



**A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PREMARITAL SEXUAL EXPERIENCE AND
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIV/AIDS AMONG THAI YOUTH**

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The study examined the relationship between the background of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Thai youth and levels of knowledge of HIV/AIDS in relation to premarital sexual experience. The analysis drew upon data from the nationally representative survey 'The Family and Youth Survey (FAYS)' conducted in 1994 by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. In the analysis, the study has included 2,180 youth between the ages of 15 years and 24 years. Demographic and socioeconomic variables in the analysis include gender, education, occupation, income and place of residence.

Among the respondents, 38.8 per cent had experienced premarital sexual intercourse. The mean age at first sexual experience was 17.5 years for those who had premarital sexual experience. After gender was controlled, the association between demographic and socioeconomic factors especially age group, annual income, education, and occupation was related at a statistically significant level, for both males and females, with premarital sexual experience among Thai youth. Place of residence was associated with premarital sex experience in females only.

After controlling for gender, the level of HIV/AIDS knowledge was related to educational attainment, annual income and occupation for both sexes. Age group and place of residence were related to level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS, among females.

The association between level of HIV/AIDS knowledge and having sexual experience before marriage was not significant for either sex. The findings on sexual experience and knowledge about HIV/AIDS of youth revealed some interesting points that may have policy implications and further research in prevention of HIV/AIDS. The first point is that improving knowledge about HIV/AIDS is not likely to affect the prevalence of premarital sexual experience, but it can certainly promote safe sex practice. More publicity should be provided and attention given to help sexually active adolescents to use effective methods of protection against pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS, especially safe sex. Curriculum improvement, school-based sexuality programs, especially for youth, about sexuality and HIV/AIDS should be extensive and continuously implemented. Further research should focus on age at first sexual experience and protection against HIV/AIDS under Thai cultural context.