

Providers' Perspectives in Addressing Adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs in Northern Thailand

Arunrat Tangmunkongvorakul^{1*}, Cholticha Ruangyuttikarn¹, Sangworn Sombatmai² and Sobhon Bipodhi¹

¹Research Institute for Health Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

²Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand

*Corresponding author. E-mail: arunrat.tang@anu.edu.au

ABSTRACT

In Thailand, as in other settings, unmarried youth face a host of obstacles in obtaining sexual and reproductive health information, counselling and services. Studies have generally focused on the perspectives of unmarried youth themselves. Fewer studies have explored the perspectives of providers that would shed light on their experiences and barriers in meeting their needs. This paper draws upon data from a qualitative study in Northern Thailand and explores the views of a range of providers, their experiences of and attitudes towards providing services to unmarried youth. Providers highlight barriers at various levels, policy and programme, facility and client that inhibit their ability to provide optimal services to young people. Some obstacles reiterate and others go beyond those expressed by young people themselves. Findings also explore provider perceptions of optimal services for unmarried youth in Thailand and are intended to guide the development of sexual health services for young people.

Key words: Health Care Providers, Adolescents, Experiences, Attitudes, Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs, Northern Thailand

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing evidence in Thailand on changing of sexual norms among young people. In study after study, large proportions of young males and significant minorities of young females report pre-marital sexual experience (Koetsawang, 1987; Nuchanart, 1988; Srisupan, 1990; Thevaditthep, 1992; Chanakok, 1993; Puthapuan, 1994; Rugpao, 1995; Gray, 1999; Wissarutrat, 2001; Thianthai, 2004). Despite pervasive parental controls, it is clear that there has been a relaxation in sexual morals as opportunities have expanded for young people. Increasingly, they enjoy social interaction in mixed sex company, whether in schools, the workplace or entertainment spots (Soonthornhdada, 2002).

At the same time, double standards persist and sexual activity among young females in particular is strongly disapproved (Soonthornhdada, 1992; Yoddumnern-Attig, 1992). Surveys reveal wide disparities in the reported behaviour of young men and women. Koetsawang (1987), reporting on the sexual experiences of college students in Bangkok, revealed that 45.2 per cent of male and 5.3 per cent of female students, aged 19 years or less,