

UNSAFE SEX AND DRUG USE IN JUVENILE DETAINEES IN THE NORTHERN THAILAND

Oraphin Krissanakriangkrai^{1,*} Supaphitt Mikanmak² Tawatchai Pinkrue¹
Nithra Kitreerawutiwong¹ Vimala Chayodom¹

¹Faculty of Public Health, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand. 65000

²Phitsanulok Provincial Health Office, Phitsanulok, Thailand. 65000

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to examine whether drug use was associated with participation in unprotected intercourse and to explore the factors that influenced drug use and sexual behaviors among juvenile detainees in Thailand. The study used qualitative and quantitative approaches to identify factors that affected sex and drug-use behaviors of 96 juvenile detainees in detention facility in Northern Thailand. There was a significant association between sexual intercourse and using amphetamines ($\chi^2 = 14.8$, p-value <0.001), and using marijuana ($\chi^2 = 8.9$, p-value <0.001). Parents should be a friend and a counselor to their children regarding drugs use and sexuality issues. Interventions directed at peer norms are needed. Eradication of drug-sellers might help creating safer environments for adolescences. Sex media such as VCD and magazines should be more strictly controlled.

Keywords: Juvenile detainees, unsafe sex, drug use, Northern Thailand

INTRODUCTION: HIV/AIDS among Thai adolescents has become a significant concern since the social environment has changed rapidly over the last decade. Male teenagers seek to be “smart boys”, whose status depends on stories of sexual performance and conquests. Female teenagers are managing a new concept of dating without their parents' support and with few life skills to enable them to manage their desires in potentially coercive situations¹⁾. A study in Thailand reported that less than 50 % of adolescences who had premarital sex used condoms when they had these casual sexual encounters²⁾. Such behaviors might lead to other problems such as becoming infected with HIV and premature pregnancy, which could deny youth the opportunity for further study and a better future. In addition, drug use such as amphetamines and methamphetamines has been shown to be associated with sexual risk and HIV transmission among adolescents³⁾.

Thailand has experienced a rapid increase in drug availability, use, and related social harms through the

1990s⁴⁾. According to the Office of Narcotics Control Board, methamphetamines, known as Ya-Baa in Thailand, comprise 75% of all drug use and the remaining 25% is made up of a wide range of less popular drugs⁵⁾.

According to the Central Juveniles Court's statistics, the number of juvenile delinquents in Thailand increased by 31,000 in 2000, up from 20,419 in 1999⁶⁾. In the past, theft was the most common offence that came before the court, but nowadays the offenses are drug-related and sexual harassment in nature⁷⁾. The most recent study in the US found that nearly two-thirds of juvenile detainees had engaged in ten or more HIV-AIDS risk behaviors related to sex or drugs⁸⁾. However, no study has yet been conducted to determine the relationship between drug use and sexual behaviors among juvenile detainees in Thailand. The purpose of this study was to examine whether drug use was associated with participation in unprotected intercourse and to explore the factors that influenced drug use and sexual behaviors among juvenile detainees in Thailand.

* To whom correspondence should be addressed.

E-mail: koraphin@hotmail.com, Tel./Fax. 0 5526 1911

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Design and setting

This study used a mixed method combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to identify factors that affect sex and drug-use behaviors of juvenile detainees in detention facility. Data was collected from all 96 juvenile detainees aged between who were arrested and confined in a detention facility in Northern Thailand between July and December 2006. The study protocol was approved by the ethical review committee of Naresuan University. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant.

The purpose of the first interview with all 96 juvenile detainees was to collect quantitative data using a questionnaire. Participants were asked a series of questions about their use of alcohol and drugs as well as their sexual behavior and experiences. Then 25 detainees who had experience used drugs before or during sexual intercourse were selected for an in-depth interview.

Analysis Procedure

Questionnaires were checked for the completeness of the data. Multiple-choice questions were coded and recorded on a statistical program (SPSS version 11.5). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, odd ratio (OR) with 95% confident interval (95%CI), and chi-square (χ^2).

In-depth interview data was verified the accuracy of the responses using the triangulation technique by interviewed the juvenile detainees, custody officers and counselors in the detention facility on the same topics. Data collected from the in-depth interview enabled thematic analysis. Audio-recordings and transcripts had unique markers, protecting the identity of the participants. Textual review and sorting of categorical data, via open coding,⁹⁾ highlighted four themes: factors influencing arrest; factors influencing drug use; factors influencing sexual intercourse; and the consequences of drug use and sexual intercourse. Observation transcriptions from field-notes were denoted to express

important feelings and reflections of the juvenile detainees.

RESULTS:

Juvenile detainees' characteristics

Of the 96 participants, 94.8 % were male. The average age of participants was 16.3 years, with 72.9 % of participants between 16 to 20 years old. Most participants (58.3 %) had education at the secondary school level. The parents of 50 % of juvenile detainees were labors. Only 40 % of the juvenile detainees come from families where the parents living together and 37.4% come from families without father. Juvenile detainee was arrested from the following actions: robbing or stealing, drug use or selling drugs, aggravated assault, voluntary or involuntary manslaughter, rape or sexual assault, and vehicular or intoxication manslaughter (35.4 %, 25.0%, 13.5%, 12.5%, 11.5%, and 2.1%, respectively).

Drug Use among Juvenile Detainees

In total, 90.6% of juvenile detainees had used drugs prior to the arrest. Juvenile detainees used amphetamine 33.3%, marijuana 30.8%, glue and solvents 18.8%, and other drugs 17.1%. All detainees drank alcohol while using drugs. Data from the in-depth interview, found that 44.9% of juvenile detainees sold drugs and 32.2% used money that had been provided to them by their parents to purchase drugs, without their parents knowledge. Friends of the juvenile detainees were found to be the most influencing person resulting in the detainees' use of drugs (41.4%). Before the juvenile detainees were arrested, they most often used drugs at their own home or at their friends' home as a group when their guardians were not there. Sometimes this drug use occurred before and during sexual activities. Only 20.7 % of the juvenile detainees quit using drugs while housed at the detention facility.

Sexual behaviors and experiences

Of the 96 juvenile detainees, 66.7% had experience having sex while using drugs. Among those who had sexual experience, only 29.7 % of those used a

condom every time while having sex. Factors that influence sexual emotion include: watching porn CD/VDO (37.4%), using drugs (27.8%), reading porn book/magazine (17.7%), being intimate with boy friend/girl friend (12.7%), and have erotic conversations (4.4%). Most juvenile detainees (who had sex while using drugs) had sex at their own home or at their friends' home (81.3 %). Other place where juvenile detainees had sex while using drugs include: motel (10.9%), dormitory (4.7%), and public park (3.1%). Forty percents of participants felt guilt and where in fear of the possible consequences of their actions after having sexual intercourse for the first time (i.e. pregnancy of partners, expulsion from school, and punishment by parents). However, 60 % felt enjoyment and had little or no fear of the consequences and sought to have more sexual intercourse. Consequences after sexual intercourse for those juvenile detainees include: partner becoming pregnant and performed illegal abortions (18.8%), being arrested for rape (18.7%), becoming infected with sexual transmitted diseases (15.6%), expulsion from school (12.5%), Partner pregnant and kept the babies (9.4%), and no consequent from this action (25%).

Relationship between drug uses and sexual behaviors

Results from this study showed that there was a significant association between sexual intercourse and drinking alcohol ($\chi^2 = 14.6$, p-value <0.001), using amphetamines ($\chi^2 = 14.8$, p-value <0.001), and using marijuana ($\chi^2 = 8.9$, p-value <0.001). Juvenile detainee had a higher chance to have sexual intercourse when using amphetamines (OR = 7.88 [CI: 4.25- 18.11]) and marijuana (OR = 7.88 [CI: 1.01- 8.30]).

DISCUSSIONS:

Male adolescences, especially in the age between 16-20 years old, were involved in more serious crimes including rape, robbing, and voluntary/involuntary manslaughter. Peer effects were estimated in a variety of ways. Among teens these included binge drinking,

marijuana use, methamphetamine use, and premarital sexual activities taking place during their secondary school years.

In Thailand, a rapid increase in economic prosperity has been accompanied by an erosion of traditional cultural and religious values. This can have a negative effect on the juvenile population in Thailand. Family instability, including economic stress, unkindly punitive behaviors, inconsistent parenting practices, multiple moves, and divorce, may also contribute to the development of oppositional and rebellious behaviors. A recent study in Thai adolescences found that male adolescences whose parents did not live together tended to have more delinquent behaviors than those coming from intact families; for females, not having a family member as a confidant and living on one's own were associated with delinquent behaviors¹⁰⁾.

Premarital sexually activities among young people increase their risk of HIV infection and other STDs since only 30 % of the juveniles regularly use a condom during sexual intercourse. Most juveniles in this study quit their education while attending primary or secondary school. Thus the juveniles lack of knowledge and life skills make it difficult for them to circumvent the pressures of premarital sexual activities.

Thai cultural norms normally approve sexual freedom to males, but obligatory constraints on female sexual behavior. In the past, unmarried males often experience sexual initiation with female sex workers, while young unmarried females were expected to maintain virginity until they were married¹¹⁾. The norms leading sexual practices among the Thai youth have changed¹²⁾. A growing proportion of adolescent females are reporting to have had premarital sexual intercourse, while male sponsorship of female sex workers has decreased considerably. Most Thai men now have their early sexual experience with noncommercial partners¹³⁾. Most of the time, these adolescents did not use condoms due to trusting their partners. Patterns of commercial sex have also changed. There has been a

Table 1 In-depth interview from juvenile detainees in detention facility in Phitsanulok Province, Thailand**Social environment and factors influencing arrest****Family instability:**

'My parents have been separated since I was in the fourth grade. My dad is an alcoholic. He hit my mom everyday. I live with my mom and my sister. My mom works hard but cannot earn enough money so I had to quit my studies after graduating from primary school. I was arrested for robbing. I need money to buy drugs.'

Academic failure in elementary school:

'My mom is a construction worker. We had to move a lot thus making it hard for me to study. I quit studying after I graduated from primary school and worked as a laborer. I don't care about school because none of my friend studies. I work hard so I use amphetamine.'

Live in a bad environment

'There are many gangs in my neighborhood: motorcycle gang, drug gang, drunker, robbers, etc. I saw them use drugs everyday. When I was 13-years-old one of my neighbor give marijuana to me. Later, I became addicted and needed more drugs but I had no money so I began to sell drugs. I was arrested for the first time when I was 15 year old. I was in this detention facility for 1year. After I went out of this place, I lived in the same place I lived before. I couldn't find a job since people did not give me an opportunity and were afraid of me once I was out from jail. I had to sell drug again and now I'm back here again.'

Factors influencing drug use**Friends or relatives who engage in drug use, delinquent behavior, or violence:**

'My brother sells drugs... amphetamines, marijuana, heroin, you name it. One day he asked me to help him sell in exchange for some money. Wow, I got lots of money. He gave me some marijuana to try. I feel like I can touch the sky.'

'My neighbor produces amphetamines. I buy directly from them. It costs 12 bath (30 cent) per tablet and sells for 300 bath (7.50 \$US) per tablet. I also used those drugs myself. My brother is in the police. One day, he asked me to be a spy for him. I was proud because we got them all. But I couldn't stop using amphetamines so I got arrested by another policeman.'

Curiosity:

'I tried it myself. I wanted to know what it felt like. I didn't expect to get addicted.'

Would like to work more:

'I work at the garage. I feel awake and can work more when I use amphetamines. I use more and more so I can work more and more. I then become drug dependent.'

Factors influencing sexual intercourse**Love:**

'I love my girlfriend and would like to have her all to me. We had sex for the first time on Valentine's day. We were drunk. I did not use condom because I trusted her.'

Heightened sexual awareness curiosity:

'The first time I had sex, I first went to the pub and got drunk. My friend introduced me to one lady. I never had sex before and wanted to try. We went to a hotel. I paid her later. I used a condom because I did know that lady. I was afraid of getting HIV.'

Drugs use:

'One day, I used methamphetamines with my gang. We were very drunk and I didn't remember anything. The only thing I remember is there was a lady that walked by. So we raped her and that is why I'm here.'

Erotic media (VDO and magazine):

'We always hang out at one of my friend house. We play cards, use marijuana, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, use amphetamines, and all kind of drugs. Then we watch sex VDO's together before we have sex. It stimulates my sex emotion more this way.'

Consequences of drug use and sexual intercourse**Sexual transmitted diseases infection:**

'I got gonorrhea. I don't know how this happened. I only had sex with my girlfriend.'

Partner got pregnant:

'My girlfriend was pregnant. I took her to do get an abortion. I felt guilty to do that but we couldn't take care of the baby. I was 16 year old and she was 14 year old.'

Being arrested:

'My girlfriend's parents were very angry with me since I got their underage daughter pregnant. Her parents told the police to arrest me.'

Terminated from school:

'We used amphetamines in the boys' restroom at school one day. We had a rival gang and we met each other. I think the amphetamines made us feel easily angered more than usual. We fought with the other gang at school. My teacher took us to meet the principal. They found drugs in our pockets. They called our guardians and then expelled us from school.'

large increase in the number of 'indirect' sex service establishments. This has lead to difficulty in regulating these forms of sex workers using condoms¹³⁾.

The shift in sexual behaviors has potentially adverse consequences for the Thai youth, particularly for young women. Although most participants in this study are males we found that their partners have elevated rates of unplanned teenage pregnancy and pregnancy termination.

IMPLICATION: Life skill training may help in preparing Thai youth to adequately negotiate the sexual and health challenges of their adolescent years such as coerced or unwanted pregnancy. Sex education as a formal subject for Thai school curricula should be modified and delivered more often during late primary school and again in the secondary school years (grade 5 to grade 9) since it is currently limited and teachers are often hesitant to teach it in the classroom¹⁴⁾. Sex education needs to consider sexual behavior in the context of substance abuse and generalized risk-taking, unplanned or unwanted pregnancy, STDs and HIV prevention, and safe sex practices.

LIMITATIONS: Since the questions asked in this study were sensitive to the participants, underreporting of these sensitive behaviors might have occurred due to recall and report biases. In addition, because the study was conducted in a detention facility in northern Thailand, it might not be representative of the adolescent population at large in Thailand. Juvenile detainees had special characteristics and more delinquent behaviors than the general adolescence population. This population tended to come from a low socioeconomic background. Hence our samples might provide some insight into an important segment of Thai adolescences that had delinquent behaviors, low socioeconomic status, and/or family instability.

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พฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศและการใช้สารเสพติดในสถานพินิจในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย
อรพิน ภฤษณเกรียงไกร^{1,*} ศุภาพิชญ์ มีชนันหมาก² ธวัชชัย ปิ่นเครือ¹ นันทรา กิจธีระวุฒวณิช¹ วิมาลา ชโยดม¹

¹คณะสาธารณสุขศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร จังหวัดพิษณุโลก ²สำนักงานสาธารณสุขจังหวัดพิษณุโลก 65000

บทคัดย่อ: การศึกษาครั้งนี้ประยุกต์ใช้การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพร่วมกับการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณเพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศและการใช้สารเสพติดของเยาวชนที่อยู่ในสถานพินิจในเขตภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย จำนวน 96 คน ผลการศึกษาพบความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศกับการใช้สารแอมเฟตามีนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ($\chi^2 = 14.8$, p-value < 0.001) และความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศกับการเสพยาสูบอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ($\chi^2 = 8.9$, p-value < 0.001) พ่อแม่ผู้ปกครองควรเป็นทั้งเพื่อนและผู้ให้คำปรึกษาแก่เยาวชน ในเรื่องการป้องกันพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทั้งการใช้สารเสพติดและพฤติกรรมทางเพศ การป้องกันพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงดังกล่าวควรจัดกิจกรรมเพื่อนช่วยเพื่อนให้แก่เยาวชน การกวาดล้างแหล่งค้ายาจะช่วยสร้างสิ่งแวดล้อมที่ดีแก่เยาวชนได้ นอกจากนี้ควรมีการควบคุมสื่อลามกอนาจาร เช่น VCD และนิตยสารต่างๆด้วย

คำสำคัญ: เยาวชนในสถานพินิจ พฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศ การใช้สารเสพติด ภาคเหนือ ประเทศไทย

*ติดต่อได้ที่ koraphin@hotmail.com โทรศัพท์/ โทรสาร 0 5526 1911