SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND EVOLVING SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND PARTNER PREFERENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual activity of students</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth in general are not liberal in their view of sex: Is it true?</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth who stay with parents or are watched by parents do not have much opportunity to have sex: Is it true?</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male youth are more sexually active than female youth. Is it true?</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most single youth do not have sex: Is it true?</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male youth had their first sex with sex worker.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth have sex because of pornography: Is it true?</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and HIV prevention</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication on condoms between parents and youth</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an increase in same sex behavior: Is it true?</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion and recommendations</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Currently in Thai society, the sexual behavior of Thai youth is widely discussed and there have been attempts to identify potential solutions to problems that may result from the evolving behavior. Adolescence is a critical period of physiological change, especially sexual development, and psychological and emotional changes that lead to HIV risk behavior, including unprotected sexual intercourse. Moreover, external factors, such as the social and cultural context; peers, neighbors, adults and the media all may affect the sexual behavior of young people.

According to ABAC’s survey in 2004, it was found that 91.5 percent of the sample have been exposed to sexual information by watching pornography from various media sources, such as videos, VCD, websites and magazines. These media are easy to buy but difficult to control. The findings revealed that 42.4 percent of the sample had sexual experience, 16.1 percent had unwanted pregnancies and 13.9 percent indicated that they had sex with someone they had just met in a pub, discotheque or shopping mall. These survey findings generate the question of whether social factors affect sexual behavior of Thai youth, how and at what level.

This chapter presents information on the sexual behavior and preferences of Thai youth and compares this with social perceptions on youth sexual behavior and attitudes. Data from Thailand’s National Survey on Risk Behavior and HIV/AIDS and ART Knowledge conducted by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University in 2006 are used in the analysis. The study population are unmarried youth aged 18-19
and 20-24 (in some cases, married youth are included). This age grouping is based on the fact that according to Thai law, a person who is over 20 years old is legally adult, and therefore the author assumes that the attitudes and behavior of the two age groups, one below 20 years old and the other 20 and above, are different. The sample includes youth in rural and urban areas, and Bangkok.

The following sections explore whether the social perceptions are consistent with the evidence from the survey on sexual behavior and attitudes of the youth.

**Sexual activity of students**

In general, Thai society perceives that students have no sexual experience while out of school youth have sexual experience. Is this true in Thai society? The survey data reveals that this perception is not true among youth for both age groups. Among those aged 18-19 who are studying in school, 53.7 percent of males have had sexual experience, and 18.4 percent of females are sexually experienced. Among male students aged 20-24, 70.7 percent have had sexual intercourse, and 33.9 percent of female students aged 20-24 already have sexual experience. This is consistent with the study of Siriyupa Nansunanon (2006) on knowledge, attitude, belief, and sexual behavior of Thai youth, who found that one-third of youth who were studying have sexual experience.

![Figure 1: Sexual experience of youth in schools](image-url)
There are also questions raised about what youth think. Adult always say that “it is not the right time” for youth to be having sex. The data from the youth survey on attitudes toward premarital sex, expenditure for sexual activity, and having a “gig” (slang for lover) are as follows:

**Premarital sex of students**

Among male and female youth who are studying (not included married youth), about 67 percent have a positive attitude toward premarital sex. They perceive that it is a common and acceptable practice among young people. More male youth agree with this than do female youth. Older youth agree with this statement more than do younger youth. Among 18-19 years old youth, 71.4 percent of male and 56.8 percent of female youth and among 20-24 years old youth, 78.1 percent of male and 63.0 percent of female youth have a positive attitude.

**Paying for sex**

About one-third of youth in school have a positive attitude toward paying for sex. They view that there is nothing wrong with paying for sex. More male than female youth agree and older youth agree with this issue than do younger youth. Among 18-19 years old youth 37.0 percent of male and 14.5 percent of female youth and among 20-24 years old youth, 46.2 percent of male and 22.6 percent of female have a positive attitude.

**Having a “gig” is fashionable**

About a quarter of male and female youth in school perceive that having “gig” or lover is fashionable. More male than female youth accept having a lover and older youth accept more than younger youth. Among 18-19 years old youth, 29.7 percent of male and 16.0 percent of female youth accept having a lover, and among 20-24 years old youth, 24.2 percent of male and 10.7 percent of female youth accept having a lover (gig).
In summary, the sexual behavior of students is in accordance with their attitudes toward premarital sex, which is generally seen as normal and acceptable among young people. In addition, it is consistent with the viewpoint of youth regarding their parents’ acceptance of children’s premarital sex.

**Father’s acceptance of premarital sex of sons and daughters**

Most male and female youth view that their father accepts premarital sex of sons (71.7 percent). More male than female youth think that their father accept premarital sex, and older youth are more likely than younger youth to think that their father accept premarital sex of sons. Among 18-19 years old, 76.6 percent of male and 58.7 percent of female youth reported that fathers accept. Among 20-24 years old, 86.6 percent of male and 60.3 percent of female youth report that fathers accept premarital sex of sons.

The finding is opposite for premarital sex of daughters. A small proportion of male and female youth views that fathers accept a daughter’s premarital sex. The view is similar among male and female youth and older and younger youth. Among 18-19 years old youth, 17.1 percent of male and 21.1 of female youth think that their father accepts premarital sex of a daughter, and among 20-24 years old, 21.3 percent of males and 21.8 percent of female youth think that their father accept it.

**Mother’s acceptance of premarital sex of sons and daughters**

More than half of youth view that their mother can accept the premarital sex of sons (68.6 percent). More male than female and older youth more than younger youth think that their mother accepts premarital sex of sons. Among 18-19 years old, 74.0 percent of male and 51.7 percent of female youth felt that their mother could accept premarital sex of sons and among 20-24 years old, 82.4 percent of male and 59.4 percent of female youth felt that their mother could accept it.
The finding is opposite for premarital sex of daughters. Only a small proportion of male and female youth views that mothers accept a daughter’s premarital sex. More female youth than male and older more than younger youth think that their mother accepts premarital sex of a daughter. Among 18-19 years old youth, 16.6 percent of male and 22.5 of female youth think that their mother accepts premarital sex of a daughter, and among 20-24 years old, 19.8 percent of males and 24.5 percent of female youth think that their mother accept it.

In summary, youth in school perceived that mothers and fathers accept premarital sex of sons more than they do for daughters. However, female youth are more likely than male youth to think that their mother accepts premarital sex of daughters.

In conclusion, we can agree that the social perception that youth in school have no sexual activity is not true. Evidence from the survey indicates that many students have had sexual experience, with more than half of male youth reporting that have had sex. Older youth are more likely to have had sexual intercourse than are younger youth. The results are consistent with the students’ perception that premarital sex is common and acceptable for young people nowadays and that having a lover (gig) is normal and fashionable. Moreover, youth view that their parents can accept premarital sex of sons more than they can for daughters.

Figure 2  Youth perceptions on parents’ acceptance of premarital sex of sons and daughters.
Youth in general are not liberal in their view of sex: Is it true?

A general perception in Thai society is that youth are not liberal in their view of sex. However, the results of the survey suggest that youth, both in school and out-of-school, are rather liberal in their attitude toward premarital sex, paying for sex and having a “gig” (casual lover).

Premarital sex

Based on responses to the statement that “Nowadays premarital sex is common and acceptable among male and female youth,” it is found that majority of male and female youth agree that premarital sex is common and acceptable. More male than female youth agree with this statement. There is almost no difference between older youth and younger youth. Among 18-19 years old youth, 76.3 percent of male and 59.6 percent of female youth agree, and among 20-24 years old, 77.3 percent of male and 60.9 percent of female youth agree with the statement.

Paying for sex

About a half of male youth agree that there is nothing wrong with paying for sex. About one-fifth of female youth agree with this statement. Older youth express more agreement than do younger ones. Among 18-19 years old, 41.6 percent of male and 18.8 percent of female youth agree with the statement, while among 20-24 years old, 53.4 percent of male and 22.3 percent of female youth agree with the statement.

Having “gig” (casual lover)

Data reveal that about one-third of male and about one-fifth of female youth view that having a ‘gig’ is fashionable. In other words, more male than female youth agree with statement. Younger youth are more likely to agree than are older youth. (i.e. among 18-19 years old, 31.5 percent of male and 19.3 percent of female youth agree, and among 20-24 years old, 28.7 percent of male and 16.2 percent of female youth agree with the statement. This may indicate a trend among younger generation in favor of “having a casual lover”.)
Opinion on sexual experience of male close friends

The results of the question “Have your male close friends ever had sex?” shows that most male and female answer that most already have had sex. That means youth perceive that most of their male close friends have already had sexual experience, and some answer that every male friend has had sex. Older youth are more likely to view that most of their male close friend have sexual experience, among 18-19 years old, 69.3 percent of male and 68.1 percent of female youth, and among 20-24 years old, 80.0 percent of male and 78.2 percent of female youth reporting that most of their male friends have had sex. It should be noted that the view that majority of male close friends have already had sex is shared by similar percentage of male and female youth.

Opinion on sexual experience of female close friends

One-third of 18-19 male youth say that most of their female close friends have had sex already (32.1 percent). The next most frequently cited answer is very few friends have ever had sex (26.2 percent). For 20-24 male youth, slightly over one-third answer that most of their female friends have had sex (41.6 percent), while one-quarter responded that about a half have ever had sexual experience (25.0 percent).
Among the 18-19 female group, one-third respond that very few of their friends ever had sex (32.8 percent) The next most frequently cited answer was that the majority have already had sex (28.9 percent) For the 20-24 female youth, about one-third of them say that most of their female friends have sex already (34.5 percent), and a quarter of female youth said everyone had sex already (25.0 percent). Age does not seem to make much difference in the opinion among female youth.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4** How youth describe the sexual experience of their male and female close friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male close friends</th>
<th>Female close friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>18-19 yrs.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All have sexual experience</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most have sexual experience</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About half have sexual experience</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few have sexual experience</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20-24 yrs.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All have sexual experience</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most have sexual experience</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>About half have sexual experience</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few have sexual experience</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Opinion on sexual experience of unmarried adolescents.

The responses to the question on “How many unmarried male adolescents have sex?” found that most male and female youth say that most or all of unmarried male adolescents have had sex. Their opinion is nearly the same. Age and gender do not seem to make much difference in their opinion. (i.e. among 18-19 years old, 77.7 percent of male and 80.9 percent of female youth, among 20-24 years old, 79.0 percent of male and 77.2 percent of female youth).

Asking about how many unmarried female adolescents has sex already, most respondents reported that most or nearly all female adolescents have had sex. The results are similar for males and females and for the older and younger age groups. Among 18-19 years old, 67.0 percent of male and 65.1 percent of female youth and among 20-24 years old, 67.3 percent of male and 66.2 percent of female youth reported that most or nearly all of unmarried female adolescents have had sex.
In conclusion, based on the results of the survey we can argue that the perception by people in Thai society is not true. Actually youth are liberal in their view toward sex. Evidence from the survey indicates that youth perceive that premarital sex is common and acceptable among adolescents. Paying for sex is acceptable. They also reveal the perception that their close friends, both male and female, already have had sex, including unmarried male and female adolescents. Their point of view is not different by gender and age group.

**Youth who stay with parents or are watched by parents do not have much opportunity to have sex: Is it true?**

**Youth who stay with parents do not have much opportunity to have sex**

The general perception in Thai Society is that youth who stay with parents have limited opportunity to have sex. But the results of the survey show that for youth aged 18-24, almost three-quarters of male youth and one-quarter of female youth who stay with parents have had sex (71.1 percent of male youth and 26.0 percent of female youth). Older youth have more sexual activity than the younger youth. Male youth have more sexual activity than female youth. Among 18-19 years old, 57.3 percent of male youth and 20.5 percent of female youth have ever had sex. Among 20-24 years old, 78.0 percent of male and 29.7 percent of female youth have had sex.

Comparing youth who stay with other persons, it is found that male youth aged 18-24 who stay with other persons (relatives and friends) have a higher proportion with sexual experience as compared to those who stay with their parents. (77.6 percent of youth who stay with relatives and 75.0 percent of ones who stay with friends). Among female youth aged 18-24, those who are currently living relatives have a lower proportion with sexual experience; while those who stay with friends have a higher proportion with sexual experience than those who live with parents. (14.0
percent for female youth who live with relatives and 33.3 percent for those who live with friends).

For youth aged 20-24, it is found that 75 percent already have sexual experience regardless of whom they are living with. The proportion varies little, with 78.6 percent of those living with parents, 81.0 percent of those living with a relative and 75.0 percent staying with friends. Female youth who are living with either a father or mother, or with friends, have higher levels of sexual activity than those who stay with other persons (35.7 percent of female youth who stay with father or mother have had sex, and 36.4 percent of those who stay with friends).

Figure 5  Sexual behavior of youth by the relationship of who they are currently living with.

Youth who are watched by parents do not have much opportunity to have sex

The general perception in Thai society is that youth who are watched by parents have little opportunity to have sex. However, the results of the survey show that many youth who are watched by parents have had sex. The finding from the question “Generally, do your parents know that where you are, with whom and what you do each day?” it was found that male youth whose parents watch closely are more likely to have had sex than female youth. The proportion increases with the distance between them and their parents.
Among male youth aged 18-19 whose parents mostly know where they are, with whom and what they are doing, 54.0 percent already have had sex. Among male youth whose parents sometime know about their activities, 65.6 percent already have had sex. And among male youth whose parents rarely know about their daily activity, 73.5 percent already have had sex.

The percentage is higher for male youth aged 20-24. For the male youth whose parents mostly know where they are, with whom and what they are doing, 75.5 percent already have had sex. Among male youth whose parents sometime know about their activities, 82.7 percent already have had sex. And among male youth whose parents rarely know about their daily activity, 88.0 percent already have had sex.

Among female youth aged 18-19 whose parents mostly know where they go, and with whom, 18.0 percent already have had sex. Among female youth whose parents sometime know, 40.0 percent have had sex. And 44.4 percent of female youth whose parents rarely know about daily activity already have had sex.

The proportion is higher among female youth aged 20-24, where 30.5 percent of female youth whose parents always know their daily life have had sex, 39.7 percent whose parents sometime know about their activity, and 57.7 percent whose parent rarely know have had sex.

**Figure 6**  Sexual behavior of youth whose parents/guardians know about youth’s daily activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Mostly know</th>
<th>Some times</th>
<th>Hardly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19 yrs.</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Mostly know</th>
<th>Some times</th>
<th>Hardly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24 yrs.</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can conclude that it is not true that youth who are living with parents or closely watched by parents have no chance to have sex. Findings indicate that male youth and older youth who are living with their parents and closely watched have a higher probability of experiencing sex than are female youth and younger youth. However, youth who are staying with other persons or not closely taken care by their parents are also likely to have had sex.

**Male youth are more sexually active than female youth: Is it true?**

The general perception in Thai society is that male youth are more sexually active than female youth. The findings from the survey confirm that in the 12 months before the survey, male youth had more sexual partners than did female youth. This was found for both age groups. Among the 18-19 age group, sexually active male youth had 2.25 sexual partners on average, with a minimum of 1 partner and a maximum of 21 partners. Among female youth, the average number of sexual partners was 1.18, ranging from 1 to 8 partners. Among the 20-24 age group, male youth have 2.5 sexual partners on average, with a range from 1 to 41. On average, female youth had 2.23 partners, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 5. This shows that older female youth have more partners than younger ones but possibly with more stable partners.

Older male youth had more casual sexual partners than younger youth, with male youth aged 18-19 having 2.2 casual sexual partners on average compared to 2.6 sexual partners for sexually active male youth aged 20-24. The female youth rarely have casual sexual partners.
We can conclude that it is true that male youth are more sexually active than female youth, with male youth having more sexual partners than female youth and older male youth have more sexual partners than younger ones.

**Most single youth do not have sex: Is it true?**

The general perception in Thai society is that most single youth do not have sex. However, the findings from the survey show that more than a half of male youth between age of 18 to 24 have had sex (ranging from 58-90 percent) and a significant proportion of female youth between age of 18 to 24 have had sex (ranging from 20-45 percent). Sexually active male youth started having sex at ages of 10-13, and for sexually active females, age at first sex was in the age range 11-14.

**First sexual intercourse**

Sexually experienced male youth aged 18-24 tended to have first sexual intercourse when they were 10-13 years old. For each age, 58-90 percent of male youth already have had sex. Sexually experienced female youth aged 18-24 generally had first sex at 11-14 years old. For each age group, 20-45 percent of female youth have already had sexual intercourses.
Most male youth are single but have had sex (63.2 percent of 18-19 age group and 81.1 percent of 20-24 age group). Among female youth, the proportion of unmarried who have had sex is lower than that of male youth. Older youth are more sexually active than are younger youth (25.5 percent of 18-19 age group and 38.9 percent of 20-24 age group).

**Last sexual intercourse**

Respondents were asked “Who is the last sexual partner during the past 12 month?” The majority of male youth aged 18-19 reported that their last partner was their girlfriend (68.6 percent), next is someone they know (6.8 percent) and third most reported was “gig” or casual lover (6.1 percent) and only 3.4 percent had their last sex with sex worker. Among the 20-24 years old male youth, most replied that their last partner was their girlfriend (60.8 percent); followed by cohabiting partner (13.2 percent) and someone they know (5.6 percent), while 5.4 percent had their last sex with sex worker. Among female youth in both age groups, most mention their boyfriend as their last sexual partner followed by cohabiting partner.

More than one-third of male youth use condoms every time (i.e. among 18-19 years old, 39.2 percent, among 20-24 years old, 32.7 percent use condoms every time). However, one-half use sometime or never use condoms (i.e. 24.0 percent of males aged 18-19 use sometimes, and 22.0 percent never use, among 20-24 years old, 32.3 percent use occasionally and 24.5 percent never use).
Condom use for female youth is opposite to male behavior. About 70 percent of female youth never used condoms or used occasionally with their last partner. Among female youth aged 18-19, 43.0 percent never used condoms with their last sexual partner, 28.0 percent used occasionally and 16.0 percent used every time. For female youth aged 20-24, 42.7 percent used condom sometimes, 37.3 percent never used and 14.0 percent used every time.

It is found that more than 40 percent of male youth did not use condoms in their last sex with their last sexual partner, while 70 percent of female youth did not use condoms in their last sex with their last sexual partner. The proportion of older youth who did not use condom is higher than that of younger youth.

In conclusion, the perception of Thai society that most single youth do not have sex is not true. Data show that more than two-thirds of single male youth and one-fourth of single female youth have had sex. These youth have sexual risk behavior, with more than half (both male and female) not using a condom at first intercourse. Most, particularly females and older youth, also did not use condom every time with their last sexual partner.
Male youth had their first sex with sex worker: Is it true?

The perception in Thai society is that male youth have their first sex with a sex worker. However, the data from the survey does not support this perception. Most male and female youth have first sex with their girlfriend and boyfriend. Among youth 18-19 years old, 69.1 percent of male youth and 86.9 percent of female youth, among 20-24 years old, 65.7 percent of male, and 82.9 percent of female youth had first sex with a girlfriend or boyfriend. This is, followed by friend and someone they know. First sex with a sex worker is found only among male youth, for who 3.9 percent of those aged 20-24 and 1.7 percent for those aged 18-19 had first sex with a sex worker. This difference in the proportion of first sex with sex workers among older and younger youth may show a trend of change in Thai society on this matter.

More than half of male and female youth in the two age groups did not use condom during first sexual intercourse. More female than male youth aged 20-24 did not use a condom. Older female youth more than younger female youth did not use condom.
In summary, in contrast to the general Thai perception that male youth had their first sex with a sex worker, most male and female youth had first sex with a girlfriend or boyfriend, followed by a friend and someone they know. Very few had their first sex with a sex worker. Older male youth, compared to younger youth, were more likely to have had first sex with a sex worker.

**Youth have sex because of pornography: Is it true?**

It is usually felt in Thai society that youth have sex because of pornography. However, The results from the survey show no clear relationship between viewing pornography and sexual experience but watching VCD and VDO of pornography does appear to have a relationship with their sexual experience.

**Youth’s watching pornography**

Watching pornography from media is often associated with the sexual behavior of youth. Pornography on VCD or DVD is easily associable. The spread of pornographic websites, sexy pictures in newspapers and magazines are seen to arouse youth’s sexual behavior. How much do these pornographic images affect youth’s sexual behavior?

Findings indicate that during the past 12 months most male and female youth have seen pornographic pictures from CD (54.3 percent), from
mobile phone (32.9 percent), book (32.3 percent) and magazines (29.7 percent). Male youth are more likely than female youth to have viewed pornography from every kind of media. It is noted that younger youth are more likely to have viewed pornography from mobile phones and the internet.

**Pornography and sexual activity**

The data suggests that viewing pornography from books or magazines does not affect sexual activity. In other words, male youth aged 18-19 and 20-24 who have or have not seen pornographic images in magazines and books have similar levels of sexual activity (i.e. 64.0 percent of male youth aged 18-19 who have and have not viewed pornography have had sex, and among male youth age 20-24, 85.0 percent who have seen pornography and 83.5 percent of them who have not seen pornography have had sex. The proportion who had sex among female youth who have seen pornography is slightly higher than among those who never seen (51.6 percent versus 46.4 percent). But among the 20-24 age group, the proportion of those who had sex is the opposite. Those who have never seen pornography are more likely to have had sexual activity than those who have viewed pornography (66.4 percent versus 73.7 percent).

Data shows an association between watching pornography from VCD or VDO and having sex. Male youth aged 18-19 and 20-24 who have seen pornography from VCD or VDO are more likely to have sexual activity than male youth who have not viewed pornography (66.7 percent versus 56.5 percent). Among male youth aged 20-24, 86.4 percent who have viewed pornography have had sex and 76.8 percent who have not viewed pornography have had sex. Female youth who have seen pornography from VCD or VDO have more sexual activity than those who have not viewed pornography (i.e. among the 18-19 age group, 56.4 percent have viewed pornography and have had sex, 44.5 percent have had sex but never seen pornography, while among the 20-24 age group, 76.9 percent have ever pornography and have had sex, and 68.4 percent who never seen pornography but have had sex.)
Findings on watching pornography from cell phones and the internet show that male youth aged 18-19 and 20-24 who have watched pornography from a cell phone or the internet are more likely to have had sex than male youth who have never viewed pornography from these sources. Among youth aged 18-19 age group, 68.1 percent versus 59.5 percent and among the 20-24 age group, 85.6 percent versus 82.5 percent. For female youth aged 18-19 and 20-24 who have viewed pornography from a cell phone or internet have the opposite levels of sexual behavior, i.e. female youth who have viewed pornography have less sexual activity than those who have never viewed pornography, with 42.9 percent versus 51.5 percent among the 18-19 age group and 61.4 percent versus 75.7 percent among the 20-24 age group.

We conclude that viewing pornography does not clearly affect the sexual behavior of youth, although viewing pornography from a VCD or VDO is correlated with having sex.

**Youth and HIV prevention**

There is a perception in Thai society that youth who know about AIDS are better able to prevent themselves from HIV. The results from the survey show no clear relationship between level of knowledge on AIDS and level of condom use.
Knowledge on AIDS and condom use

Thai youth have good knowledge on AIDS, but the number of HIV-positive youth continues to increase. Previous studies have reported high levels of sexual risk behavior, for example, a high proportion do not use a condom during intercourse or they thought that HIV was not of issue of concern for them. In this study, there are 11 questions on AIDS knowledge which is divided into three levels of knowledge. If the respondents could correctly answer every question, they are considered to have high knowledge, with 1-2 wrong answers, they are considered having moderate knowledge and 3 or more wrong answers means that they have low knowledge.

Findings from the survey on the association between knowledge and risk behavior of youth, such as condom use during first sex (excluding first sexual intercourse of married couples or cohabitants), show that male and female youth aged 18-19 generally did not use condom at first sex (about 58 percent). When comparing among youth with different knowledge on AIDS, we find that male youth who have high AIDS knowledge are less likely to have used condom than those with low knowledge. Female youth who have moderate knowledge used condom at a lower rate than those with high or low knowledge. Among youth aged 20-24, 56 percent of male youth and 65.2 percent of female youth did not use condom at first sex, with little variation by knowledge levels.

For condom use in the last sex with the last casual partner who is not sex worker, it is found that about one-half of male youth aged 18-24 use a condom every time, and about 40 percent use sometimes or never use. 32 percent of male youth aged 18-19 and 20-24 do not use condom. About 69 percent of female youth aged 20-24 stated they did not use condom. Male youth aged 18-19 who have high knowledge use less condom than other groups. Among male youth aged 20-24, those with low and high knowledge used condoms at a lower level than the moderate knowledge group. This suggests that levels of knowledge on AIDS do not appear to significantly affect condom use.
For condom use at last sex with the last partner (neither a spouse nor cohabitant nor fiancé), it is found that 37.1 percent of male youth aged 18-19, and 42 percent of male youth aged 20-24 did not use a condom, while 69 percent of females aged 18-19 and aged 20-24 did not use condom. For male and female youth aged 18-19, levels of knowledge on AIDS relate to levels of condom use. Male youth aged 20-24 who have low and high knowledge had lower level of condom use than the moderate knowledge group. Among female youth, those with low and high knowledge had lower level of condom use than did the moderate knowledge group.

It was found that 94 percent of male youth aged 18-19 and 20-24 use condom with their last paid partner. The different levels of knowledge among youth do not affect condom use at last sex with a casual paid partner.

In summary, there is no evidence from the survey that youth who know more about AIDS are better in preventing themselves from HIV. There is no clear relationship between levels of AIDS knowledge and sexual risk behavior. This suggests that providing youth with AIDS knowledge alone will not lead to HIV prevention.
Communication on condoms between parents and youth

It is generally believed in Thai society that this is no discussion between parents and their adolescent children about condoms. The result of the survey supports this perception.

According to the survey data, most male and female youth have never talked about condoms with their parents. More female than male youth have not talked about condoms with parents. Most male and female youth say that they have never talked about condoms with their father. The proportion of differences between male and female is similar in both age groups. (i.e. 72.4 percent for male and 93.4 percent for female youth aged 18-19, and 77.2 percent for male and 90.1 percent for female youth aged 20-24). Most also do not talk about condoms with their mother (i.e. 72.9 percent of male and 90.9 percent of female youth aged 18-19 and 77.6 percent of male and 86.1 percent of female youth aged 20-24). It appears that more male youth have talked to fathers and mothers than female youth do.

Communication on sexuality and prevention of sexual risk is rare in Thai families. Youth prefer talking with their friends about sex.

Figure 14  Youth who never discussed condom use with father and mother.
In conclusion, the belief that parents and their adolescent children do not talk about condoms is true. Data confirm that majority of male and female youth have never talked about condom use with either their father or their mother. More female than male youth have not talked about condom use with parents. Younger male and female youth tend to talk with fathers and mothers more than older male and female youth about this issue. This may indicate a change between generations.

**There is an increase in same sex behavior: Is it true?**

Although the data from the survey show that the younger respondents are more likely to have had same-sex partners than older respondents - a finding that is consistent with the general perception in Thai society of an increase in same sex behavior, this trend may result from young people being more brave and more open about their sexual preference.

According to data shown in figure 14, the results suggest an increasing trend of homosexuality and bisexuality. For both male and females aged 18-19 years old there was a higher proportion who stated that they prefer same sex or both sex than the 20-24 years old group. More female than male youth in both age groups reported that they prefer same sex or both sex.

When considering first sexual partners, there is small proportion of same sex although the proportion appears to be increasing. When asked about the sex with their steady partners during the last 12 months, the proportion with a same sex steady partners is higher than for the first sexual partner. For male youth, the proportion of same sex partners who are casual partners during the last 12 months is higher than who are same sex partners who are first sexual partners.

The latest partners of younger male and female youth are more likely to be same sex. Among male youth aged 18-19, 2.1 percent have had sex with the same sex, which is higher than for male youth aged 20-24
Among female youth aged 18-19, 3.8 percent have had sex with the same sex which is higher than for female youth aged 20-24 (1.7 percent).

Very few youth agreed when asked having sex with the same sex is safer for HIV transmission. More female than male youth agreed with this statement.

In conclusion, in general people think that there is an increase in same sex behavior. This is true. There is an increase of same sex preference among younger youth. This may indicate a trend of behavior for the younger generation and partially it may due to the fact that the younger generation is more brave and more open about sexual preference.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Based on the evidence from the survey, it was found that majority of the general perceptions in Thai society are not true. The results can be summarized as follows:

- **Youth in schools have no sexual activity - Not true**
- **Youth who stay with parents or are watched by parents do not have much opportunity to have sex Not true**

It was found that more than 50 percent of the male youth in school who live with their parents have sexual experiences while one fourth of the
female youth have had sex. This is consistent with their attitudes towards sex, including the saying that it is common and acceptable to have a premarital sex among male and female youth. Youth view that their parents can accept the premarital sex of sons more than of daughters.

- **Youth are not liberal in their view of sex-Not true**
The finding is also consistent with their attitude saying that most of their close friends have sex experiences.

- **Male youth are more sexually active than female youth - True**
A few sets of evidence support this statement. For example, in the last 12 months, male youth have had more sexual partners than female youth.

- **Most single youth do not have sex- Not true**
More than a half of male youth have had sex (ranging from 58-90%) and a significant proportion of female youth have had sex (ranging from 20-45%), sexually active male youth started sex at the age of 10-13, compare to females who started at the age of 11-14

- **Male youth had their first sex with sex workers - Not true**
Most have their first sexual experience with their girlfriends.

- **Youth have sex because of pornography - Not really true**
There is insufficient evidence to support this claim. Evidence shows slight relationship between sexual experience and watching pornography from DVD or VCD, but no relationship with pornography from other media.

- **Youth who know about AIDS are better able to prevent themselves from HIV - Not true**
The findings showed that youth with good knowledge of AIDS have HIV risk behavior. Most youth had their first sex with a girlfriend, boyfriend, friend and someone they know. More than 50 percent do not use condoms. Some condom use occurs when having sex with a casual or paid partner.
There is no discussion between parents and their adolescent children about condom - True
Majority of male and female youth have never discussed condom use with their parents.

There is an increase in same sex behavior - There is a trend of increase. Younger youth appear to have same sex more than older youth.

How did this phenomenon reflect our society?

It is possible that risk behaviors are not acceptable but tolerated, In addition, what youth are exposed to such as, adult behaviors, media, and television dramas, show sexual experience as common and even popular while safer sex is rarely mentioned. Therefore, many youth might perceive that for them and for the adult, sex and risk behaviors are common, normal and acceptable in the society.

The awareness and sense of gender equality has been raised in Thai society. Often, the popular translation of gender equality is that “if a man can do it, then a woman can do it too” and vice versa. This may lead to an increase in sexual expression and risk behavior among both male and female youth.

It is recommended that:

1. Everyone including adults, teachers, families, media staff and policy makers as well as youth themselves acknowledges the facts about youth’s sexual behavior and attitudes. If the adults close their eyes and ears from the facts, there will never be a chance to address the problem.
2. With the acknowledgement of the facts, youth should be empowered with capacity, knowledge, awareness, risk assessment skills, life skills and support so that they can make informed decisions on appropriate behavior and protect them from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, exploitation and abuse by peers and adults. They should lead and participate in sexual, reproductive health, AIDS and youth development projects for them and by them through strengthened youth networks in all areas of the country.
References


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