SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES AMONG FEMALE HOMELESS ADOLESCENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Homeless adolescents represent a marginalized population in society, who, as a group, pose a serious social challenge to health service providers. However, there is a dearth of literature concerning their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health. This study explores sexuality among female homeless adolescents in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study investigates the social context of their daily lives and the conditions of being homeless and how they shape female homeless adolescents’ gender, sexuality, and make them vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health problems.

This study uses an ethnographic approach with a postmodern feminist perspective on sexuality. In-depth data was obtained by community mapping, focus group discussions, participant observation, and interviews with 13 female homeless adolescents. Twelve key informants who had connections with female homeless adolescents were interviewed to explore topics related to sexuality. Data were analyzed using content and discourse analysis.

The findings describe the setting, culture, and daily lives of female homeless adolescents. Several participants reported engaging in street sex work, selling lottery tickets, and gathering recyclable materials. Several participants perceived themselves as having both masculine and feminine gender identities. Also, they felt responsible for a mother’s role and a wife’s role. Various dominant themes from gender and sexual discourse and the social context of being homeless impacted on their sexuality. Some had steady partners while others engaged in casual sex. They engaged in both bisexual and heterosexual relationships. Three main findings emerged from the study: the desire for a stable family with a good husband or partner, the necessity of a close friendship, and the various sexual meanings that were given to sex such as love, sharing affection, and fulfillment of sexual desires and drives. Most participants reported being sexually harassed, at risk and vulnerable to unsafe sex and unwanted pregnancy; having limited access to health services; lacking knowledge and skills to take care of health and hygiene issues related to their reproductive system and menstruation. The recommendations of this thesis are that sexual and reproductive health program and social support be made available to homeless adolescents in general.

KEY WORDS: FEMALE HOMELESS ADOLESCENTS/ SEXUALITY/ GENDER IDENTITY/ REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH/ VIETNAM

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