

# INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS IN NORTHERN THAILAND

Arunrat Tangmunkongvorakul<sup>1</sup>, Gordon Carmichael<sup>2</sup>, Cathy Banwell<sup>2</sup>,  
Sam-Ang Seubsman<sup>3</sup> and Adrian Sleigh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Institute for Health Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand; <sup>2</sup>National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; <sup>3</sup>School of Human Ecology and Thai Health Promotion Center, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Nonthaburi, Thailand

**Abstract.** With the influence of modernization, there is evidence of increasing Thai adolescent sexual activity. The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the intimate relationships of adolescents in different social groups in northern Thailand, and to note the health implications of their behavior. Quantitative and qualitative data from more than 1,750 unmarried young people aged 17-20 years revealed that adolescents from different social and educational backgrounds had significantly different types of intimate relationships. In the Thai context, social class differences are mostly based on young people's educational backgrounds and their families' financial power. Perceptions of love and relationships were interpreted according to social strata and sex. Notably, less well-off young people were likely to engage in much riskier sexual relationships. The present study provides detailed and constructive information to help plan and improve sexual and reproductive health counselling, programs and services for young people in northern Thailand.

**Key words:** intimate relationships, dating, adolescents, socio-economic status, Thailand

---

Correspondence: Dr Arunrat Tangmunkongvorakul, Research Institute for Health Sciences, Chiang Mai University, PO Box 80 CMU, Chiang Mai 50202, Thailand.

Tel: +66 (0) 53 945055; Fax: +66 (0) 53 221849  
E-mail: arunrat@rihes-cmu.org; Arunrat.Tang@anu.edu.au