

**SINGLE MOTHERS AND THEIR VULNERABILITY TO
HIV/AIDS AND STIs IN THE LAO PEOPLE'S
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**



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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to study the vulnerability of Lao single mothers to HIV/AIDS/STIs. The research methods included narrative interviews, non-participant observations, and key informant interviews. Information from ten single mothers living in Vientiane was collected through narrative interviews. The study uses a post modern feminist perspective to analyze how socio-cultural contexts and sexual meanings, sexual desire, and various forms of expression of sexuality influence single mother's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS/STIs.

The results reveal the socio-cultural context of single mothers which includes living with their children, living without their children and living with their families. Gender discourses surrounding being a Lao single mother in this study include those of being a good mother, good wife and femininity. Single mothers have double responsibilities. They support their family, their natal family, earn a living by themselves and are stigmatized and discriminated against. Single mothers are viewed as deviant, promiscuous, easy to have sex with, having sexual hunger and strong sexual desire, and even being willing to sell sex. Therefore, they have less opportunity to find stable or genuine boyfriends. Single mothers have their own sexual autonomy, but paradoxically, they don't have equal power to negotiate with their partners for safer sex. Their lower socioeconomic and sexual status as well as negative gender discourse leads to their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS/STIs.

**KEY WORDS: SINGLE MOTHER/VULNERABILITY/HIV/AIDS/STIs/LAOS/
SEXUALITY/DISCOURSES**

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