child	57.19 (481)	61.16 (592)	2.93
Two children or more	42.81 (360)	38.84 (376)	
Total	46.49 (841)	53.51 (968)	

N=1809

*** p < .001

Note: National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International (2015)

Procedures

The CDHS uses a stratified, clustered multi-stage sampling design. Stratification was achieved by separating each survey domain into urban and rural. In order to balance the provision of estimates at the subnational level and to limit the population size while remaining representative, 19 domains were stratified into 38 sampling strata. Fourteen of those domains corresponded to individual provinces and five which corresponded to grouped provinces. A sampling frame was created from a list of enumerated areas (EA) used for the 2008 Cambodia General Population Census (GPC), provided by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). EAs served as the primary sampling unit. EA sampling served as first selection stage. The second selection stage, a fixed number of houses were chosen from every urban (24 households) and rural (28 households) cluster using an equal probability systematic sampling process. For unfound or nonresponding households, replacements were not allowed. Instrument and measure validity was established by modeling questions after the widely used MICS survey (UNICEF), by basing questions and modifying questions based on four previous CDHS surveys, and by developing the 2014 CDHS with stakeholder input, pretesting the instrument, and modifying the survey based on interviewer feedback.

Sampling. A number of women were not included in the ECE sample as they did not respond to the question about participation in early childhood education programs. Any respondents not in the ECE sample, coded as “.” in the original dataset, were dropped from the dataset using the command “drop if ece==.” This resulted in 3,261 women who answered “Yes” or “No” regarding participation of children under five in an early childhood education program. The dataset was further limited to include all women who indicated that their child attended an early childhood education program. Due to the high proportion of non-ECE participants in the data, 40% of these participants were randomly sampled to create relatively proportional numbers

of ECE and non-ECE participants. This resulted in a total sample size of 1,809 (See Figure 2). This was accomplished using the STATA command “sample 40, if ece==0” where ece=0 indicates non-participant. This resulted in a sample size of 841 mothers who indicated that they had contact with an ECE program through participation of their child and 968 who did not, for a total sample size of 1,809 women. Sample size was estimated for an effect size of .20, a three percent margin of error and 95 percent confidence interval using Minitab. A sample size of 1,080 was needed to detect an effect (Denscombe, 2010).

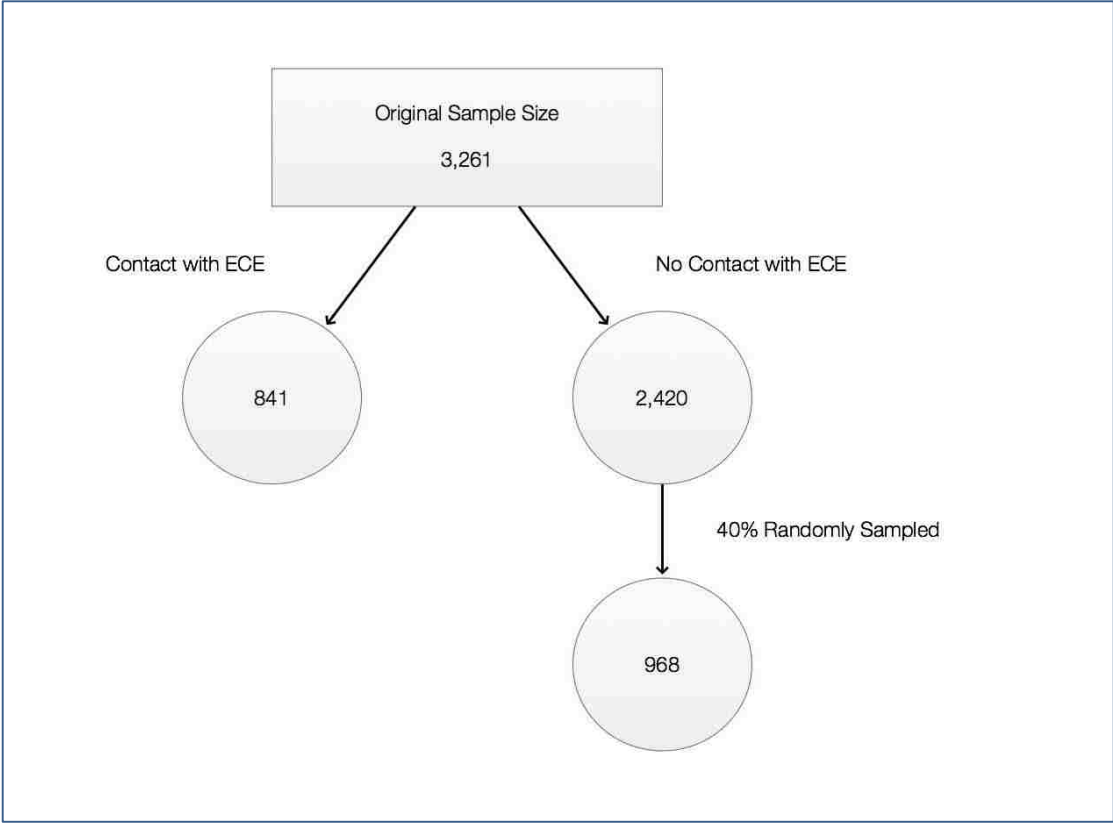


Figure 2. Random sampling of participants for the creation of ECE and non-ECE groups. This figure depicts the process of random sampling of ECE and non-ECE participants (National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF International, 2015).

Measures

Items were initially chosen for inclusion in constructs based on theoretical and DHS literature (see Kishor & Subaiya, 2008). The Cambodian DHS survey contains a single indicator for the construct of contact with early childhood development (ECD) and multiple indicators for the constructs of women's agency, mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities and justifications of child abuse. To address Hypothesis 1, three latent constructs are used to measure the second-order latent construct of mothers' *Agency: Access to information, Justifications of domestic violence, and Decision making*. Latent constructs are inferred from observed variables using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and relationships between the latent and/or observed variables are examined through regression equations (Kelloway, 2015). These were developed from at least four observed variables for each latent construct. To answer research question 2, the observed variable mothers' contact with ECE programs was modeled along with the second-order latent construct *Agency*, and the latent constructs mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities* and *Justifications of child abuse*.

The validity and reliability of indicators included in each construct were confirmed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within a SEM model. This approach allows for the consideration and reduction of measurement error within the SEM model, thereby producing a more accurate evaluation of the validity and reliability of the indicators (Acock, 2013). The use of Cronbach's alpha is used to support the inclusion of items in the constructs. Communality of each item, i.e the proportion of each variables variance that can be explained by the factor or construct, was also examined and items with communalities of less than .5 were removed (Costello & Osborne 2005). Factor loadings for items included in the final SEM model are found in Appendix A.

Exogenous observed variables.

Contact with early childhood education programs. Early childhood education enrollment is an observed variable related to the question “child attends any organized learning or early childhood education,” with a possible yes/no/I don’t know response. Only 0.61% of mothers responded “I don’t know”. Therefore these responses were dropped from the final sample.

Latent endogenous predictor variables.

Women’s agency. The latent endogenous construct mothers’ *Agency* is measured using three latent constructs: decision- making, justifications of domestic violence, and access to information. The first measure related to the latent construct of *Agency* is mothers’ *Decision making*, which consists of six items. Item examples include “Person who decides how to spend respondent’s earnings,” “Person who decides how to spend husband’s earnings,” and “Person who makes decisions regarding respondent’s healthcare” with responses categories as respondent alone, respondent and husband, husband alone, someone else, or other. Responses were recoded into joint (i.e. respondent and husband jointly decide) or other. Women in Cambodia are often expected to manage the family finances. While this can be seen in some regions as empowering, it can also be a source of conflict when men accuse women of mismanaging money. For this reason, these variables were recoded as “joint” or “other.” CFA/SEM confirmed the inclusion of five remaining items, with factor loadings above .40. With a Cronbach's alpha of .70, all five items were included in the analysis. However, final Cronbach’s alpha was .57. This is quite low, but it should be noted that there using Cronbach’s alpha with categorical variables can be problematic as it often under-reports alphas for these variables (Sijtsma, 2009).

The latent construct of *Justifications of domestic violence* includes five dichotomous observed variables. Items include a husband is justified in beating his wife if she “burns food,”

“refuses sex,” “neglects the children,” “argues with her husband”, “goes out without telling husband”. Respondents were asked to respond “yes”, “no: or “I don’t know” to five possible reasons that would justify a husband beating his wife. Responses for “I don’t know” were dropped from the dataset, creating a dichotomous variable of yes and no for each of the five justifications. Only 0.61% of mothers responded “I don’t know”. These items were treated as missing data, as participants were retained in the sample for other measure items. Responses were coded “No” = 0 and “Yes” =1. These were reverse coded so that fewer agreements with *Justifications of domestic violence* would align conceptually with other constructs loading onto the latent construct *Agency*, in which decreased agreement with *Justifications of domestic violence* indicates more agency. All factor scores were greater than .40 and Cronbach's alpha for justified domestic violence is .82.

The latent construct *Access to information* was developed from four categorical observed variables with measured frequency of watching television, reading the newspaper, listening to the radio, and as well as the categorical variable of level of literacy. Items included in the construct of access to information include “frequency of listening to the radio,” “frequency of watching television,” “frequency of reading the newspaper,” “frequency of accessing the internet,” “level of literacy”.

Frequency of watching television, reading the newspaper, and listening to the radio originally had possible responses of “not at all” = 1, “less than once a week” = 2, or “more than once a week” = 3. Literacy had three possible responses: “cannot read at all” = 1, “able to read only parts of sentence” = 2 and “able to read whole sentence” = 3. Cronbach’s alpha was .61. CFA/SEM indicated that all variables, except watching television, loaded onto the construct of *Access to information* above a .40. Therefore, AITV was dropped from the final model.

Mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities. *Mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities* was created from six items that examined whether or not mothers engaged ECE-aged children in a variety of learning activities. These dichotomous items had a possible response of "Yes" or "No." All items produced factor loadings greater than .40 and were therefore included in the final measure. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha for mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities using all items is .77. Items examples include "mom read books with child," "mom told stories to child," "mom named/counted with child," "mom sang to child, including lullabies," "mom played outside of home, compound or yard with child," and "mom took child outside of home."

Latent endogenous outcome variable.

Justifications of child abuse. The latent construct *Justifications of child abuse* is developed from ten dichotomous justifications of child abuse. Five justifications were included, with separate questions asking about male and female children. For example, participants were asked to answer "Yes" "No" or "I Don't Know" to the question "In your opinion, is a parent if justified in beating son/ if" and separately answer "In your opinion, is a parent justified in beating daughter if". Responses of "I do not know" were dropped from the sample, as this response does not provide meaningful information regarding justifications of child abuse and resulted in dropping less than .02% of responses. These items were treated as missing data, as participants were retained in the sample for other measure items. Item examples of five justifications of child abuse includes "son/daughter disobeys," "son/daughter is impolite," "son/daughter embarrasses the family," "son/daughter neglects housework," "son /daughter does not take care of siblings". Responses include "No" = 0 and "Yes" =1. All items produced factor loadings greater than .40 and were therefore included in the final measure. Cronbach's alpha for justifications of child abuse is .94.

Control variables.

Mothers' Age. This variable is a continuous variable assessed by the question "How old were you at your last birthday?". Responses ranged from 18 to 49 years old (Mean = 30.93, *SD* = 5.74).

Mother's level of education. This variable represents the total number of years completed and is assessed by the question "What is the highest (grade/form/year) you completed at that level (of education)". Responses ranged from 0 years to 20 years (Mean= 5.50 and *SD*=3.93).

Father's level of education. This variable represents the total number of years completed and is assessed by the question "What is the highest (grade/form/year) you completed at that level (of education)". Responses ranged from 0 years to 20 years (Mean= 6.96 and *SD*= 4.97).

Location. This variable was determined using the residence of respondents. Respondents residence were coded as urban=1 and rural=2.

Employment status. This variable was assessed with the question "Aside from your own housework, have you done any work in the last seven days?". Responses include "No" = 0 and "Yes" =1.

Wealth index. The CDHS does not directly assess socioeconomic status through consumption or income. Instead, this variable is assessed by collecting information on dwelling and household characteristics, consumer goods, and assets resulting in a measure of socioeconomic status created by CDHS. This variable was recoded from five categories of "Poorest" =1, "Poorer" =2, "Middle" =3, "Richer" =4, "Richest" =5 to three variables of "Poorest/Poorer" = 1, "Middle" =2, "Richer/Richest" =3.

Number of children under five years old. This variable was assessed by interviewers by assessing the number of children zero to five years old from the names given by respondents of all individuals who residents. This variable was recoded from zero to six children under five years old to “0-1” = 1 and “2 or more” =2.

This research uses a quasi-experimental research design as women cannot be randomly assigned to groups enrollment or non-enrollment of child into an early childhood education program (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Kirk, 1982). The research design includes three predictors and one outcome variable (Figure 3). It includes a single exogenous predictor variable—contact with an early childhood education program. Contact with ECE programs can be operationalized as whether or not the mother has a child who attends an early childhood education program. Two endogenous predictor variables are used: the latent construct *Agency* and the latent construct *Mothers’ involvement in early stimulation activities*. The endogenous latent construct *Agency* is derived from three latent constructs: *Justifications of domestic violence*, *Decision making*, and *Access to information*. *Justifications of domestic violence* is operationalized as the number of reasons, out of five, with which a woman agrees that a husband is justified in beating his wife. *Decision making* is operationalized as whether women are able to make choices regarding important aspects of their lives such as finances, health care, visiting relatives and sex. *Access to information* is operationalized as how often, women are accessing sources of information such as television, radio, newspaper and the internet. The latent outcome variable is *Justifications of child abuse*. This is operationalized as whether mothers agree with five possible justifications of child abuse such as beating a child because he/she disobeys (See Appendix B).

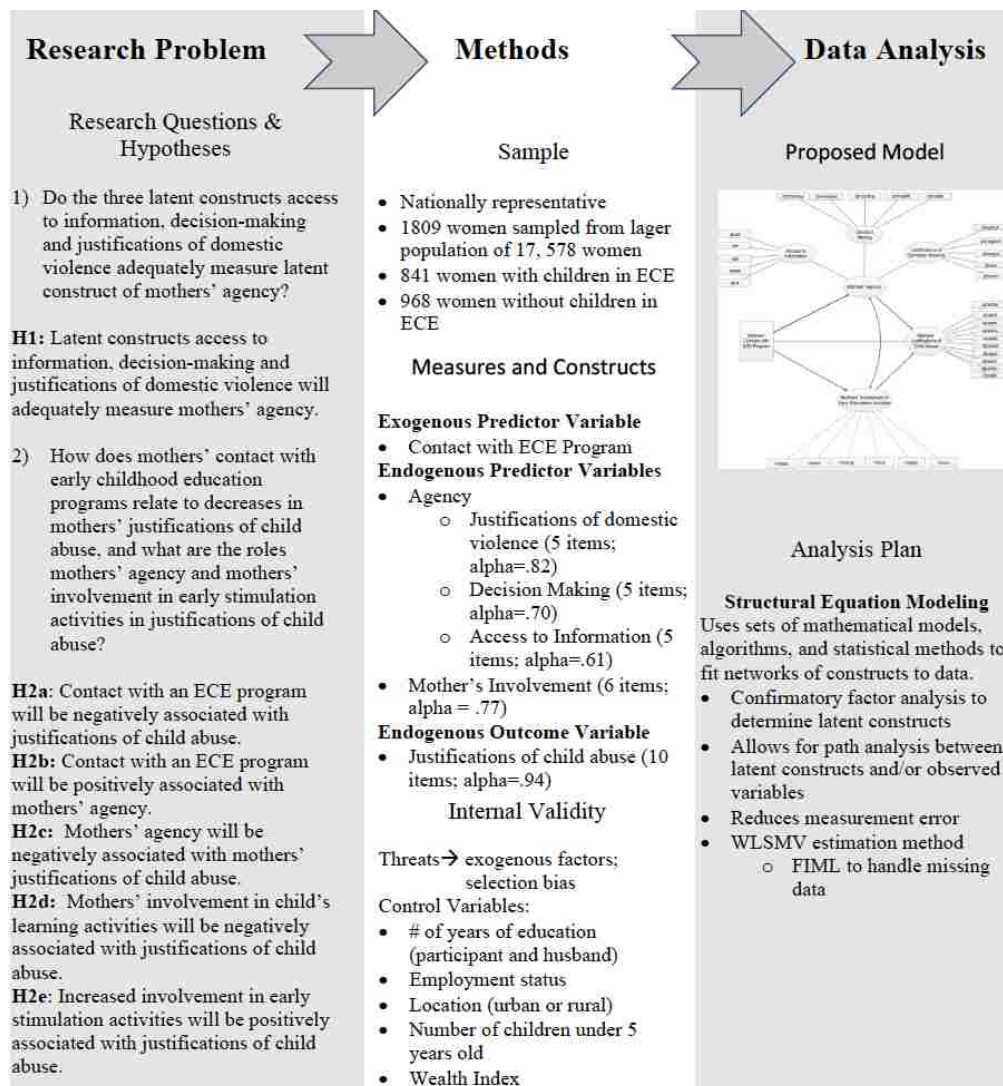


Figure 3. Research design using the 2014 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey. This figure outlines the research design for examining the relationships between contact with ECE and mothers' justification of child abuse.

Threats to validity are a concern for quasi-experimental research designs due to a lack of randomization. Internal threats to validity in this research are controlled with the use of control variables, or exogenous factors, which might provide an alternative explanation for the results. Cambodia is a lower-middle income country with a majority of women participating in the workforce and is a relatively ethnically homogenous country with little variation in religion. Additionally, Cambodia has a nascent but growing early childhood education system, with a

majority of preschools being home-based and community-based preschool system, which is quite different from other countries. This unique context also limits generalizability of findings beyond Cambodia and other countries with similar features.

Data Analysis

Permission to use the 2014 CDHS dataset was obtained from the DHS program. Variables unrelated to the study were dropped and remaining variables were labeled and cleaned. STATA 15 retains missing variables, but does not read them in data analysis, therefore missing data were not removed and remained in the dataset as “.”. Preliminary descriptive data analysis was conducted with STATA 15 to examine data distributions and any problems with the data, such as patterns of missing data. STATA 15 does provide a generalized structural equation modeling (GSEM) program, however to date, there it is not possible to test overall model fit of GSEM models and cannot handle missing data using FIML. This is a serious limitation to determining whether the SEM model fits the data. For this reason, Mplus 8 was used for data analysis.

Missing data. The 2014 CDHS is administered through individual interviews, in which 18,012 women were identified as eligible for the individual interview and interviews were completed with 98 percent of these women. However, as is common with a large-scale survey, some data are missing. No data were missing for the variables contact with early childhood education program, justifications of domestic violence, justifications of child abuse, or mothers’ involvement in early stimulation activities. Missing data were found across all variables for the variable “who makes decisions regarding respondents’ income.” This resulted in approximately 30 percent of missing data for this decision-making variable. This data is assumed to be Missing at Random (MAR). There is no ideal way for handling missing data, however structural equation modelling programs, including MPlus, have the option to handle missing data using

Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) through which missing data are handled within the analysis model. Enders and Bandalos (2001) found that FIML was superior to listwise deletion, pairwise deletion, and similar response pattern imputation across all dimensions tested. Mplus allows for FIML using the estimation method MLMV (Maximum Likelihood for Missing Values) prior to SEM, therefore FIML is used in data analysis.

This research considers the relationships between mothers' contact with early childhood education programs, mothers' agency and justifications of child abuse. A path model analysis is appropriate for examining relationships between variables and constructs and is an extension of regression analysis. In particular, structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to examine paths between latent constructs, such as the construct *Agency*, and other latent constructs or observed variables. The essence of structural equation modeling "is based on the observations that (a) every theory implies a set of correlations and (b) if the theory is valid, it should be able to explain or reproduce the patterns of correlations found in the empirical data" (Kelloway, 2015, p.6) and the power of SEM lies in the ability to assess the fit of the theoretically derived predictions to the data being analyzed.

The following model (Figure 4) represents the pathways linking early childhood education, women's agency, women's involvement in early stimulation activities and justifications of child abuse, with squares representing observed variable and ovals representing that latent constructs. Arrows represent the regression pathways, with arrows pointing from latent constructs to observed items as an indication that the latent constructs "create" the responses to the individual items. A full explanation of each item as represented in the CDHS 2014 women's questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

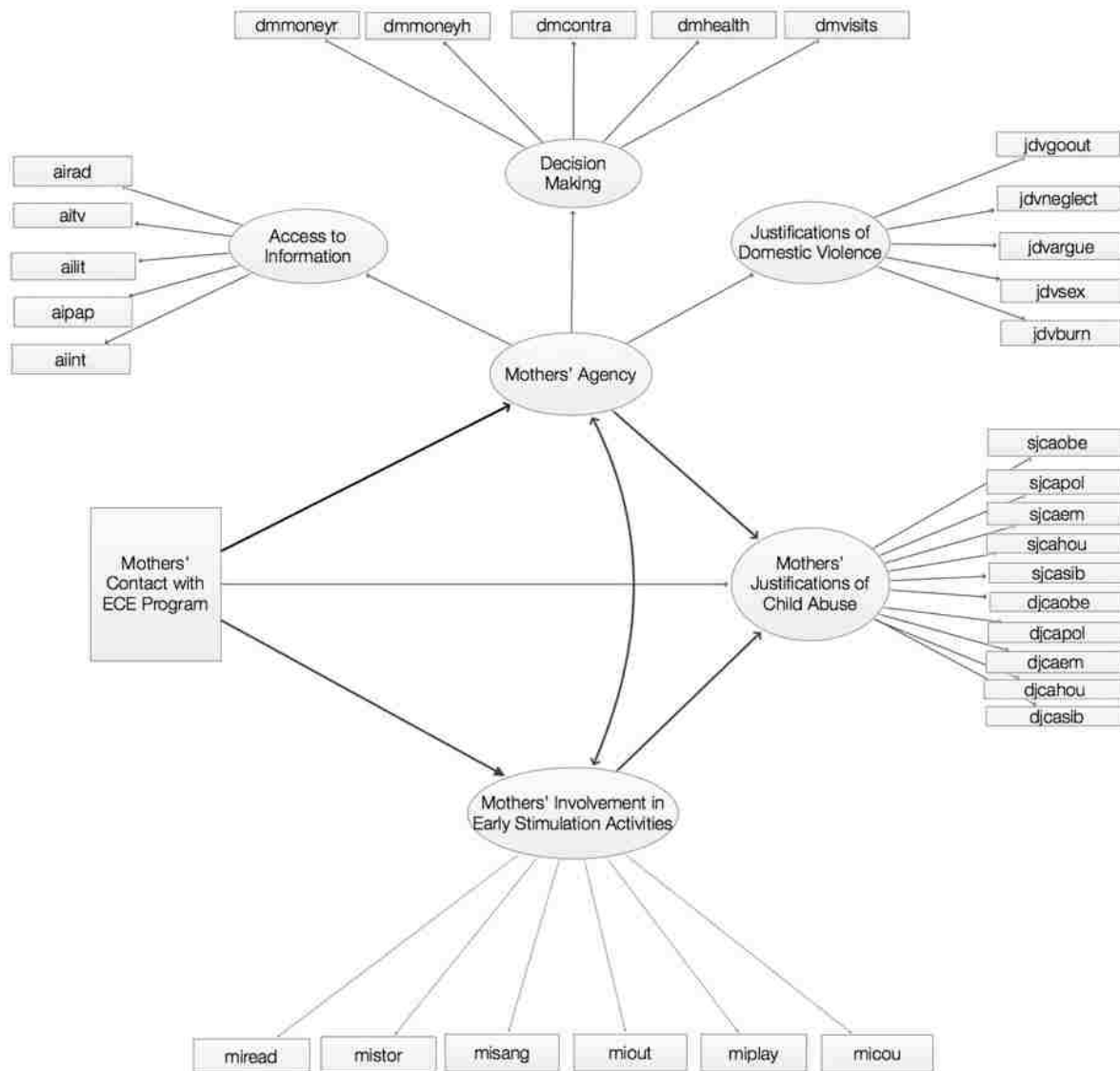


Figure 4. Hypothesized SEM model for pathways related to ECE and justifications of child abuse. This figure diagrams the latent and observed variables and model pathways that are examined using structural equation modeling.

Assumptions of SEM. Structural equation modeling requires that the assumptions of normality and linearity be met for path analysis. Data should be normally distributed and paths should be linearly related. In addition to these assumptions, several other factors impact correlation coefficients in SEM. These include: level of measurement, missing data, outliers, correction for attenuation, and issues related to sampling variation, confidence intervals, effect size, significance, sample size and power (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Data have been

checked to ensure that the assumptions normality were met using histograms and by checking variability, skewness and kurtosis using the “sum, detail” command on all variables. The use of binary and categorical variables violates assumptions of normality, therefore Weighted Least Squares, Means and Variance (WLSMV) method was used. WLSMV is a robust method of estimation which does not have any assumptions of distribution (Brown, 2015, Munthen & Munthen, 2012). Linearity was assessed with the command “qqplot” on all variables. Missing data were handled as described above. No outliers were found. Attenuation, or unreliable measurement error in scores, is a concern for SEM and therefore reliability was checked with Cronbach’s alpha where appropriate with confirmatory factor analysis as detailed above. The larger sample size of this study satisfies the minimum 100-150 participants recommended by some (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) though the suggested sample size has been recommended as 400 (Boomsma, 1982) and even as large as 5,000 (Hu, Bentler, & Kano, 1992). It should be noted that large sample sizes can impact χ^2 alpha values, with large sample sizes yielding a falsely significant χ^2 . For this reason, other SEM indicators considered in model fit along with the alpha associated with χ^2 , as detailed below.

Data analysis procedures. To answer research question one, a second order confirmatory factor analysis was performed by assessing model fit and related estimates at first and second order latent constructs using MPlus 8 (Brown, 2015). Model fit was determined for the each of the first order latent constructs using the Goodness of Fit Indices detailed above, namely χ^2 , RMSEA, CFI and TFI. When good model fit has been established for individual first order latent constructs, the magnitude and variation of the correlation was examined. Finally, the second order factor model was fit by examining the relationship between the latent construct *Agency* and the latent constructs *Access to information*, *Decision making* and *Justifications of domestic violence*. Model fit indices were determined as detailed above and the

estimates of the relationship between *Agency* and *Access to information*, *Decision making* and *Justifications of domestic violence* were examined. This second-order model of *Agency* was included in the larger SEM model described in Figure 4.

The relationships of this research were tested using the five stages of SEM modeling outlined by Bollen & Long (1993), which are commonly used in SEM and multivariate analysis (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). These stages of SEM modeling include model specification, identification, estimation, testing fit, and respecification. Model specification was completed through an examination of relevant literature and theoretical developments leading to the model specified above in Figure 4. Model identification was conducted to ensure that the model is over-identified (i.e. has a sufficient number of degrees of freedom to identify one more unique model estimations that can fit the data) and therefore is an acceptable candidate for SEM analysis. This model has 81 parameters that are free to vary.

Evaluation of model fit relies upon a number of established SEM indices that assess overall fit of the model to the data and includes a model Chi² Goodness of Fit test, Root Mean Square Error of Approximations (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) (Hox & Bechger, 1998; Kelloway, 2015). A good model fit is indicated by a non-significant Chi² as this indicates that there is little variation between variance-covariance matrices of the sample and the model and therefore little difference between estimated matrices and the CDHS 2014 data matrix. A Chi² alpha level of less than 0.05 is an indication of poor model fit, as it indicates that the model and the CDHS data are significantly different. However, as Chi² alpha levels have been shown to be unreliable with large N-values, a significant Chi² alpha level is not the primary indication of model fit given the sample size of 1,809 participants. Therefore, alternative overall model-fit indicators are used. Root Mean Square Error of Approximations (RMSEA) is examined as is standard in SEM. A RMSEA of greater than 0.05

is an indicator of poor model fit. Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is examined, with a value less than 0.9 indicating poor model fit. Mplus also allows for the determination of the Goodness of Fit using the Tucker-Lewis Index or TLI. A TLI with a value less than 0.9 indicating poor model fit (Hox & Bechger, 1998; Kelloway, 2015).

In the case of poor model fit, model respecification is used in the final stage of analysis. Modification indices, or suggested removal or addition of pathways and correlations as suggested by the MPlus 8 software, is identified by the MPlus command “MODINDICES” and suggested addition or removal of paths and covariances are considered and the modified model evaluated by repeating the steps as above until the path model can no longer be modified or the fit indices indicate a model fit (Kelloway, 2015; Schumaker & Lomax, 2004). Model respecification is conducted only if altered paths and covariances are supported by theoretical conceptualizations and literature.

Interpretation of results includes a consideration the size, direction and statistical significance of the coefficients along pathways as well as a consideration of variances and covariances associated with the model, as well as an examination of the impacts of control variables. Coefficients related to the structural model were standardized according to the variances of both latent and observed variables and can be interpreted as linear coefficients as latent variables are considered continuous variables. Statistical significance of predictor variables is indicated by an alpha p-value of less than 0.05

Chapter IV Results

Descriptive Statistics of Latent Variables

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the latent variables used in the SEM model. Regarding mother's access to information, nearly 40 percent of women never accessed any form of these sources of information (N=692) and nearly 10 percent of women indicated that they accessed some source of information more than once a week (N=173). Mothers' literacy levels indicated that over 23 percent of women could not read a sentence at all (N=420) and over 50 percent of women could read a whole sentence (N=990). Regarding mothers' decision making, on average women made 2.59 decisions jointly with their husbands ($SD=1.59$). Nearly 50 percent of mothers agreed with at least one justification of domestic violence (N=906) and on average, the women in this sample agreed with 1.34 justifications of domestic violence ($SD=1.68$).

Regarding mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities, over 35 percent of women did not participate in any of the six early stimulation activities (N= 648), fewer than seven percent of women participated in all six early stimulation activities (N111) and on average, mothers participated in 1.85 early stimulation activities ($SD=1.87$). Nearly 75 percent of women agreed with at least one justification of child abuse (N= 1,327) and almost 27 percent of mothers agreed with all justifications for of child abuse (N=486). Mothers were slightly more likely to agree with all justifications of child abuse for daughters (N=688) than for sons (N=522). On average mothers agreed with 4.88 justifications of child abuse ($SD=3.58$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Latent Variables

Latent Variable	Observed Variables	% (n)		
Access to Information		Not at all	Less than once a week	More than once a week
	Frequency of Access	38.25(692)	52.18 (944)	9.56 (173)
	Level of Literacy	23.23 (420)	22.01 (398)	54.76 (990)
Latent Variable		Mean (SD)	Range	α
Decision-Making	-	2.59 (1.59)	0-5	.71
Justifications of Domestic Violence	-	1.34 (1.68)	0-6	.81
Mother's Involvement	-	1.85 (1.87)	0-6	.77
Justifications of Child Abuse	-	4.88 (3.58)	0-10	.95

Note. Access to Information Cronbach's α = .57

Research Question 1

In order to address Hypothesis 1, the latent construct *Agency* was modeled independently of the overall SEM model. It was hypothesized that all three latent constructs would be significantly and positively associated with the second-order latent construct of *Agency*. This was tested using measurement models for each of the three constructs developed from observed variables: *Access to information*, *Decision making* and *Justifications of domestic violence* (see factor loadings in Appendix A), followed by a structural model assessment and model fit of the latent construct *Agency* (Figure 5). In the event of inadequate model fit, the model was respecified based on recommended covariances produced by the command "MODINDICES", which indicates potential paths that can be correlated. Model respecification is a common step in SEM models, which can be exploratory in nature and is often used to improve model fit (Kelloway, 2015).

Agency measurement model assessment and fit. Modification indices indicated a significant covariance between listens to radio and reads the paper. This correlation could be justified as these forms of information are traditionally the way that individuals access information, and given that access to information is quite new and that level of literacy is slightly

different conceptually. Respecification of the model resulted in a good model fit $\chi^2(4) = 19.26$ ($p < .001$), CFI=.993, TLI=.981, RMSEA=.046. AITV was removed from the model due to a factor loading below .40, however all other factor loadings were above .40. The model fit for the construct of Decision-Making was acceptable, with no respecification needed $\chi^2(4) = 10.75$ ($p < .05$), CFI=.993, TLI=.982, RMSEA=.031. All observed variables loaded higher than .40. Modification indices indicated a significant covariance between beating wife is justified if she neglects the children and beating wife is justified if she goes out without telling husband, indicating a correlation between mothers' freedom of movement and their ability to perform traditional domestic duties of child care. There was also a suggested correlation beating wife is justified if she argues with husband and beating wife is justified if she neglects children, indicating a correlation between challenging power hierarchies and the assumptions relating these hierarchies to women and childcare duties. Finally, a correlation was added between beating a wife is justified if she argues with her husband and beating wife is justified if she goes out without telling husband indicating that there is relationship between women's freedom of movement and their ability to challenge male power and authority. Respecification of the model resulted in a good model fit $\chi^2(6) = 10.37$ ($p < .05$), CFI=1.00, TLI=.99, RMSEA=.020. All items loaded above .40 and were retained in the model. All respecification covariances were included in the structural model to examine the second order latent construct of *Agency*.

Agency Structural model assessment and fit. To assess the structural model of mothers' *Agency*, the three latent constructs above were loaded onto the second-order latent construct *Agency*. The model was over-identified with 45 parameters free to vary. Final model fit indices $\chi^2(198) = 1303.84$ ($p < .001$), CFI=.926, TLI=.916, RMSEA=.056. While this model does not meet the traditional cutoff of RMSEA of $< .05$ as an indication of good model fit, the use of a fixed cutoff point for RMSEA has been challenged due to their limited generalizability

to moderately misspecified models (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Chen, Curran, Bollen, Kirby, & Paxton, 2008; Hayduk & Glaser, 2000; Hu & Bentler, 1999, Marsh, Hau & Wen, 2004; Steiger, 2000). Hu and Bentler, 1999 suggest a RMSEA estimate of $<.05-.06$ indicates good model fit and a RMSEA of $<.08$ indicates an adequate model fit and MacCallum, Browne and Sugawara (1996) suggested the use of $<.01$, $<.05$ and $<.08$ to indicate excellent, good and mediocre fits, asserting that adhering strictly to RMSEA values can be problematic as there can be a limited range of allowable RMSEA values. This model is within an acceptable range of good to adequate model fit. All first order latent constructs loaded significantly onto *Agency* and were positively associated with *Agency*. *Decision making* had a significant positive association with *Agency* ($\beta=.17$, $SE=.05$, $p <.001$), as did *Access to information* ($\beta=0.41$, $SE=.06$, $p <.001$) and *Justifications of domestic violence* ($\beta=0.88$, $SE=.01$, $p <.001$) (Table 3). These findings support Hypothesis 1.

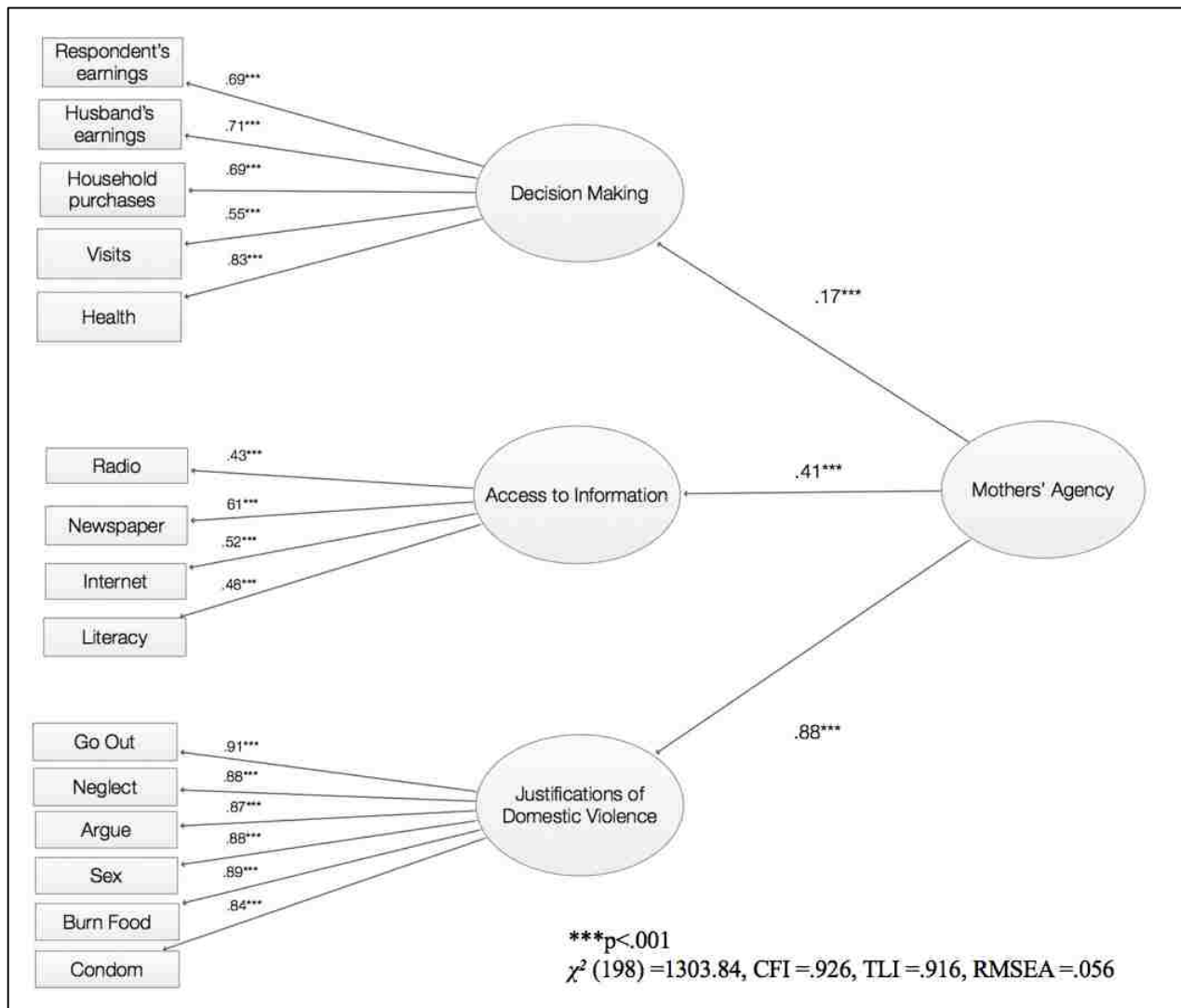


Figure 5. Measurement and Structural Model for Second-Order CFA of Agency.

Research Question 2

The results of the final SEM model addresses research question two “How does mothers’ contact with early childhood education programs relate to decreases in mothers’ justifications of child abuse, and what are the roles mothers’ agency and mothers’ involvement in early stimulation activities in justifications of child abuse?” The final SEM model includes all respecifications described in the Agency model above. All observed variables loaded onto the proposed latent constructs with a factor loading of .40 or higher (see Appendix A).

SEM measurement model assessment and fit.

Construct validity. Appendix C describes the model discriminant validity, which indicates that latent constructs are theoretically distinct and not highly inter-correlated (Brown, 2015). High correlations between constructs would indicate low construct validity as constructs would be measuring identical constructs. An examination of the correlation coefficient between latent constructs indicate that no constructs had a correlation higher than .80.

Mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities. Table 4 describes the Goodness of Fit Indices for the latent constructs of mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities* and *Justifications of child abuse*. The initial model fit indices for the construct of mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities* did not indicate an acceptable model fit, therefore covariances between plays with child and goes outside with child were added. Additionally, covariances were added between counts with child and plays with child, plays with child and sings with child. Finally, covariances were included between sings to child and tells child stories to render an acceptable model fit $\chi^2(5) = 21.98$ ($p < .001$), CFI=.996, TLI=.999, RMSEA=.043.

Mothers' justifications of child abuse. The initial measurement model fit for construct of *Justifications of child abuse* was not acceptable, therefore the model was respecified. Covariances were included between the variables parent is justified in beating a son if he does not care for siblings and parent is justified in beating a son if he does not do housework, as well as covariances between the variables parent is justified in beating a son if he does not care for siblings and parent is justified in beating a daughter if she does not care for siblings. Other respecifications included covariances between the variables son does not do housework and daughter does not do housework, son is not polite and son disobeys. Finally, covariances were included between the variables parent is justified in beating a daughter if she disobeys and parent is justified in beating a son if he disobeys. With these respecifications, good model fit was

achieved $\chi^2(27) = 122.34$ ($p < .001$), CFI=.999, TLI=.999, RMSEA=.044. All measurement respecifications were included in the structural model.

Table 3

Goodness of Fit Indices of SEM Measurement Models (N=1809)

Latent Variable	χ^2	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Access to Information	19.26(4), p=.001	.993	.981	.046
Decision-Making	10.75(4), p=.03	.993	.982	.031
Justifications of Domestic Violence	10.37 (6), p=.11	1.000	.999	.020
Agency	1303.84 (198)	.926	.916	.056
Mother's Involvement	21.98 p=.000	.996	.989	.043
Justifications of Child Abuse	122.34 p=.000	.999	.999	.044

Structural model assessment and fit.

Model Fit Indices. Table 4 represents the final model fit indices for the structural model of the SEM model. This model was over-identified with 88 parameters free to vary. While χ^2 analysis had an insignificant p-value, RMSEA, CFI AND TLI Goodness of Fit Indices met the recommended level indicating good model fit $\chi^2 (655) = 2232.91$ ($p < .001$), CFI=.989, TLI=.988, RMSEA=.036. This indicates good model fit and therefore no model respecification was necessary.

Table 4

Goodness of Fit Indices of SEM Structural Model (N=1809)

Fit Index	Model Fit	Recommended Level	Reference
χ^2	2232.91 (655), p<.001	Non-significant p-value	Kelloway, 2015
CFI	.989	<.90	Bentler, 1990
TLI	.988	<.90	Tucker & Lewis, 1973
RMSEA	.036	<.05	Schumacker & Lomax, 2004

Analysis of path structures. Figure 6 includes the results related to the analysis of the path structures testing the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE and justifications of

child abuse, and the role of mothers' agency and involvement in early childhood education activities. Results indicate that mothers' contact with ECE is not statistically associated with mothers' justifications of child abuse ($\beta=0.10$, $SE= .07$, $p =.168$), indicating that Hypothesis 2a is not supported. The latent variables of *Access to information* ($\beta=0.28$, $SE= .05$, $p =.000$), *Decision making* ($\beta=0.20$, $SE= .04$, $p =.000$), and *Justifications of domestic violence* ($\beta=0.71$, $SE= .06$, $p =.000$), were all positively associated with the latent construct of mothers' *Agency*. This re-confirms the findings of Hypothesis 1, as the second-order latent construct of *Agency* remains significantly related to these factors in the overall SEM model.

The latent construct of mothers' *Agency* is positively associated with contact with ECE programs ($\beta=0.30$, $SE= .06$, $p=.000$), indicating that mothers' increased contact with early education programs is associated with increases in mothers' *Agency*. Mothers with contact with ECE programs are more likely to have more agency than mothers who do not have contact with ECE programs, thus supporting Hypothesis 2b. Additionally, the results of this model support Hypothesis 2c that mothers' contact ECE programs is positively associated with mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities ($\beta=0.36$, $SE= .04$, $p <.001$), indicating that mothers who have contact with ECE programs are more likely to engage in activities such as reading to their child. Mothers' *Agency* is negatively associated with *Justifications of child abuse* ($\beta=-0.89$, $SE= .09$, $p <.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2d that mothers' who have increased agency are more likely to agree with fewer justifications of child abuse. Finally, there was no statistically significant relationship between mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities* and *Justifications of child abuse* ($\beta= -0.03$, $SE= .05$, $p =.54$), refuting Hypothesis 2e that increased mothers' involvement would be associated with increased justifications of child abuse. There was no statistical significance correlation between mothers' *Agency* and *Involvement in early stimulation activities* ($r = 0.05$, $SE= .06$, $p=.34$).

Appendix D presents the relationship between latent constructs and control variables. Specifically, mothers' age is negatively associated with contact with ECE programs ($\beta = -0.07$, $SE = .03$, $p = .03$), mothers' years of education is positively associated with contact with ECE programs ($\beta = 0.39$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$), as is the number of years of husbands' education ($\beta = 0.11$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$). Location was negatively associated with contact with ECE ($\beta = -0.18$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$), indicating that urban mothers are more likely to have contact with ECE programs. Low wealth index was negatively associated with contact with ECE ($\beta = -0.13$, $SE = .04$, $p = .002$), however middle wealth was not significantly associated ($\beta = -0.06$, $SE = .03$, $p = .07$). Mothers' employment status ($\beta = 0.00$, $SE = .03$, $p = .90$) and number of children under five ($\beta = 0.00$, $SE = .03$, $p = .97$) were not significantly associated with mothers' contact with ECE programs.

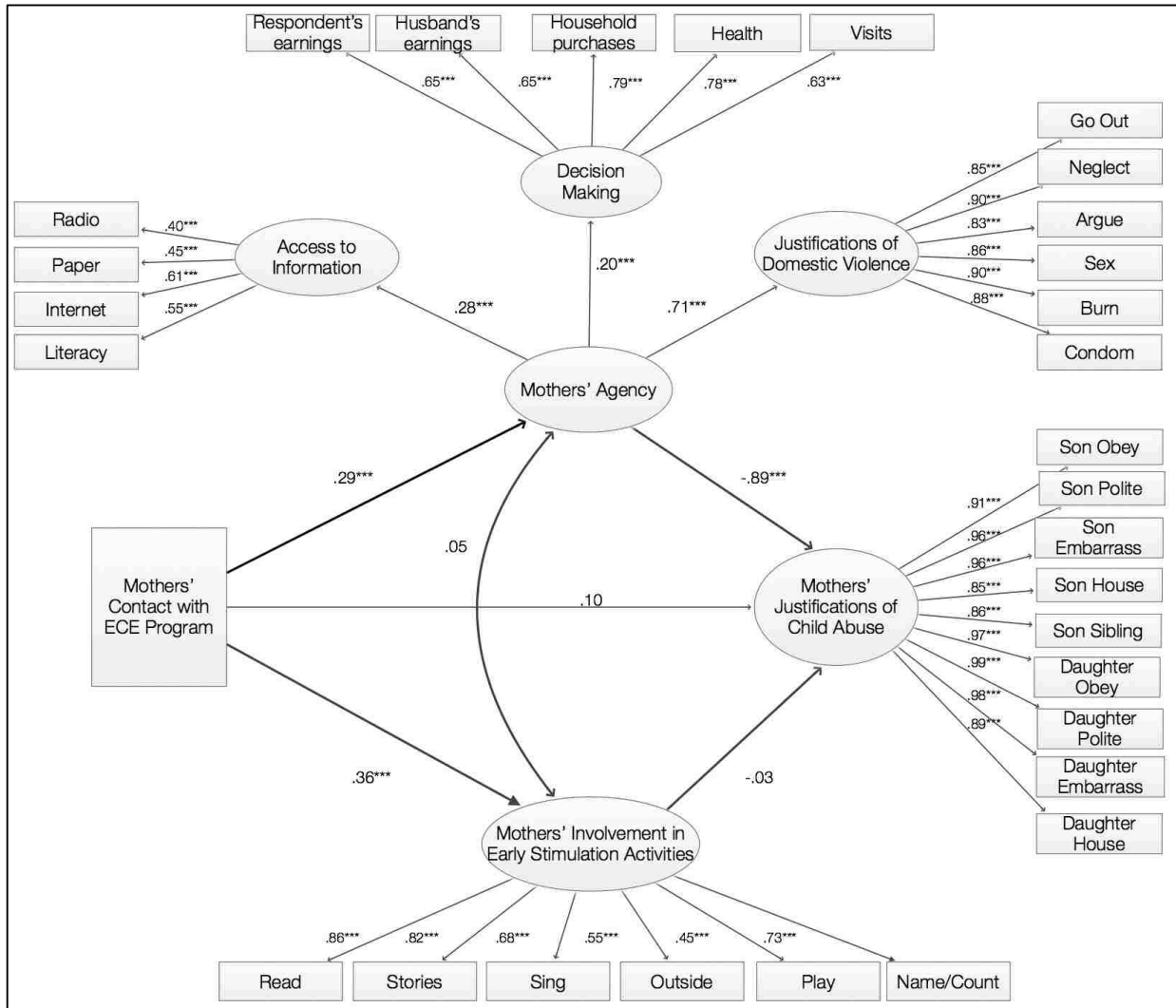


Figure 6. Final SEM model examining the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE and justifications of domestic violence with agency and involvement in early stimulation activities as mediators. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$; $X^2(655) = 2232.91$, CFI = .989, TLI = .988

All estimates are standardized.

Direct/Indirect and total effects. Analysis of direct and indirect paths are necessary to examine the full mediation effects of the latent variables mothers' *Agency* and mothers' *involvement in early stimulation activities*. An indirect effect describes the mediating effect of one or more variables on the relationship between two variables (Brown, 2015), and refers to the compound structural paths made up of two or more independent paths between this relationship. This provides an overall consideration of the direct relationship between mothers' contact with

ECE programs and their justifications of child abuse, while also exploring the size and direction of the significant mediating variables. Testing mediation effects allows for the establishment of causal paths in SEM and overall effects of the mediating variables on the outcome variable. Zhao, Lynch and Chen (2010), outline five potential paths of mediation that can explain mediating effects in SEM: complementary mediation, competitive mediation, indirect-only mediation, direct-only non-mediation, and no-effect non-mediation, each explaining the various ways that mediators can impact direct paths. The direct, indirect and total effects of the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE programs and justifications of child abuse, while considering the role of mothers' agency and maternal involvement in early stimulation activities in this relationship (Kelloway, 2015) are described in Table 5.

Table 5

Relationship between Mothers' Contact with ECE Programs and Justifications of Child Abuse: Direct, Indirect and Total Effects

	Estimate	SE	p-value
Total	-0.17	0.04	<.001***
Total Indirect	-0.27	0.07	<.001***
Specific Indirect			
ECE→Agency→JCA	-0.26	0.07	<.001***
ECE→MI→JCA	-0.01	0.01	.547
Direct			
ECE→JCA	0.10	0.07	.168

Note. *p<.05 ***p<.001

All estimates are standardized.

Results from the analysis of mediating effects indicate an indirect-only mediation effect in which the direct effect between contact with ECE programs and justifications of child abuse produces an insignificant association ($\beta = 0.10$, $SE = .07$, $p = .17$), but a significant mediating effect when accounting for the mediating effects of mothers' agency (Zhao, Lynch and Chen, 2010). Total effects indicate that, when accounting for the latent constructs of mothers' *Agency* and mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities*, mothers' contact with ECE programs is

negatively associated with *Justifications of child abuse* ($\beta = -0.17, SE = .04, p < .001$). This indicates that mothers' who have contact with ECE are more agentic and thereby have decreased justifications of child abuse. The total indirect effects of mothers' *Agency* and mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities* suggest that these variables are involved in the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE programs and *Justifications of child abuse* ($\beta = -0.27, SE = .07, p < .001$). Specific indirect effects suggest that mothers' *Agency* results in a significant indirect-only mediation of this path ($\beta = -0.26, SE = .07, p < .001$), but that mothers' *Involvement in early stimulation activities* ($\beta = -0.01, SE = .01, p = .55$) does not play a significant role in the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE programs and *Justifications of child abuse*. This indicates that mothers' *Agency* accounts for most of the indirect effect related to the negative association between mothers' contact with ECE programs and *Justifications of child abuse*. An indirect-only mediation effect indicates that not only is the hypothesized mediator of mothers' *Agency* a significant mediator in the relationships between mothers' contact with ECE programs and their *Justifications of child abuse*, but also that omitted mediators explaining this relationship are unlikely and that mothers' *Agency* is consistent with the hypothesized theoretical frameworks (Zhao, Lynch and Chen, 2010).

Chapter V Discussion

This research explores Cambodian mothers' agency and its role, along with mothers' involvement, in maternal justifications of child abuse. Mothers' access to information, decision making and justifications of child abuse proved to be an adequate measure of mothers' agency, supporting Hypothesis 1. Using this construct of agency, results refute Hypothesis 2a as mothers' contact with ECE is not related to justifications of child abuse, unless women's agency is considered. Contact with ECE is associated with increased mothers' agency and this agency is an important factor in the decrease of justifications of child abuse. This suggests that women with more agency might be better able to consider the power dynamics in their own lives, including those with their children, and that contact with ECE programs can play an important role in this process. These findings supported Hypothesis 2a and 2c. While Hypothesis 2d was not supported, as mothers' involvement is not related to mothers' justifications of child abuse, Hypothesis 2 b was supported as contact with ECE is related to mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities. This indicates that mothers' involvement does not cause increased strain on their relationships with their children as predicted. Additionally, mothers' agency and mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities are not associated with one another, calling into question the association between mothers' agency and empowerment and children's schooling.

Although there was no significant role of mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities in the relationship between contact with ECE programs and justifications of child abuse, the findings supporting the role of mothers' agency in mediating this relationship have important implications for women, their children, ECE programs and the field of CIE. The consideration of the cultural nuances related to mothers' decision-making, have important

implications decision making as a central concept in women's agency and empowerment. This study supports the inclusion of women's access to information as a significant piece in measuring women's agency.

Supporting Mothers for Child Protection

Globally, ECE programs support mothers' involvement in ECE early stimulation activities to improve child development and support early childhood education (Duch, 2005; Chinen & Bos, 2016; Sayre, Devercelli, Neuman, & Wodon, 2015). In this study, this is reflected in the significant association between mothers' contact with ECE programs and mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities. However, this study argues that ECE programs do not consider the impact of ECE programs on mothers and their agency and view mothers as instruments ECE practices. Additionally, a feminist framework suggests that by not considering these impacts on mothers, and only supporting mothers' involvement in ECE early stimulation practices, these programs further oppress women, which in turn can negatively impact their parenting practices and negatively impacts the way that they interact with their children. Therefore, this study indicates that in order to maximize ECE program aims of child protection, as presumably benefit child well-being, programs should move beyond engaging mothers only through involvement in early stimulation activities to fostering mothers' agency.

Drawing from feminist theory and Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework, this study provides evidence that contact with ECE programs supports mothers' agency and that this agency, as a tool for liberation as opposed to a tool for oppression, allows mothers to implement positive socialization processes, specifically, decreased justifications of child abuse. Feminist theory would suggest that knowledge and knowledge empowerment contribute to the dismantling of family power structures through ECE programming, and the overall mediation of agency in the relationship between contact with ECE and justifications of

child abuse support this assertion. Additionally, this finding supports the feminist perspective that child abuse is associated with patriarchal structures of power dynamics (Dougherty, 1993; Featherstone & Fawcett, 1994; Gordon, 1986) and that women who justify or perpetrate child abuse are asserting power and control over their children as a perpetuation of the family dynamics, in which violence legitimizes structure and to which mothers are also subordinated. This supports Stark and Filcraft's (1998) assertion that the key to decreasing child abuse is through women's empowerment and that the power to transform women's understandings of child abuse lies in the ability to transform mothers' understandings of power and the use of violence to reinforce dominant power structures.

However, the insignificant correlation between mothers' agency and mothers' involvement in this study provides evidence that ECE programs are not able to engage mothers' agency through involvement alone. This lack of significance could indicate that supporting mothers' involvement, without considering their agency, could be a practice of social injustice which is reinforced through ECE programs and forced upon mothers, without considering the impact of these practices on mothers. By ignoring mothers' agency, mothers may be trapped by assumptions of ECE programs regarding how they should engage with their children in early childhood. This calls into question how mothers' involvement is defined in ECE programs and whether these expectations for involvement in early stimulation activities are inclusive and relevant for the way that mothers in Cambodia raise and engage with their young children. Therefore, these limited measurements of mothers' involvement may not capture the impacts of mothers' involvement on justifications of child abuse.

Additionally, these assumptions regarding mothers' involvement may unjustly disregard the many ways that mothers understand and engage in their child's schooling and development, thereby ignoring the multidimensional concept of parent involvement (Fantuzzo, McWayne,

Perry, & Childs, 2004; Manz, Fantuzzo & Power, 2004; McWayne & Melzi, 2014), ensnaring women in expectations stemming from a Western, middle class understanding of education and parent involvement (De Carvalho, 2000) and veiling or diminishing their visibility, voice and agency within these programs. ECE programs could, therefore, be tempering the benefits related to mothers' contact with ECE programs and agency with mother involvement. This supports feminist research (Reay, 1998) that mothers' involvement in schooling is not a universally positive practice, and has important impacts for the mothers involved.

Although mothers' involvement is not significantly associated with justifications of child abuse as hypothesized, the lack of a significant effect could indicate that mothers' involvement may not positively impact children's well-being when other factors, such as mothers' agency, are considered. This is particularly important given that bivariate correlations between mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities and mothers' justifications of child abuse indicated a significant relationship. Therefore, caution should be taken when arguing for the universally positive relationship between mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities and child outcomes, as this study shows that mediating factors could play a role in this relationship. Careful theoretical and methodological considerations should be used in supporting the argument that mothers' involvement is beneficial for child well-being.

Mothers who have children enrolled in ECE programs have shown increased positive interactions with their children, increased positive parenting approaches, and less physical discipline (Green, et al, 2018; Love et al, 2005). In this study, contact with ECE programs in Cambodia could challenge accepted norms of violence such as child discipline and could lead to a network of relationships with other mothers and teachers who offer alternative, non-violent options for child discipline and a network of support regarding the frustrations related to raising young children. Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework would suggest the

knowledge gained from contact with ECE programs would lead mothers to a greater understanding of oppressive practices against their children and skills or tools with which to change those practices. Mothers' contact with these ECE programs could link them to community resources that provide support for mothers' own learning and literacy, thereby increasing their access to information. Finally, parenting programs can play a role in supporting mothers' understandings of their own agency as they learn about gender equity regarding their children (Grace, 2018) and are made aware of community resources.

Mothers' ability to access information, make their own decisions and challenge justifications of domestic violence are supported by contact with ECE programs and support positive parenting practices. This supports research in Western contexts that indicates that mothers who have children enrolled in ECE programs benefit in a number of ways (Zoritch, Roberts & Oakley, 1998) and that benefits related to women's empowerment and agency can be beneficial for child well-being (Cunningham, Ruel, Ferguson, & Uauy, 2015; Kishor, 2005; Lavy, Lotti & Yan, 2016). Contact with ECE programs provides social networks which can help women access information related to their children's' well-being and parenting practices. Other women in ECE programs, including teachers, may be able to help mothers access resources, or may serve as resources themselves, that inform their understandings of their role in the family and to advocate for their own decision making and to challenge justifications of child abuse. This contact with other mothers and teachers could in turn impact their understandings of child abuse and their justifications of child abuse.

Recommendations for ECE Policy and Practice

The establishment of the relationship related to mothers' agency and decreased justifications of child abuse supports the primary implication of this study; that supporting women as more than instruments of ECE practices is critical in child protection efforts. In this

way, Cambodian ECE policy makers and practitioners have an opportunity to support mothers as advocates for child protection, while also supporting their agency. Such an endeavor would address two global issues within a single ECE policy and practice framework. Addressing women's agency is a path to decreasing child abuse, and potential policies programs and practices in ECE should begin to see mothers as potential advocates for child protection, not simply as perpetrators, complicit spouses, or culpable victims in child abuse. With mothers engaged in so many facets of ECE programs and considering their role as primary caregivers and supporters of early stimulation activities, ECE programs can develop mothers' roles as advocates for child protection. The advocacy potential of mothers in contact with ECE programs could be paired with efforts to support their own agency, thereby developing women's ability to advocate for themselves and their children in their homes and communities.

Measuring agency. Measuring women's agency is a complicated task and no single measure can encompass the many facets of women's agency. While constructs of women's empowerment which consider prevalence of resources, justifications of domestic violence and decision making are essential for measuring women's empowerment, this study shows that women's access to information also serves as an important indicator for women's empowerment. In light of Kabeer's (1999) three aspects of women's empowerment, i.e. resources, agency and achievement, the CDHS attends to the aspects of resources quite extensively through variables relating to income, property ownership, employment and other economic resources. Some aspects of agency fall under this umbrella term of empowerment. However, by considering the critical role that access to information plays in supporting women's ability to make choices and "define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438), conceptualization of women's empowerment could be strengthened.

Joint decision making. The inclusion of joint decision making as a measurement of agency is an important, if not controversial, contribution to the measurement of women's agency. One criticism of common conceptualizations with household surveys measuring women's agency, sometimes called autonomy, and empowerment is that privileging women's ability to acting alone in decision making discounts the interdependence of family life and women's potential preference to make decisions with others (Kabeer, 2001b; White, 1992). However, joint decision making has been shown to decrease domestic violence (Hindin & Adair, 2002) and increase women's agency (Deere & Twyman, 2012) as compared to couples in which the husband or wife are the dominant decision maker. Joint decision making can indicate higher quality marital relationships (Coleman & Strauss, 1990) and quality relationships between husband and wife can support women's agency (Allendorf, 2012). ECE policy and practice can better support mothers through careful consideration of cultural, social, and family-related factors, as well as the individual factors that are associated with mothers' decision making when measuring agency.

In particular, ECE policy and programs should consider the specific measurement of agency outlined in this research and how the components of access to information, decision making and justifications of domestic violence can be incorporated into ECE programming. The importance of decreased justifications of domestic violence in the concept of agency, indicates that ECE policy focused on decreasing domestic violence against mothers is justified and important. Providing resources in this endeavor is critical. However, it is also important to consider mothers' justifications of domestic violence and examine ways of decreasing mothers' acceptance of domestic violence in their own lives. This supports Nho and Seng's (2017) assertion that justifications of domestic violence are an important facet of justifications of child abuse. In light of their findings that mothers are more likely to agree with justifications of child abuse than fathers, and the results of this research linking mothers' agency with a strong

influence of justifications of domestic violence, the centering of mothers within ECE policy and practice is further justified.

While focusing on domestic violence against mothers with the aim of decreasing child abuse is a laudable, it is also an incomplete endeavor. The construction of the measurement of agency used here indicates that there are other ways in which women could be supported through ECE programming. In addition to considering mothers' justifications of domestic violence, mothers' access to information and their decision-making can also be a consideration in ECE programming when addressing women's agency. Addressing women's literacy, a component of accessing information, would be in line with Stromquist's work supporting women's deconstruction of power dynamics and broadening of their understandings of power dynamics (Stromquist, 1990, 2006b, 2008). Therefore, supporting mothers' literacy alongside early childhood learning could be a viable means for supporting women's agency through ECE programming. While the exact processes related to the association between contact with early childhood education programs and increased mothers' agency have not yet been explored, this research argues that social contact with other mothers and teachers or access to information through parenting programs could impact mothers' agency. Therefore, providing mothers with opportunities to expand social networks and exchange information with other mothers and teachers could be beneficial in supporting their agency and decreasing their justifications of child abuse.

Engaging mothers, families and communities. Supporting mothers' advocacy is an opportunity for ECE policy and programming to address issues of women's empowerment and child protection simultaneously, while promoting mothers as advocates of child protection. The collective nature of Cambodian society and the centering of many ECE programs in many communities indicates that a focus on family and communities should be considered when

supporting women's agencies and justifications of child abuse. While mothers are potentially advocates for child protection, fathers and community members should be included as allies in the support of women's agency and justifications of child abuse. Research indicates that leaving men out of women's agency altogether can cause resistance to practices hindering women's agency (Fleming, Barker, McCleary-Sills & Morton, 2013), and that men as allies in supporting women's empowerment is crucial (Connell, 2005). Additionally, local community action can be powerful in supporting women (Assaad, Nazier, & Ramadan, 2015; Baily, 2011; Mason & Smith, 2003). This research indicates that ECE programs that address women's agency might be particularly effective in community and home-based ECE programs which are already centered in village life and engage communities, families and women in ECE programs and in parenting programs. As the Cambodian government views ECE as an essential vehicle to decreasing child abuse, particularly through family and community centered ECE programs (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2014a), the centering of mothers and mothers' agency within ECE policy could strengthen these family and community centered approaches to child protection.

Theoretical Implications

The importance of mothers' agency in justifications of child abuse has theoretical implications related to knowledge empowerment, feminism and power. This work supports feminist theory and a knowledge empowerment framework by suggesting that justifications of child abuse are rooted in family power dynamics which are reinforced through violence. However, it also suggests ambiguity in the role of mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities and its impact on women's agency or their justifications of child abuse, calling into question whether mothers' involvement falls within the domain of feminist work. Despite no clear association in this research between mothers' involvement in early stimulation activities

and mothers' agency and justifications of child abuse, a discussion of the theoretical implications of mothers' contact with ECE programs, agency, and justifications of child abuse is warranted.

Stromquist's knowledge empowerment framework posits that through education women transform their knowledge of power and agency to broaden their understanding of oppressive practices. This study indicates that contact with ECE programs is associated with increased agency and decreased justifications of child abuse, and therefore supports the possibility that ECE programs transform women's understanding of power dynamics and their own agency, and therefore the way that they interact with their children. This supports Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment theory, indicating that educational programs like ECE programs, can support women's agency and transform their understanding power dynamics and oppressive practices. It also extends her conceptualization of the knowledge transformation to examine not only the oppressive practices that impact women's agency but the potential of education to transform power dynamics related to their own oppressive practices towards their children. The testing of Stromquist's theoretical framework is not limited to an examination of power dynamics and oppressive practices, but also considers the potential programs, particularly literacy training, that can support women's transformational learning.

While Stromquist examines the importance of literacy in transformational learning (Stromquist, 1990, 2006b, 2008), she also acknowledges that "Feminists have learned that efforts to empower adult women must not only include literacy training but also transformative education content through non-formal and informal learning" (Stromquist, 2014, p.548). The use of literacy and access to information to define agency, and their significance in this model, aligns with Stromquist's (2007) work with formal and informal education for women, which indicates that education programs for women can be transform power dynamics and support women's empowerment. However, the inclusion of agency within a model of ECE

programming extends this framework to include education programs that are not adult education courses for women, but continues to highlight the importance of literacy, and access to information, in knowledge transformation.

The transformation of knowledge through mothers' contact with ECE programs also connects to Freire's (2018) conceptualization of education and knowledge as a tool for liberation. Considering the lack of an effect on mothers' involvement on agency and a lack of an effect on mothers' justification of child abuse through mothers' involvement, this has important implications for ECE programs and their potential for the liberation or oppression of mothers. By considering mothers' agency, ECE programs could serve as opportunities of mothers' "conscientization" and liberation. However, by ignoring agency and supporting only mothers' involvement, ECE programs could be acting as a tool of oppression, or at the very least missing important opportunities to support a liberation pedagogy by supporting mothers learning regarding the forces of oppression to which mothers and their children are subjected.

This study adds to the scant body of literature examining the phenomenon of women and child abuse (Featherstone, 1999). While this research does not directly test power dynamics, it does allude to the underlying power associated with mothers' justifications of child abuse and the ability to transform these power dynamics through women's agency. In the Cambodian context, where "All relations are hierarchically ordered along the elder-younger dimension, bong/pqoun, and the kinship terminology is extensively applied to all relations in society, as a way to conceptualize and order social relations" (Ovensen, Trankell, & Ojendal, 1996, p. 55), children are expected to show obedience to their parents (Miles & Thomas, 2007) and within this context children are subordinated to family dynamics which are enforced through violence. This is also in line with the construction of child abuse in Cambodia by Miles and Thomas (2007), which aligns physical discipline with hierarchical patterns of child rearing in which children remain

without voice. While these contextual factors are beyond the scope of this research, it is possible that these interactions of cultural hierarchy and patriarchal forces can be linked to the acceptance of violence at a societal level, and in particular to the remnants of the violence perpetrated by Cambodia's recent history of genocide.

Implications for the field of CIE. Along with theoretical implications for Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework, this research contributes to the field of CIE in three important ways. First, it suggests that two critical fields of CIE- women's empowerment and early childhood development- are linked, with important implications, and opportunities, for the global issue of child protection. Although this research focuses on the single context of Cambodia, there is the potential to expand the construct of Agency, rooted in CIE conceptualizations, to other countries implementing the DHS and expanding its use in the field of CIE. While the DHS occasionally works with Kabeer's conceptualization of agency (Kishor, 2005), Stromquist's (2015) knowledge empowerment framework has not been used with this dataset. This is important considering the uniqueness of the dataset, the inclusion of education variables, and particularly ECE variables, and the numerous countries for which this dataset is available. Therefore, this work brings the potential of comparative scholarship across the important CIE domains of women's empowerment and agency, early childhood education, and child protection.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this research. The use of this dataset does not allow for the measurement of women's agency before and after contact with ECE programs. This causes issues related to causality and determining whether mothers who have contact with ECE programs have more agency due to this contact or if they have access to ECE programs because they have increased agency. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the

extent to which ECE programs support mothers' agency. A second limitation is that there is no measurement of the type of ECE programs with which mothers have contact, what kind of contact mothers have (i.e. social interactions, parenting programs, etc.) or the extent of this contact. Contact with ECE programs assumes that mothers are engaging with ECE programs in some way, but there is no way to measure the type or extent of the contact using this data. There are also limitations in conceptualizing women's agency based on available variables. While the variables used in this study constitute a conceptualization of agency, the dataset does not specifically measure agency and, therefore, does not have variables that were constructed for this purpose. This could result in a limiting conceptualization of agency that could be better addressed with specific questions pertaining to mothers' agency. Finally, the term child abuse is a culturally constructed concept. What constitutes discipline in some cultures might constitute child abuse in others. The use of the term child abuse, though it aligns with the Cambodian government's definition, could invoke varying conceptions regarding physical harm to children.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this research provide an initial look at the role of Cambodian mothers' agency and involvement in the relationship between mothers' contact with ECE programs and justifications of child abuse. The paucity of research related to this topic allows for several recommendations for future research. While these results indicate that the construct developed to measure agency is valid in this work, agency is a culturally sensitive concept. The constructs of justifications of domestic violence, access to information and decision making might not be sufficient in defining agency with other datasets. Therefore, validation of this construct in other contexts is necessary. The interaction effect of mothers' agency is beyond the scope of this study; however, an exploration of the interaction effects of mothers' involvement and mothers'

agency would give a more complete explanation of how these two constructs impact mothers' justifications of child abuse.

The inability to measure mothers' agency before and after contact with ECE program should be addressed through research which can measure mothers' agency as a result of contact with ECE programs in order to substantiate the impact of ECE programs on mothers' agency and justifications of child abuse. Additionally, the processes associated with assuming mothers' contact with early childhood education programs should be established further, determining the nature of the contact, social networking or direct parenting programs, and the extent of that contact. Additional qualitative research regarding mothers' experiences in ECE programs could determine if mothers are being impacted in other ways, particularly regarding mothers' involvement in early stimulation practices, and provide an in-depth consideration of the impact of mothers' involvement in ECE programs. Further research should consider the interrelation between mothers' and fathers' involvement in early stimulation activities and how this might be related to mothers' agency. Finally, the impacts of Cambodian mothers' agency on child development should be further explored, particularly in light of their involvement in early stimulation activities.

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Appendix A

Standardized Factor Loadings

Standardized factor loadings for latent constructs of full SEM model

Construct	Label	Indicator Description	Loading
Access to Information	AIRAD	Do you listen to the radio at least once a week, less than once a week or not at all?	.40***
	AIPAP	Do you read a newspaper or magazine at least once a week, less than once a week or not at all?	.45***
	AIINT	Do you access to internet, at least once a week, less than once a week or not at all?	.61***
	AILIT	Can you read any part of the sentence to me?	.55***
Decision Making	DMMR	Who usually decides how the money you earn will be used: you, your (husband/partner), or you and your (husband/partner) jointly?	.65***
	DMMH	Who usually decides how your (husband's/partner's) earnings will be used: you, your (husband/partner), or you and your (husband/partner) jointly?	.65***
	DMHEA	Who usually makes decisions about health care for yourself: you, your (husband/partner), you and your (husband/partner) jointly, or someone else?	.79***
	DMPUR	Who usually makes decisions about making major household purchases?	.78***
	DMVIS	Who usually makes decisions about visits to your family or relatives?	.63***
Justifications of DV	JDVOUT	In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: If she goes out without telling him?	.85***
	JDVNEG	In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: If she neglects the children?	.90***

	JDVARG	In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: If she argues with him?	.83***
	JDVSEX	In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: If she refuses to have sex with him?	.86***
	JDVBUR	In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: If she burns the food?	.90***
	JDVCON	In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations: If she asks him to use condom?	.88***
Mothers' Involvement	MIREA	In the past 3 days, did you or any household member age 15 or over engage in any of the following activities with (NAME): Mother read books to or look(ed) at picture with (NAME)?	.86***
	MISTOR	In the past 3 days, did you or any household member age 15 or over engage in any of the following activities with (NAME): Mother told stories to (NAME)?	.82***
	MISING	In the past 3 days, did you or any household member age 15 or over engage in any of the following activities with (NAME): Mother sang songs to (NAME) or with (NAME), including lullabies?	.68***
	MIOUT	In the past 3 days, did you or any household member age 15 or over engage in any of the following activities with (NAME): Mother took (NAME) outside the home, compound, yard or enclosure?	.55***
	MIPLAY	In the past 3 days, did you or any household member age 15 or over engage in any of the following activities with (NAME): Mother played with (NAME)	.45***
	MICOUN	In the past 3 days, did you or any household member age 15 or over engage in any of the following activities with (NAME): Mother	.73***

		named, counted, or drew things to or with (NAME)?	
Justifications of Child Abuse	JCAOB	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his son for the following reasons: If he disobeys?	.91***
	JCAPOL	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his son for the following reasons: If he impolite?	.96***
	JCAFAM	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his son for the following reasons: If he has embarrassed the family?	.96***
	JCAHOU	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his son for the following reasons: If he does not do the housework or cooking?	.85***
	JCASIB	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his son for the following reasons: If he does not take care of younger sibling?	.86***
	DJCAOB	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his daughter for the following reasons: If she disobeys?	.99***
	DJCAPOL	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his daughter for the following reasons: If she impolite?	.98***
	JCAHOU	In your opinion, is a parent justified in hitting or beating his daughter for the following reasons: If she does not do the housework or cooking?	.89***

***p<.001

Appendix B

Exogenous, endogenous, and outcome variables

Observed Exogenous Predictor Variable	
Name	Operationalization
Enrollment of Child in ECE Measurement Level: Dichotomous (Yes/No)	Mothers who reported that their child did or did not participate in any learning or early childhood education program
Latent Endogenous Predictor Variable	
Name	Operationalization
Agency	A latent construct measuring mothers' agency constructed from three latent constructs: Justifications of Domestic Violence, Decision-Making and Information Access
Justifications of Domestic Violence	A latent construct inferred from five observed variables. Agreement with one of five reasons why a husband would be justified in beating his wife: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goes out without telling husband 2. Neglects children 3. Argues with husband 4. Refuses sex 5. Burns food
Decision Making	A latent construct inferred from five observed variables regarding who makes decisions regarding: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participant' earnings 2. Husband's earnings 3. Large household purchases 4. Participant's health decisions 5. Participant's visits to family and relatives
Information Access	A latent construct inferred from five observed variables regarding how often the respondent: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watches TV 2. Listens to the radio 3. Reads the Newspaper 4. Accessed the Internet

	5. Level of Literacy
Mothers' Involvement Measurement Level: Continuous	A latent construct inferred from six observed variables related to mothers who reported that they: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read books to their child 2. Told their child stories 3. Sang to their child 4. Took the child outside 5. Played with their child 6. Named, counted or drew with their child
Latent Endogenous Outcome Variable	
Justifications of Child Abuse	A latent construct inferred from 10 observed variables related to agreement with one of 5 reasons why a parent is justified in beating a son or a daughter: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The child disobeys 2. The child is impolite 3. The child embarrasses the family 4. The child does not do housework (for girls, daughter does not do housework or cook) 5. The child does not take care of their siblings
Exogenous Control Variables	
Mother's Education Level	Continuous variable indicating maximum number of years of completed education
Father's Education Level	Continuous variable indicating maximum number of years of completed education
Location	Dichotomous variable indicating rural or urban residence
Employment Status	Dichotomous variable indicating currently working no/yes
Wealth Index	Categorical variable representing socioeconomic status recoded as poor/poorest, middle and richer/richest
Number of Children under 5	Categorical variables indicating the number of children in the household under 5 years old.

Appendix C

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity: Correlations between Latent Factors

Latent Constructs	Decision Making	Justifications of Domestic Violence	Access to Information	Mother's Involvement	Justifications of Child Abuse	Agency
Decision-Making	1.00					
Justifications of Domestic Violence	0.18	1.00				
Access to Information	0.06	0.21	1.00			
Mother's Involvement	0.08	0.25	0.09	1.00		
Justifications of Child Abuse	-0.20	-0.66	-0.23	-0.19	1.00	
Agency	.23	.77	.27	0.33	-0.66	1.00

Appendix D

Control Variables

Relationship Between Control Variables and ECE SEM Model

	Estimate	SE	p-value
Age	-0.07	0.03	.026**
Years of Education	0.39	0.03	.000***
Years of Education Husband	0.11	0.04	.000***
Location	-0.18	0.05	.000***
Employment Status	0.00	0.03	.896
Children under 5	0.01	0.03	.973
Low Wealth	-0.13	0.04	.002***
Mid Wealth	-0.06	0.03	.067

Note. *p<.05, ** p<.01, ***p<.001

Vita

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Refereed publications include:

- Anderson, E., & Grace, K. (2018). From Schoolgirls to "Virtuous" Khmer Women: Interrogating Chhab Srey and Gender in Cambodian Education Policy. *Studies in Social Justice*, 12(2), 215-234.
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