

**ROYAL THAI ARMY CONSCRIPTS AND HIV/AIDS-RELATED
STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE)**

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY

2006

ISBN 974-04-7131-5

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M.A. (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE)

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ABSTRACT

This social inquiry aims to understand the origins and persistence of the stigmatization and discrimination experienced by RTA conscripts with HIV/AIDS. It adopts a qualitative research approach relying on three main data collection techniques, namely in-depth interview, observation, and a documentary review. Three RTA units (battalions) were studied over a period of four months from August to November 2005.

The results of this study reveal that stigmatization of and discrimination against HIV+ conscripts exists in various forms and to various extents. The severity of this is largely influenced by misconceptions about modes of HIV transmission and negative views about HIV/AIDS. These phenomena are closely linked with the compulsory HIV screening of conscripts, which is carried out with inadequate pre- and post-counseling, and with a lack of concern for confidentiality issues. These contributory clinical testing factors were found to be an unintended side effect of RTA policies and guidelines for HIV/AIDS prevention and control. This study also considers HIV/AIDS-related stigmatization and discrimination in the context of military culture and power structures. Pre-existing prejudices and power relationships within the military create a double stigmatization of conscripts, and perpetuate discrimination against conscripts both presumed to be and actually HIV positive.

The study recommends that there should be a vigorous campaign to combat HIV/AIDS-related discrimination against and stigmatization of HIV+ conscripts. Furthermore, updated and clear RTA policies and guidelines on HIV/AIDS prevention and control are urgently required. In particular, guidelines for HIV screening of conscripts and care and support of RTA personnel with HIV/AIDS require adjustment in light of the above findings. Training for RTA personnel at different levels of both the health sector and RTA units is also necessary. Gaps between official policy and the actual implementation of HIV/AIDS control need to be tackled more seriously and effectively.

KEY WORDS: CONSCRIPT / HIV/AIDS / STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION / MILITARY CULTURE / THAI ARMY

122 P. ISBN 974-04-7131-5