SEXUAL BEHAVIOR RELATING TO HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND INFLUENTIAL FACTORS AMONG UNMARRIED YOUNG MALES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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AIDS as a fatal disease is a serious threat for people all over the world as well as in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Among the transmission routes, sexual activity has been found to account for a high percentage of infection in many areas, especially among young people. To gain an understanding of their actual sexual behavior relating to HIV/AIDS prevention and the influential factors, this qualitative research has been conducted by using in-depth interviews with 19 male college students and 6 lower education level young males. Data were then transcribed, coded, grouped and interpreted based on the conceptual framework.

The results reveal a variety of sexual patterns ranging from no risk to high risk behaviors. The majority of informants reported having had their first act of sexual intercourse with their girlfriends. Some engaged in sex as early as age 16, and the first act of sexual intercourse was typically unprotected. For later acts, use of condoms appeared to be the preventive measure of choice for sex with commercial sex workers but was not so common in the case of girlfriends. Though basic knowledge about AIDS was recognized by almost all, many incorrect beliefs were held by many informants, which appeared to contribute to their unsafe sex practices. Perceived benefits of condom usage were seen to be related to actual condom use. However, negative affect toward condom usage such as embarrassment when buying or carrying condoms, and uncomfortable feelings when wearing condoms, appeared to be associated with non-condom usage sexual practices with girlfriends. Socioeconomic factors, especially economic status, have proved to have a strong impact on sexual behavior. Finally, the sexual behavior of young males was seen to be affected by social influences. Peers and partners was found to influence informants’ behaviors via direct action while parents appeared to affect their behaviors by shaping their thinking. Direct communication with more attractive and explicit presentations was shown to have a strong influence on young males’ ideas which encourage them to practice safer sex. Pornographic materials, on the other hand, stimulate and lead young males to uncontrolled and unprotected sexual intercourse.

In terms of recommendations, the HIV/AIDS education program should provide youth with more knowledge about HIV transmission routes, safer sex practices as well as contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases. Training in practical skills is needed: skills to avoid risky situations, and to control one’s own excitement for young males; skills to refuse unwanted sex and to negotiate to have safer sex for young females. More attractive and explicit HIV/AIDS information activities should be developed and offered while pornographic materials should only be made available to young males under appropriate circumstances. Sexual behavior relating to HIV/AIDS prevention is best conceived as not purely a biological and epidemiological issue but rather a psycho-social-cultural issue which requires further research.