

Factors Related to the Sexual Behaviors among Youth in Universities Located in the Eastern Region of Thailand

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Background and objective: Youth is a “crisis period”, as it is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. This period incites the youth to have curiosity, especially to sexual contents. As a result, they have higher risk behavior leading to the percentage of newly HIV infected persons among youth in the eastern region that is proportionally higher. This research aimed to study factors related to sexual health behaviors among youth in universities located in the eastern region of Thailand.

Material and Method: This research was a cross-sectional survey research. The data collection process was conducted from June-September 2011. There were 405 informants, who participated in this study. They were students from both government and private universities in the eastern region. The age of the youth was 20-24 years old. The students' field of study varied. The tool of the study was self-answered questionnaires. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented as frequency, percentage, average score, deviation standard scale, and it was analyzed by Crude odds ratio.

Results: It was found that three-fifths of the youth already had sexual experiences, and more than half did not use condoms during their first-time sex. Regarding sexual behavior, it was found that almost one-fourth of the students did not use condoms at any time when they had sex, and did not negotiate for safer sex when they had sex. The statistical significance was ($p = 0.012$, Crude OR = 1.65). Youth who already had sex had more chances to have unprotected sex than those who never had sex ($p = 0.014$, Crude OR = 1.64). Youth who had casual sex partner(s) had more chances to have unprotected sex than youth who did not have casual sex partner(s) ($p = 0.026$, Crude OR = 1.78). Youth who had little knowledge on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases would have more chances to have unprotected sex than youth who had high level of knowledge on these topics ($p = 0.010$, Crude OR = 2.83). Youth who had negative attitudes towards safe sex would have more chance to have unprotected sex than youth who had positive attitudes towards safe sex ($p = 0.002$, Crude OR = 3.65).

Conclusion: More than half of the informants had sexual experiences. They did not use condoms during their first-time intercourse. The study found that the factors, which had a relationship with sexual behaviors showing statistical significance, were as follows: gender, having sex in the past 3 months, having casual sex partner(s) in the past 3 months, knowledge on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and attitude towards safe sex. This study's recommendation suggests that the educational institutions and parents should contribute to the knowledge and attitudes, and should support the life skills for safe sex behavior.

Keywords: Sexual behavior, Unsafe sexual behavior, Youth

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Youth is the life period when one faces rapid changes. It can also be considered a “crisis period” in one's lifetime as it is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood⁽¹⁾. Besides, youth have to undergo various changes in terms of physical growth, psychology, emotion, society, thought and intelligence as well as social conditions and values. This period incites the youth to have curiosity, especially to sexual contents⁽²⁾, which probably causes risk behaviors in terms of health and social behaviors, such as under-

aged sexual behavior, teenage pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, etc⁽³⁾.

According to UNAIDS's 2011 report, there are 34 million people who are HIV patients or people who are living with HIV⁽⁴⁾. This number has increased compared to that of the last 10 years. From this number, there were 2.5 million newly infected people⁽⁴⁾. Female youth worldwide aged 15-24 years were 50% of these newly infected people⁽⁵⁾.

Statistically, the Bureau of Epidemiology, Department of Disease Control in Thailand has received the report from both governmental and private health service establishments from 1984 until 31 October 2014 that there were 388,621 accumulated cases. From these cases, there were 32,449 people whose age was between 15-24 years old⁽⁶⁾.

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From the HIV infection surveillance among students in Thailand's 2011 data, it was found that students' average age of the first sexual intercourse was 12 years old, which leads to the under-aged pregnancy problem. In 2010, Thailand ranked first for the teen-mother problem in Asia⁽⁷⁾. Pregnancy among youth under 20 years old was 14.3% of all age groups⁽⁸⁾. In addition, it was found that Thai youth had a very low level of knowledge regarding family planning and sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, they held false beliefs regarding abortion, and how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases⁽⁹⁾.

One-fifth of the population in Thailand's eastern region were students aged 10-24 years old. Almost half of students were living in dormitories both inside and outside campus. The percentage of newly HIV infected persons among youth in the eastern region was proportionally higher. From the findings of the study conducted in this area, it was found that the age of the first sexual experience was younger. They tended to think it was safer to have unprotected sex with a boyfriend or girlfriend (especially if it was the first sexual encounter) or to have sex with a regular woman⁽¹⁰⁾, which reflects that they had a higher risk behavior. With empirical data, it was also found that cohabitation both openly and secretly had resulted in sexual health problems. This research, thus, intended to study factors related to the sexual behaviors among youth in universities located in the eastern region to be used as referential data to building understanding, awareness, values and skills for youth in strengthening reproductive health, and having adequate knowledge to prevent AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Most importantly, it is hoped that the youth will be well prepared for rapidly changing situations, and later on have a better quality of life.

Relevant glossary

Sexual behavior means the intention in practice, among youth 20-24 years old, to have suitable and safe sex behavior resulting from knowledge, attitude, and negotiating power with sexual partners. Sexual behavior can be divided into two levels: protected sex and unprotected sex.

Material and Method

Study design

This study was a cross-sectional survey research that studied the relationships from various factors and sexual behaviors among youth in the universities located in the Eastern Region of Thailand.

Population and samples

The samples used in the study were both full-time and part-time students enrolled in academic year 2011. They were attending five universities at the undergraduate level located in the eastern region (for both government and private universities). The students' field of study varied among different majors. The sample size was calculated using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 P(1-p)}{d^2}$$

Where n is the required sample size. For,

Z = The confidence level is 95% or 0.95 ($Z_{\alpha/2} = Z_{0.05/2} = 1.96$)

d = The margin of error is 5% (Acceptable error = 0.05)

p = The expected population proportion of sexual risk behaviors = 0.5

q = 1 - p

The sample size calculation for the study was 385 students. Calculating for a 10% dropout rate; one would need to complete approximately 405 students. Data were collected under systematic, random sampling designs; sample units were selected according to the field of study, including health sciences, humanities and social sciences, and technology.

Process

Regarding the data collection method, this research was reviewed and approved from Burapha University's committee on the ethics of human research. The age of the informants participating in this research were 20 years old or above. Informants voluntarily participated in the research. The data collection process was conducted from June-September 2011. After the researcher gave out the questionnaire, the informants self-answered the questionnaire immediately. There were 405 questionnaires used for data analysis in the study.

Tools and the quality of the tools validity

Tools used in the data collection process consisted of 70 items in the questionnaire, which had contents covering the objectives and conceptual framework in research. Questions in the questionnaire included personal data, social psychology, knowledge of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, attitudes

towards safe sex, and sexual behavior. Sexual behavior was divided into two levels: safe sex and unprotected sex. In an initial trial, the questionnaire was tried out with 30 youths, who possessed similar characteristic aspects of the informants who later participated in the study, and this justified the reliability, which scored a rank of 0.72.

Analyses

The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The information was presented by frequency, percentage, average score, deviation standard scale, and it was analyzed by Crude odds ratio.

Results

General information

There were 405 informants from higher education institutions, participating in this research. From this number, 55.8% were female, while 44.2% were male. The academic achievement, showing 2.51 or higher for the grade average point, was 64.2%. Regarding parents' marital status, most students' parents were living together (77.5%). For the current residential pattern, youth were living with parents and friends at the same proportion (34%). However, it was notable that the number of youth living with boyfriend or girlfriend was 11.6%. More than 61.5% had sexual experience. Most of them had sex when their age was greater than 15 years old (80.7%). From this number 59.8% did not use condoms during their first sexual encounter. During the past three months, 70.1% had a boyfriend or girlfriend. Sixty-eight percent had sex during the past three months. From this number, 25% was a casual sex partner (s) as shown in Table 1.

Sexual behaviors

Regarding youth sexual behavior, it was found that only 24% of youth sometimes used self-control to abstain from having sex during the school years in order to protect themselves. It was noteworthy that more than 23.7% of youth were not always using condoms while having sex; however, 73% would always request their sexual partner(s) to use condom. The youth (14.8%) had anal sex and 46.2% had oral sex, as show in Table 2.

The relationship between the studied factors with sexual behaviors among youth in universities

From the relationship analysis, there were two variation groups: protected sexual encounter and

Table 1. The number and percentage of the informants classified by the general information

General information	Frequency	%
Gender (n = 405)		
Female	226	55.8
Male	179	44.2
Grade average point (n = 405)		
Less than or equal to 2.5	145	35.8
Greater than 2.51	260	64.2
Marital status of the parents (n = 405)		
Living together	314	77.5
Widow	31	7.7
Divorced/separate	60	14.8
Current residential type (n = 405)		
Staying with parents	138	34.1
Staying with friends	138	34.1
Staying alone	82	20.2
Staying with a boyfriend or a girlfriend	47	11.6
Had sexual experiences (n = 405)		
No	156	38.5
Yes	249	61.5
Agewhen informant had sex for the first time (n = 249)		
Less than or equal to 15 years old	48	19.3
Greater than 15 years old	201	80.7
Condoms used during the first sexual intercourse (n = 249)		
Yes	100	40.2
No	149	59.8
Having a boyfriend/girlfriend during the last 3 months (n = 405)		
Yes	284	70.1
No	121	29.9
Had sex with a boyfriend/girlfriend during the past 3 months (n = 284)		
Yes	195	68.7
No	89	31.3
Had casual sex partners during the past 3 months (n = 284)		
Yes	71	25.0
No	213	75.0

unprotected sexual encounter. The statistically significant factors showing the relationship with the sexual behavior were: gender, sexual encounter in the past three months, having a casual sex partner in the past three months, knowledge of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and attitude towards safe sex. It was found that male youth had unprotected sex encounters at the rate of 1.65 times higher than female youth. The youth had a chance to have more

Table 2. Number and percentage of the informants classified by sexual behavior

Sexual behavior	Frequency (n = 405)	%
Used self control to abstain from having sex during the school years		
Always	308	76.0
Sometimes	97	24.0
Using condoms during intercourse		
Always	309	76.0
Sometimes	96	23.7
Requesting sexual partners to use condoms		
Always	296	73.1
Sometimes	109	26.9
Having anal sex with partners		
Always	60	14.8
Sometimes	345	85.2
Having oral sex with partners		
Always	187	46.2
Sometimes	218	53.8

unprotected sex at the rate of 1.64 times higher than students who never had sex. Students who had casual sex partner(s) had a chance to have unprotected sex at the rate 1.78 times higher than those who do not have casual sex partner(s). Youth who had little knowledge of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases would have a chance to have unprotected sex at the rate of 2.83 times higher than those who had high level of knowledge. Students whose attitude did not comply with safe sex practices had a chance to have unprotected sex at the rate of 3.65 times higher than those who had such an attitude.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that factors related to sexual behaviors showing statistical significance were as follows: gender, having sex in the past three months, having casual sex partners in the past three months, knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases, and attitude towards having safe sex. These findings contribute to the following discussion.

Male youth had more chances to have unprotected sex than female counterparts, because of tremendous physical and mental changes. Male youth tended to have more curiosity towards sex and had more interest in sex than female youth. Besides, the socialization of the Thai society has encouraged men

to be a leader. Consequently, women tended to have less negotiating power when they had sexual encounters⁽¹¹⁾. Male and female youth had different forces to have pre-marital sex. Apart from curiosity, men were interested in sex because they sought sexual pleasure, and they wanted to exert their masculinity, while female youth had pre-marital sex with the hope that it might bring love, a long-term relationship and marriage⁽¹²⁾, which was similar to the study mentioning that gender was one of factors that influenced sexual behavior. Male youth had earlier sexual encounters than female youth. They also had sex more frequently than female youth. In almost all sexual encounters, male youth were the initiator⁽¹³⁾. This corresponded to the study mentioning that during the early stage of adolescence, sex drive influenced male youth to engage more in terms of sexual behavior. However, male youth and female counterparts did not share the same perspectives about relationship, as female youth developed friendship into love before having sex while male youth seemed to seek sex without love. As a result, male youth had more chances to have unprotected sex⁽¹⁴⁾.

The study indicated that youth who already had sexual experience had more chance to have unprotected sex than those who never had sex. The number of students who did not use condoms during their first-time sex was 59.8%, which imposed more risks for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, which corresponded to a study conducted on youth sexual behavior during school years in Brazil. The study showed that 25% of students did not use condoms while they had sex, which increased a higher risk for sexual disease⁽¹⁵⁾. It also corresponded to the study mentioning that the willingness for prevention among youth who already had sex influenced their future sex safe⁽¹⁶⁾.

The study also revealed that youth who had casual sex partner(s) had more chances to have unprotected sex than those who did not have casual sex partner(s). The students (25%) had casual sex partner(s) during the past 3 months, which corresponded to the study about the risk perception for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases among youth at the University in Zimbabwe, indicating that more than half of the infection resulted from casual sex encounter(s)⁽¹⁷⁾.

From the study, it was found that youth who had little knowledge about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases had more chances to have unprotected sex than students who had more

Table 3. Crude odds ratio of sexual behavior factors

Factors used in the study	Unprotected sexual encounter	Protected sexual encounter	Crude OR	p-value
Gender (n = 405)			1.65	0.012
Male	92	87		
Female	88	138		
Grade average point (n = 405)				
Less than or equal to 2.5	66	79		
Greater than 2.51	114	146		
Age which informant had sex for the first time			1.19	0.583
Less than or equal to 15	26	22		
Greater than 15	100	101		
Having sex in the last 3 months (n = 284)			1.64	0.014
Yes	99	96		
No	81	12		
Having casual sex partners in the last 3 months (n = 284)			1.78	0.026
Yes	40	31		
No	140	194		
Using condoms during the first sexual intercourse (n = 249)			1.43	0.162
Yes	80	68		
No	45	55		
Knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS (n = 405)			2.83	0.010
Low level	19	9		
High level	161	216		
Attitudes toward safe sex (n = 405)			3.65	0.002
Not agree	173	196		
Agree	7	29		

knowledge on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Theoretically, knowledge was the ability to recall or remember as well as previous experiences, and this knowledge was essential to future behavior⁽¹⁸⁾. According to the study, knowledge about sex education will discourage students to have a risky sexual behavior, as more knowledge on sex education will reduce the risky sexual behaviors⁽¹⁹⁾. This corresponded to the study mentioning that youth who acquired a low level of knowledge on reproductive health, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases will have sex more frequently than youth who have a high level on these topics⁽²⁰⁾.

This study also indicated that youth who had negative attitudes towards safe sex had more chances to have unprotected sex than those who had positive attitudes towards safe sex, which corresponded to the study mentioning that youth who had negative attitudes towards safe sex will have sex 3.3 times higher than youth who had positive attitudes towards safe

sex⁽²¹⁾. This corresponded to the study mentioning that there was a relationship between sexual attitudes and sexual behavior among youth⁽²²⁾, and it corresponded to the study mentioning that attitudes among youth towards sexual intercourse and unprotected behavior or pre-marital sex varied from various situations. For instance, students who had positive attitudes towards safe sex might have had unprotected sex when they were sexually aroused⁽¹⁴⁾.

Limitations

The topic of this study was a very sensitive issue, as the data collection process required sexual and sexual health information as well as sexual experiences. This may have caused embarrassment and discomfort for the informants to reveal this information to the researcher.

Conclusion

It can be noted from the study that three-fifths

of the youth already had sexual experiences. More than half did not use condoms during the first-time sex. One-fourth of the youth had casual sex partner(s) in the past 3 months. Regarding sexual behavior, almost one-fourth of students did not use condoms at all times, and did not negotiate with sexual partner(s) to use condoms when they had sex. Risk factors that show statistical significance were as follows: gender, having sex in the past three months, having casual sex in the past three months, knowledge on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, attitudes towards sex safe. Related organizations should promote multi-dimensional sex education, especially skills in negotiation for protection. In addition, mobile services in reproductive health both inside and outside campus should be established to increase channels for sexual health services.

What is already known on this topic?

Youth who had little knowledge about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases had more chances to have unprotected sex than students who had more knowledge on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

What this study adds?

Male youth had more chances to have unprotected sex than female.

Youth who already had sexual experience had more chance to have unprotected sex than those who never had sex.

Youth who had casual sex partner(s) had more chances to have unprotected sex than those who did not have casual sex partner(s).

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Potential conflicts of interest

None.

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ปัจจัยที่มีความสัมพันธ์กับพฤติกรรมทางเพศของเยาวชนในสถาบันอุดมศึกษาภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย

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ภูมิหลังและวัตถุประสงค์: เยาวชนเป็นช่วง ‘วัยวิกฤติ’ ของชีวิตเนื่องจากเป็นช่วงรอยต่อระหว่างความเป็นเด็กสู่ความเป็นผู้ใหญ่ส่งผลให้เยาวชนเกิดความอยากรู้อยากลองโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในเรื่องเพศ จากเหตุดังกล่าวทำให้เยาวชนมีพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศเพิ่มมากขึ้นและนำไปสู่การอัตราการคิดเชื้อเอชไอวีรายใหม่ในกลุ่มเยาวชนในเขตภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทยมากขึ้น ดังนั้นการศึกษาวัยจี้ครั้งนี้จึงมุ่งศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีความสัมพันธ์กับพฤติกรรมทางเพศของเยาวชนในสถาบันอุดมศึกษาเขตภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย

วัสดุและวิธีการ: การศึกษาวัยจี้ครั้งนี้เป็น Cross-Sectional Survey Research เริ่มเก็บข้อมูลตั้งแต่เดือนมิถุนายนถึงกันยายน พ.ศ. 2554 กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาเป็นเยาวชนในสถาบันอุดมศึกษาเขตภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือที่ศึกษาในระดับปริญญาตรี ในสถาบันการศึกษาของภาครัฐและภาคเอกชน โดยกระจายในทุกกลุ่มสาขาวิชาเยาวชนจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 405 ราย เครื่องมือที่ใช้คือแบบสอบถามเก็บข้อมูลโดยการตอบแบบสอบถามด้วยตนเอง วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณนาโดยนำเสนอในรูปของความถี่ ร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ยและส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และวิเคราะห์หาความสัมพันธ์โดยใช้ Crude odds ratio

ผลการศึกษา: เยาวชนกว่า 3 ใน 5 เคยมีเพศสัมพันธ์มาแล้ว และเกินกว่าครึ่งหนึ่งไม่สวมถุงยางอนามัยในขณะที่มีเพศสัมพันธ์ครั้งแรก ในด้านของพฤติกรรมทางเพศพบว่าเกือบ 1 ใน 4 ที่ไม่สวมถุงยางอนามัยทุกครั้งที่มีเพศสัมพันธ์ และไม่ตรงกับคู่นอนให้ใช้ถุงยางอนามัยเมื่อมีเพศสัมพันธ์ นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าเยาวชนเพศชายมีโอกาสที่จะมีพฤติกรรมทางเพศไม่เหมาะสมมากกว่าเยาวชนเพศหญิงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ($p = 0.012$, Crude OR = 1.65) เยาวชนที่มีเพศสัมพันธ์มีโอกาสที่จะมีพฤติกรรมทางเพศไม่เหมาะสมมากกว่าเยาวชนที่ไม่มีเพศสัมพันธ์ ($p = 0.014$, Crude OR = 1.64) เยาวชนที่มีคู่นอนชั่วคราวมีโอกาสที่จะมีพฤติกรรมทางเพศไม่เหมาะสมมากกว่าเยาวชนที่ไม่มีคู่นอนชั่วคราว ($p = 0.026$, Crude OR = 1.78) เยาวชนที่มีความรู้เกี่ยวกับโรคติดต่อทางเพศสัมพันธ์และโรคเอดส์มีโอกาสที่จะมีพฤติกรรมทางเพศไม่เหมาะสมมากกว่าเยาวชนที่มีความรู้มาก ($p = 0.010$, Crude OR = 2.83) เยาวชนที่มีทัศนคติต่อการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ที่ปลอดภัยไม่เห็นด้วยมีโอกาสที่จะมีพฤติกรรมทางเพศไม่เหมาะสมมากกว่าเยาวชนที่มีทัศนคติต่อการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ที่ปลอดภัยเห็นด้วย ($p = 0.002$, Crude OR = 3.65)

สรุป: กลุ่มตัวอย่างมากกว่าครึ่งหนึ่งเคยมีเพศสัมพันธ์แล้วและไม่สวมถุงยางอนามัยในขณะที่มีเพศสัมพันธ์ครั้งแรก ผลการศึกษาพบว่าปัจจัยที่มีความสัมพันธ์กับพฤติกรรมทางเพศอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติได้แก่ เพศ การมีเพศสัมพันธ์ในรอบ 3 เดือน การมีคู่นอนชั่วคราวในรอบ 3 เดือน ความรู้เกี่ยวกับโรคติดต่อทางเพศสัมพันธ์และโรคเอดส์ และทัศนคติต่อการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ที่ปลอดภัย ดังนั้นสถาบันการศึกษาผู้ปกครองควรมีส่วนร่วมในการส่งเสริมให้วัยรุ่นมีความรู้ ทัศนคติ และเสริมทักษะชีวิตที่จำเป็นเพื่อให้เกิดพฤติกรรมการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ที่ปลอดภัยต่อไป
