

Adolescent Sexual Health in Thailand***

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1). To study sexual health's situation among the adolescent in Thailand 2). To investigate sexual norms and practices among the adolescent across Thailand. The research used cross-sectional descriptive study by a stratified two-stage cluster sample design to produce a nationally representative sample. Using the questionnaire which we randomly selected several classes at the chosen 17 institutes so as to meet a required sample size in each regional stratum.

The result shown that 6924 questionnaires were returned and about 60% of male and 40% of female were majority in science and technology and the rest in education. We originally targeted 3rd and 4th year students but some 1st and 2nd were included in the study. One-third of the participants lived with their family or relatives at home but living with their friends in the apartment or dormitory was common as well for both male and female students. The statement of HIV infection regarding the effectiveness of condom use, a large majority of the participants (over 70-80% think that consistent condom use would prevent HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. The participants self-efficacy of controlling sexual contacts by someone, among female students over 60% are reportedly capable of stopping kissing on the lips and over 70% reported that they can stop him touching the breasts or having sex, even if they are told to break up their relationship unless they have sex with him. The perception of their friends' sexual experience and norm was quite different between male and female students, males' friends were more sexually engaged and permissive to such behaviors than females' friends. Sexual experience, mainly show the participants it was quite common for both male and female students to have ever had a serious boyfriend or girlfriend and to have kissed someone on lip ; more prevalent among males than females. Regarding their sexual debut, a majority of male (63%) and female (89%) students had first sex with their

serious boyfriend or girlfriend, though about one in three males initiated their sex with casual partners or sex workers. Their sexual debut was likely to be unplanned for both sexes. And condom use at first sex was as low as 39% for males and 42% for females. Regret for first sex was much more prevalent among females (67%) than males (26%). The conclusions and recommendation that nowadays about half of male and one in five female college students in Thailand are involved in sexual relationship with their partners but most of them do not follow the practice of consistent condom use despite they are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and particular, have protective attitudes to sex. So, further efforts need to be made to fill in the gap between knowledge and practice with regard to sex among Thai youth.

Introduction

In Thailand, adolescent sexual behaviors are becoming more active despite of the risk of sexually transmitted infection, notably human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), as well as unplanned pregnancy. Thai men initiate their sexual activities much earlier than women, and premarital sex is quite common among them, often with commercial sex workers. The HIV epidemic occurred in the early 1990's, however, prompted men changed their sexual behaviors: By shifting from commercial to non-commercial sex partners. This might led women to initiate their sexual activities in early age and increased their risk of sexually transmitted infections. It should be

continuously monitor such changes in their sexual activities and associated risks so that we can plan appropriate interventions to protect their sexual health. In this survey, the researcher investigated sexual norms and investigated sexual norms and practices among the adolescent across Thailand.

Objectives

1. To study sexual health's situation among the adolescent in Thailand.
2. To investigate sexual norms and practices among the adolescent across Thailand.

Methods

The target population of this study was the students of 36 Rajabhat universities

located nationwide in eight regional strata: upper north, lower north, upper northeast, lower northeast, central east, central west, south, and Bangkok which is the capital of Thailand. Each stratum consists of four to six campuses. A stratified two-stage cluster sample was designed to make a nationally representative sample of the students at the 36 campuses. The first-stage of the sampling frame contained the 36 campuses of eight regional strata. In each stratum, 50 % or half the campuses were selected with probability proportional to the university size within the stratum. Two strata consisting of five campuses, respectively, were represented by two campuses each. As a result, 17 out of 36 campuses were selected. At the second-stage of sampling, it randomly selected several classes at the chosen 17 campuses so as to meet a required sample size in each regional stratum. The sample size of each regional stratum was determined in proportion to the stratum size in the total target population, and it was evenly allocated for the chosen campuses within each

stratum. All students in selected classes were requested to participate in the study.

Data collection

The data collection was done in 2013 during June – August by the researcher visited each campuses for data collection. And explained to the study participants about the aim of the study and the fact that their participation is voluntary and their answers will be kept confidential. It was not seek for their written consents to keep their participation anonymous but they were instructed to skip any question as they wish. The participants answered anonymous self-administered questionnaires which were distributed by the research's team, and which were collected in class within an enclosed envelope or carton box. Data collection took about 30 minutes in each class. For this study, it obtained ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tokyo, as well as official approval from the authority in charge of the studied institutes.

Self-administered questionnaire were used. The questionnaire consisted of 2 parts, part 1 was the demographic characteristics of the participants included age, sex, living arrangement (whether they live with their families/relatives or in dormitory/apartment).

and part 2 consisted of knowledge on HIV/AIDS, mainly on the route of HIV transmission and the effectiveness of preventive behavior. Regarding their self-efficacy in relation to sexual contacts, male students were asked whether they hesitate or not to obtain condom when it is necessary and whether they can stop themselves from having sex against their strong sexual desire; female students were asked whether they can stop someone they like if that person wanted to kiss them on the lips, to touch their private parts, or to have sex with them even if they are told to break up the relationship unless they have sex; both male and female students were asked whether they could tell their partner to use condoms.

For their sexual norms 5 Likert scale were used to ask both male and female

participants about their idea on condom use and premarital sex. Participants chose to answer either “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “not sure”, “agree” and “strongly agree” on the questions such as “People who use condoms during sex don’t trust the person they’re with” and “Having sexual intercourse is something only married couples should do”.

As to their sexual experience, the questionnaire were stated whether they have had sex with a steady partner, casual friend, someone they had just met, sex worker, or relatives in their lifetime and in the past 12 months, and how frequently they had used a condom with them in the past 12 months (“always”, “more than half the time”, “half the time”, “less than half the time”, and “never”). Information regarding their first sexual experience we asked included: their age at first sex; type of their first sexual partner; condom use at first sex, and if condom was used, who suggested, and if not used, why; when they decided to have sex before actually having sex; whether first sex was regrettable.

The participants' perception of peer's sexual and norm and parental attitude toward sex. Particularly on how many of their friends they think have a steady partner, experiences of kissing, touching breast or genitals, or having sex, and how many of their friends think people their age can have sex with a steady partner or people their age should wait until they are older to have sex. For these questions, the participants chose to answer either "none", "less than half", "half", "more than half", or "all" then asked the participants to assess whether their parents accept their having sex, using a five-point scale: "definitely no", "probably no", "maybe", "probably yes", or "definitely yes".

RESULTS

The questionnaires were returned by 6924 students. Regarding, the characteristics of these participants by sex and region. About 60% of male and 50% of female students were majoring in science and technology studies, and the rest in education. The proportion of 3rd year students was greater than that of 4th year students for both male and

female students. It was originally targeted at 3rd and 4th year students but some 1st and 2nd year students were included in the study. Since they were only 4% of all the participants, they were included in the analysis for the present report. About one-third lived with their family or relatives at home but living with their friends in the apartment or in the dormitory was common as well for both male and female students(66%).

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

The proportion of the participants who agree or disagree with the statement regarding HIV infection. Regarding the effectiveness of condom use, a large majority of the participants (over 70 to 80%) thought that consistent condom use would prevented HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases but the rest of the participants do not necessarily think that condom use perfectly prevent HIV infection. Over 60% thought that having sex once or twice without using a condom can result in HIV infection.

A majority of male (68%) and female (75%) students thought that having one uninfected faithful sex partner would

protect them from HIV infection but one in three males (37%) and females (35%) denied the effectiveness of sexual abstinence in HIV infection. Misunderstanding of the mode of HIV infection was still observed. One in four males (27%) and females (29%) think that HIV infection through kissing is possible. Regarding other modes of transmission such as mosquito bites, sharing a meal, and sharing a needle, those who misunderstood the possibility of HIV infection through these respective modes was found in less than one in ten participants.

The HIV transmission from mother to child, females had a better knowledge than males. The fact that a pregnant woman can transmit HIV to her unborn child is known to 87% of females but 78% of males. Similarly, HIV transmission through breastfeeding is known to 62% of females but 49% of males. Regarding the curability of HIV/AIDS, nearly 40% think that HIV/AIDS is incurable so far and 75% of males and 82% of females think that those infected with HIV would be infected for life.

The majority of the participants (58% of males and 66% of females) think that a healthy-looking person can be infected with HIV, yet one in three males and one in four females were unsure about it.

Self-efficacy of controlling sexual contacts

The participants' self-efficacy of controlling sexual contacts by someone they like very much. Among female students, over 60% are reportedly capable of stopping him kissing on the lips, while over 70% reported that they can stop him touching their breasts or having sex, even if they are told to break up their relationship unless they have sex with him.

Regarding condom use, a greater number of females (80%) than males (65%) reported that they can tell their partner to use a condom. Over 70% of males would not hesitate to get a condom if they need it but only about half of males reported that they can stop themselves from having sex even if they have strong sexual feelings for someone.

Perception of peer's sexual experience and norm

How the participants perceived their peer's sexual experience and norm. The perception of their friends' sexual experience and norm was quite different between male and female students. According to their perception, males' friends were more sexually engaged and permissive to such behaviors than females' friends.

Sexual norm

The proportion of the participants who agree or disagree with the statement regarding sexual norm. As seen in their perception of peer's sexual norm, there were large discrepancies in their own sexual norms between male and female students: males were more permissive to having sex even before marriage and even if the risk of sexually transmitted diseases was involved, as compared to females.

Perception of parental attitude toward sex

The perception of the participants about whether their parents would accept their sexual experience. As compared to females, male students perceived their sexual experience would be more accepted by their parents and more by their fathers. Most of females perceived

their sexual experience would not be accepted by both parents.

Norms on condom use

The proportion of the participants who agree or disagree with the statement regarding norm on condom use. Compared to males, female students had negative attitudes to sex without using a condom, while males tended to think condom use would imply mistrust to the partner and make sex less pleasurable. Yet, a majority of both males and females thought that people who might have sex during a date should be responsible to carry a condom.

Sexual experience

Mainly show the participants' sexual experience. It was quite common for both male and female students to have ever had a steady boyfriend or girlfriend and to have ever kissed someone on the lips; more prevalent among males than females. The proportion of those who have ever had sex was greater among males (47%) than females (18%) while the proportion of those who have ever had sexually transmitted diseases was not largely different between males (8%) and females (5%).

Most of male and female students who have ever had sex with their steady partners. Having sex with casual friends, someone they just met, sex workers, relatives and some others was much more common among males than females, and among these sex partners, having sex with casual friends and someone just they met was widespread among males.

Regarding their sexual debut, a majority of male (63%) and female (89%) students had first sex with their steady boyfriend or girlfriend, though about one in three males initiated their sex with casual partners or sex workers. Condom use at first sex was as low as 39% for males and 42% for females.

A majority of males (68%) reported that they were the ones who suggested condom use at their first sex, while a majority of females (46%) reported that they jointly decided with their partners to use a condom. The most commonly cited reason for not using a condom at first sex was the same for both sexes: 24% of males and 33% of females did not concerned of it. As to other reasons, 20% and 17% of males did not like it or

wanted to use it but it was not available; and 23% and 12% of females used other contraceptives or did not like it. Their sexual debut was likely to be unplanned for both sexes. Only 16% of males and 22% of females decided to have sex once a day or more before. Regret for first sex was much more prevalent among females (67%) than males (26%).

Of those who have ever had sex, over 80% of both male and female students had sex in the past 12 months mostly with their steady partner, but only 20% consistently use a condom and no use is quite common for both sexes. Males were more likely to engage in sex with other partners than their steady partners, and their condom use was more frequent when they had sex particularly with such partners as someone they just met, sex workers and some others.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Nowaday, about half of male and one in five female college students in Thailand are involved in sexual relationship with their partners but most of them do not follow the practice of consistent condom

use despite they are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and female students, in particular, have protective attitudes to sex. So, further efforts need to be made to fill in the gap between knowledge and practice with regard to sex among Thai youth. And also need more efforts from many related sectors.

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