SEXUAL COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE NORTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract - The sexual behavior of adolescents is one of the problems in the current public health interest. The precise information in sexual behaviors among university students in Thailand was insufficient. The aim of this study was to assess university students' sexual behaviors and their sexual communication to produce the baseline information and guideline for planning and implementing the prevention in the Northern of Thailand.
Method— A cross sectional study was conducted among four hundred and fifty university students between August15 and October 15, 2017 in the Northern part of Thailand. The instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire. Logistic regression was performed to find the association between sexual behaviors and general characteristic and sexual communication.
Results—Overall, 42% reported that they have ever had sexual experience. The university students who were male (OR=1.64, 95%CI 1.03-2.60), living alone (OR=2.48, 95%CI 1.44-4.28), and drinking alcohol (OR=3.25, 95%CI 1.95-5.43) were significantly more likely to have sexual experience, whereas the university students with lower GPA were more likely to have ever had sex(OR=0.53, 95%CI 0.35-0.81). Half of the students had ever perceived the information and been counseled toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. The students who have communicated regarding the information from media (OR=0.44, 95%CI 0.19-0.99) and health professional (OR=0.39, 95%CI 0.15-0.97) and been counseled from their mother (OR=0.52, 95%CI 0.28-0.99) were less likely to have sexual experience. However, the respondents who had been counseled toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS were more likely to have sexual experience (OR=2.57, 95%CI 1.62-4.09).
Conclusion and recommendation—The study highlights that media, teacher, and health professional become the significant role for students to perceive the information regarding sexual issue. These could be tailored for creating an appropriate program and promoting effective communication by merging with norm, trend, and innovation at the specific group level.

Index Terms - Sexual Communication / Sexual Behavior / University Students

I. INTRODUCTION

University student refers to late adolescence or young adulthood aged 18-24 years old.There is a transition between childhood and adulthood. As a result of growth and development, this influences to their behavior including sexual behavior. The inappropriate sexual behavior of adolescents is one of the problems in the current public interest. This could result in unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and HIV/AIDS.

It is found that the age group of 18-24 years old still has sexual risk behaviors that should be monitored such as the high rate of unwanted pregnancies[1], [2], [3]. Nowadays, there is various sexual media that can be easily assessed such as on the internet, videos, or movies. The rapid social and environmental change resulting in a stream of information influence this population. According to lack of experience in living, students are easily contacted or associated sexual risk behaviors[4].The appropriate communication and counseling regarding sexual behavior is necessary for preventing reproductive health problems among thispopulation while the issue is sensitive and rarely communicated openly.

There is rarity on the study based on the sexual behaviors and communication among university students in Thailand. This group of students is considered to be a well-educated age in an early adulthood and the factors that can result in sexual risk behaviors differing from those in secondary school [4]-[6]. Therefore, the study of sexual behaviors in this group is important in order to clearly understand the problematic that can be tailored for the communication in order to prevent the risk of the unwanted sexual behaviors including the risk of HIV and STDs and unwanted pregnancies.

The aim of this study was to assess university students' sexual behaviors and their communication to produce the baseline information and guideline for planning and implementing the prevention in a consistent and appropriate manner at the specific group level.

II. MATHERIALS AND METHODS

The cross-sectional study was used as the research design of this research between August 15 and October 15, 2017.A university located in the Northern part of Thailand were selected as a study areas. Finally, 450 university students participated in this study through simpler and on sampling. The inclusion criteria was university students who were recently studying in the study area, both male and female, and aged between18-24 years old.

A. Measurement Tools

The instrument used in this study was a validated and reliable self-administered questionnairesconsisted of three parts;

Part 1: general characteristics and socio-demographic
Part 2: sexual behaviors
Part 3: sexual communication

B. Data Analysis

The general characteristics and the variables were described by frequency,percentage, and mean. Logistic regression was performed to findthe association between sexual behaviorand general characteristic and sexual communication.The odd ratio and confident interval were also calculated, and the statistical significance level used was 0.05. This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Subjects, Health Science group, Thammasat University, Thailand.

III. RESULTS

A total of 450 university students completed the questionnaire. The mean age of the responding students was 19.84 years (SD= 1.22) and ranged from 18-24 years old. More than half of the students (66.2%) were female. The average of their GPA was 2.75 (SD= 0.56) ranged between 1.61 and 4.00. More than one third of the students (39.1%) claimed that they lived alone, and the other lived with friend (30.2%), family (15.6%), and boy/girlfriend (12.2%), respectively.67.5% of all students had the habit of alcohol drinking.

A. Sexual Behaviors

Overall, 42% reported that they have ever had sexual experience.The average age at their first sex was 17.05 years (SD= 1.69) and ranged from 12-22 years old.

B. Sexual communication

Half of the respondents (52.2%) had never perceived the information toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. More than one-third 37.6% of those perceived the information from instructor or teacher followed by 30.4% of media, 12.0% of health professional, and 9.3% of friend. Half of the respondents 51.3% had ever been counseled toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. One-third 32.9% of those consulted regarding sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS with health professionals followed by 27.8% of friend (same sex),16.7% of their mother, 9.1% of instructor or teacher, and 8% of their father (Table-1). Table 2 shows the logistic regression with factors associated with sexual behaviors.

Table-1: Sexual communication of surveyed university students (n=450)

Sexual communication	n	%
Ever perceive information toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS from		
Yes	215	47.8
No	235	52.2
Sources for perceiving information toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS		
Instructor	169	37.6
Friend	42	9.3
Siblings	22	4.9
Media	137	30.4
Family	5	1.1
Health Professional	54	12.0
Other	21	4.7
Counseling toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS		
Yes	231	51.3
No	219	48.7
Person whom consult toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS		
Father	36	8.0
Mother	75	16.7
Siblings	17	3.8
Cousin	2	0.4
Friend (same sex)	125	27.8
Friend (opposite sex)	2	0.4
Boy/girlfriend	4	0.9
Instructors	41	9.1
Health Professionals	148	32.9

Table-2: The association between sexual behaviour and general characteristics and sexual communication

Factors	Sexual Experiences (Ever having sex) OR (95%CI)
Demographics	
Age	1.05 (0.87-1.27)
Male	1.64 (1.03-2.60)*
GPA	0.53 (0.35-0.81)**
Living status	
Living Alone	2.48 (1.44-4.28)**
Living with Parent	1.59 (0 .79-3.18)
Alcohol drinking	3.25 (1.95-5.43)**

Factors	Sexual Experiences (Ever having sex) OR (95%CI)
Ever perceive information toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS	1.27(0.79-2.03)
Sources for perceiving information toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS	
Instructor	0.49 (0.23-1.08
Friend	1.64 (0.62-4.35)
Media	0.44 (0.19-0.99)*
Health Professional	0.39 (0.15-0.97)*
Counseling toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS	2.57 (1.62-4.09)**
Person whom consult toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS	
Father	0.97 (0.44-2.15)
Mother	0.52 (0.28-0.99)*
Siblings	0.29 (0.08-1.09)
Friend (same sex)	0.94 (0.57-1.55)
Instructors	2.06 (0.93-4.56)
Health Professionals	0.49 (0.22-1.08)

*Statistically significant (*p-value* of <0.05)
**statistically significant (*p-value* of <0.01)

IV. DISCUSSION

Our study shows that university students who were male, living alone and drinking alcohol were significantly more likely to have sexual experience than female, living with friend and family, and not drinking alcohol, whereas the respondents with poor grades were more likely to have had sex. The previous studies have supported the results and showed similarly that gender, living pattern, and grade factors play an important role indetermining the sexual behavior of the university students [7] - [15]. Surprisingly, half of the students had ever perceived the information and been counseled toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Although appropriate information and prevention to prevent reproductive health problems is important, the sex issue in Thai culture and society is still sensitive and rarely talked openly [6]. This reveal the significance in promoting the communication among this population. Most of the university students perceived the information from instructors/teacher and media. Moreover, the persons whom students had consulted about sexual information the most were friend with same sex and health professionals.This can explain that the university student feel embarrassed to get the sex information and counseling about sex from adults. They feel comfortable talking about sex with friends [16], [17]. Moreover, media, teacher, and health professional become the significant role for students to perceive the information regarding sexual issue. The finding from logistic regression also shows that the students who have communicated regarding the information from any media and health professional and been counseled from their motherwere less likely to have sexual experience. This could explain that the students who perceived the information about sexual issue were more understanding and receive the appropriate knowledge in their sexual behaviors. This also was found in the previous studies that mother has influenced to be the role in counseling toward sex issue [16], [18] - [21]. However, the respondents who had been counseled were more likely to have sexual experience. This revealed the crucial issue in promoting the impropriate counseling for the students in the university level.

CONCLUSION

Our finding revealed that sexual experience among the university students is related with gender, living status, alcohol drinking, GPA, communicating regarding the sexual information from any media and health professional, and counseling from mother. Moreover, half of the students have ever perceived the information and been counseled toward sex and the sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Media, teacher, and health professional become the significant role for students to perceive the information regarding sexual issue. Even though having sex in this group nowadays found to be usual, the appropriate communication in the early prevention of unwanted sexual behaviors is necessary. Consequently, these could be tailored for creating an appropriate and effective communication for preventing sexual risk behaviors by merging with norm, trend, and up-to-date innovation at the specific group level.

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