ABSTRACT

This exploratory study used qualitative approach to understand the sexual meanings, sexual behaviour and sexual reproductive health among young female factory workers in Laos. Data collected in this study was from 24 young female factory workers. Collection used in-depth interviews and participant observation techniques during a period of four months starting from July and running until October 2004.

The findings of this study show that young female respondents are at a cross-roads between their own traditional sexual culture and gender values and modern culture and values that are part of their exposure to an urban, modern, and globalized life. Many young women had been involved in premarital sex, reasoning their behaviour as being ‘modern’, ‘up to date’, and ‘new age’. There was evidence of low condom use and causal sex, indicating the young women were involved in unsafe sexual practices. Many gender-and sexuality-related perceptions and values were also found to determine their sexual behaviour.

The study also reveals that the young women were facing the risk of reproductive health problems including HIV/AIDS. Their beliefs, knowledge and understanding of sexual reproductive health were limited and inadequate.

This study suggests that strategies to prevent HIV/AIDS, STDs and unintended pregnancies among young female factory workers are necessary through a variety of ways, based on understanding of their lives.

KEY WORDS: HIV/AIDS / SEXUALITY / REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH / WORKERS / LAOS