

Dr. Colleen McGinn
**Economic trajectories following forced evictions in Phnom Penh,
Cambodia: An analysis of displaced women's narratives**

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Abstract:

This lecture explores how forced evictions affect displaced women's economic conditions. Forced evictions – “the involuntary removal of persons from their homes or land, directly or indirectly attributable to the State” (OHCHR, 1996, p. 2) – are a worldwide phenomenon, and one of the most common triggers of forced migration globally. They are widespread in Cambodia. Twenty-seven in-depth narrative interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 22 displaced women to explore post-displacement adaptation. Economic circumstances proved to be crucial to understanding overall risk and resilience. The nature and degree of economic harm experienced by participants varied widely. Harm affected different groups differently, along patterns that were consistent with pre-displacement socioeconomic status and influenced by the degree to which their financial and social capital was embedded in their former neighborhoods. Harm to livelihoods especially affected the poor, including renters who were unable to earn incomes in new locations. Harm to assets affected homeowners with relatively stable incomes, but lost enormous value of their properties. A third category lost both livelihoods and assets in a catastrophic double blow; this group tended to include shopkeepers others who both lived and worked on their property. Finally, some women reported that forced eviction had had a relatively benign impact on them. Narratives in this category were idiosyncratic. However, overall these women had superficial ties to their former neighborhoods or else found new housing nearby, and had intact livelihoods. This paper argues that a housing/shelter focus to advocacy, policy, and assistance strategies is too narrow, and poorly addresses the livelihood crisis that are experienced by the displaced. Key recommendations include: compensation at full market value for seized properties, and broad urban planning measures to protect and encourage affordable rental housing within the city, proximate to diverse livelihood opportunities.

Biodata

Dr. Colleen McGinn was awarded a PhD in 2013 from the Columbia University School of Social Work; this lecture is adapted from her dissertation entitled *Every day is difficult for my heart. Forced evictions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Women's narratives of risk and resilience*. She works as a social research consultant, and is an adjunct research associate at Columbia University. Prior to her PhD studies, Dr. McGinn worked for many years as an NGO program manager in Southeast Asia and across the globe.