

Teens and Sex: Are they ready?

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Abstract

Sexual desire is something natural for men and women. When sexual desire occurs, especially among teenagers, it needs to be managed correctly and properly so that no issues will arise later on. The purpose of this research is to examine management of sexual problems among Thai teenagers, by applying theoretical concepts on social structure and culture, concepts on teenager attitudes towards sexual relationships. This research is considered as a Quantitative Research using Accidental Sampling, Survey Research Methods and Questionnaires as data collecting tools. The sample group of this research consisted of first to fourth year students in undergraduate programs totaling 672 students. These analyses indicate that Thai teenagers trusted and were close to family members and so they had the courage to talk to or ask their parents directly about sexual issues. Even though masturbation was the safest sexual activity, some teenagers believed that it is a sin and immoral. With regard to ways to deal with sexual relationships within the limits of Thai culture in order to avoid students being exposed to circumstances that may expose them to the risk of unintended sexual relationships, it was found that most teenagers believed that female students should wear appropriate clothing and should not wear revealing clothes that may arouse sexual desire in others. They should refrain from alcohol, and should avoid being alone with people of the opposite sex.

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Keywords: Thai Teenager, sexual relationships; sexual problems; management.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is the stage of the greatest physical growth, and will produce several transitions in terms of emotion, socialization, education, career, and the pursuit of an ideal life. It can be also said that adolescence is when teenagers seek to meet their needs and realize transformations, including sexual desire, which will have a significant impact on their future lifestyle. Teenagers typically have a high sex drive and, if they do not know how to cope with it, several sexual issues may occur later on,

such as early sexual experience, unplanned pregnancy, abortion, AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases, and other social issues.

2. Objective

This study aims to examine management of sexual problems among Thai teenagers in order to support the students to learn and to seek guidelines on how to handle their sexual desire correctly and properly.

3. Methodology

This study is Survey Research that collected data using questionnaires in order to examine the sexual culture views of Thai teenagers who are 1st to 4th year undergraduate students on the human and society course at Mahasarakham University in the academic year 2013, and involved a total of 672 students.

3.1. Population, sample and procedure

The study used questionnaires prepared by the researcher to collect data from 1st to 4th year undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University. The questionnaire included open-ended questions, divided into three sections: Section 1 – General information of questionnaire respondents; Section 2 – Opinion concerning sexual culture in the view of Thai teenagers; and Section 3 – Opinion concerning ways to handle sexual relationship issues among Thai teenagers. The questions used a 5-scale rating - highly agree, agree, fairly agree, disagree, and highly disagree. The data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS for Windows. The statistics used were mean, percentage and standard deviation.

4. Analysis of the results

This study aims to examine management of sexual problems among Thai teenagers in order to support the students to learn and to seek guidelines on how to handle their sexual desire correctly and properly.

Table 1. Management of sexual problems among Thai teenagers

Context	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Additional activities during free time such as exercising, reading or listening to music, will help to reduce sexual desire	4.52	0.7240	Highest
2. Not talking about sex with person of the opposite sex will help in reducing sexual desire	3.66	1.0380	High
3. Masturbation is one of the good ways to handle sexual desire	3.47	1.0580	Moderate
4. Questions or doubts about sex or sexual relationships should be discussed with a family member or with someone who can give a correct answer	4.04	0.8260	High
5. Staying away from temptation and alcohol will help to minimize the chance of experiencing an early sexual relationship	4.30	0.8570	High

Context	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
6. When having a sexual relationship, it is necessary to have a good understanding of sexual information to prevent problems which may occur later	4.45	0.7230	High
7. Not mixing with friends who indulge in risky behavior such as going to nightclubs/drinking alcohol/addiction to drugs/skipping class/etc. will minimize the chance of experiencing sexual relationship	3.63	1.0850	High
8. Not having a lover (boyfriend/girlfriend) will help to solve sexual problems among teenagers	3.41	1.0480	Moderate
9. A friend is the best person to give advice about sexual relationships	3.22	0.9400	Moderate
10. Strongly refusing when a person of the opposite sex asks for a date or to have sex will help minimize the chance of experiencing an early sexual relationship	3.99	0.9740	High
11. Spending the night with a group of friends, or alone without adult supervision should be avoided	3.80	0.9360	High
12. Female teenagers should not wear revealing clothes that may arouse sexual desire in others	4.29	0.8880	High
13. Not staying alone in a secret place with a member of the opposite sex will help to minimize the chance of experiencing a sexual relationship	4.30	0.8080	High
14. Avoiding arranging to meet with a person of the opposite sex at night will help to minimize the chance of experiencing a sexual relationship	4.25	0.8550	High
15. An educational campaign on sexual relationships would help to minimize problems that may lead to a sexual relationship	4.18	0.8780	High
Overall results	3.96	0.4670	High

Overall it was found that the management of sexual problems among the students was in high level. When considering each individual statement, it was found that there were three statements having the highest level: additional activities during free time such as exercising, reading, listening to music will help in reducing sexual desire ($\bar{x} = 4.52$); in a sexual relationship, it is necessary to get a good understanding of sexual information and sexual relationships in order to prevent later problems ($\bar{x} = 4.45$); staying away from temptation and alcohol will help to minimize the likelihood of experiencing early sexual relationship and not staying alone in a hidden place with a person of the opposite sex will help to minimize the possibility of experiencing a sexual relationship, had equal mean ($\bar{x} = 4.30$). The statements having lowest level of opinion included: a friend is the best person to give advice about sexual relationship ($\bar{x} = 3.22$); not having a lover (boyfriend/ girlfriend) will help to solve sexual problems among teenagers ($\bar{x} = 3.41$); and masturbation is one of the good ways to handle sexual desire ($\bar{x} = 3.47$).

5. Discussion

This study is Survey Research that collected data using questionnaires in order to examine the sexual culture views of Thai teenagers who are 1st to 4th year undergraduate students on the human and society course at Maharakham University in the academic year 2013, and involved a total of 672 students.

5.1. Understanding sex and relationships

5.1.1 Questions or doubts about sex or sexual relationships should be discussed with a family member of with someone who can give a correct answer:

From the study, it was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in high level ($\bar{x} = 4.04$) which indicated that Thai teenagers trusted and were close to family members and so they had the courage to talk to or ask their parents directly about sexual issues. When parents clearly showed that they were open and ready to listen to any of the problems their children were facing, then the children will trust them and ask for advice from them. This was in accord with the research of Worawan Tipwareerom et al. (2013) which studied factors in predicting sexual risk behaviors of male teenagers in Phitsanulok province. The research found that when having problems the sample group get advice firstly from parents (54.5%) and then from friends (41.1%). But when having problems on sexual issues or on sexually transmitted diseases, they would consult physicians first (39.3%) and then parents (37.5%).

5.1.2 When having a sexual relationship, it is necessary to have a good understanding on sexual information and sexual relationships to prevent problems which may occur later:

From the study, it was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in high level ($\bar{x} = 4.45$). In other words, Thai teenagers viewed that having a good understanding on various issues including sexual relationships, pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted disease prevention, was essential before starting a sexual relationship. Sexual education was the topic that most Thai families avoided discussing with their children. Teenagers therefore tended to look for information from print and electronic media including websites, video clips and magazines. This was in accord with the research of Hatairat Kitbamrung (2003) which looked at factors correlating with sexual relationships among female vocational college students under supervision of the Department of Vocational Education, Bangkok. The study found that female vocational college students protected themselves in sexual relationships by using condoms (at 48.00%) because they had learned about safe sex through training or campaigns that promoted the use of condoms in educational institutions.

5.1.3 A friend is the best person to give advice about sexual relationships:

From the study, it was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.22$; in other words, friends were another society of teenagers who played a role and had an influence on sexual attitudes. Even though teenagers viewed that they would think of family first when they needed advice on sexual relationships, intimacy and the need of acceptance from friends also had an impact on their decision making. They therefore relied on their friends' advice as the back-up option. This was in accord with the research of Tam Boonrawd (2007) which studied sexual behavior and factors correlating with the sexual relationships of teenagers in educational institutions under supervision of the Office of the Vocational Education Commission in the Mueang District of one of the southern provinces. It was found that young people aged between 15–25 years experienced sexual

relationships for the first time at an average age of 15 years without using condoms and, when having sexual problems, they normally seek advice from their friends.

5.2. How to deal with sexual desire

5.2.1 Additional activities during free time such as exercising, reading or listening to music, will help to reduce sexual desire:

It was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.52$). In other words, most students viewed that activities such as playing sports or exercising were considered as recreation that allowed players to have fun and to develop a strong body and were beneficial ways for the body to use physical energy, which helped them to relax and reduced sexual desire. This was in accord with the study of Yupa Poonkham and Kobkarn Mahattano (2001) which stated that adolescence was the age of curiosity, especially about sex. Finding a good way to deal with sexual obsessions - taking care of themselves, replacing activity that arouses sexual desire with activity that benefits the body, such as exercising, playing sports, reading, singing or other suitable activities, not letting themselves have too much free time to think of sex, and talking to family members more often about various topics - will help to reduce sexual desire.

5.2.2 An educational campaign on sexual relationships would help to minimize problems that may lead to a sexual relationship:

It was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in high level ($\bar{x} = 4.18$). In other words, educational management in educational institutions aiming to minimize effectively risk opportunity that may lead to sexual relationships should be organized in various forms. This could involve distributing brochures, arranging exhibitions, displaying posters or providing training for everyone in educational institutions to develop the capability for students to take care of themselves and their fellow students.

5.2.3 Masturbation is one of the good ways to handle sexual desire:

It was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.47$) which indicated that more than 50% of the students viewed that even though masturbation was the safest sexual activity and should be the first way to choose especially among teenagers not having a partner, some people who masturbated felt guilty. They believed that it was a sin or was immoral and were afraid or embarrassed that other people who caught them masturbating would condemn them. However, masturbation should be engaged in at proper and moderate frequency because over-masturbation can affect a person's health and way of living. This was in accord with the research of Sukhawit Tonarang et al. (2007) which studied attitudes and behavior relating to masturbation among graduate students. It was found that male graduate students viewed masturbation as something that could be discussed, but female students felt guilty and considered that it was a sin and they became worried after masturbating more often than male students. Male students also masturbated more frequently than female students.

5.3. How to protect yourself from sexual desire

5.3.1 Female teenagers should not wear revealing clothes that may arouse sexual desire in others:

It was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in high level ($\bar{x} = 4.29$). In other words, sexual problems in Thai society have always been questioned through the way of life of women, such as how they dressed, behaved and remained moral under the social norms, etc. Limitations with regard to the right and freedom of Thai women to express themselves using their own bodies was restricted by "good" morals and tradition which stated that sex was forbidden and dangerous, and that good Thai women should "reserve themselves" (Ounjit, 2014). To behave morally, they should not dress in revealing clothes or seduce men. Most teenagers viewed that dressing in revealing clothes can draw attention from the opposite sex, lead to crime, and arouse sexual desire in those of the opposite sex. This was in accord with the research of Paijit Phuchamchot and Wilawan Chomnirat (2011) which studied the development of guidelines to prevent sexual risk behaviors among teenagers. This research found dressing guidelines as follows: 1) dressing by following fashion trends can be sensitive; 2) parents should approve of the way their children dress before they go outside. When seeing improper behavior, parents should talk to their children and give them advice; and 3) introduce a campaign to encourage people to wear local or tactful dress when going to the temple.

5.3.2 Staying away from temptation and alcohol will help to minimize the chance of experiencing an early sexual relationship, and not staying alone in a secret place with a member of the opposite sex will help to minimize the chance of experiencing a sexual relationship:

It was found that the students' attitude towards this statement was in high level ($\bar{x} = 4.30$). In other words, drinking behavior correlated with sexual behavior among teenagers in high degree, as sexual behavior may occur as a result of their own or other people's drinking behavior. They believed that drinking alcohol had an impact on decision making and led to wrong assessments of risk. This was in accord with the work of several researchers including Worawan Tipwareerom et al. (2013) which studied factors used in predicting the sexual risk behavior of male teenagers in Phitsanulok province. This research found that in terms of the correlation between information and motivation and the sexual risk behavior among male teenagers, being invited by friends to drink alcohol, use drugs, read porn or watch porn movies, had an impact on sexual risk behavior among male teenagers at 44.6%. The research of Prapaporn Iam-anan (2008) which studied factors affecting drinking attitude among undergraduate students in Bangkok, found that drinking alcohol led to unintended sexual relationships. The research of Klangploy Uawitthayasuporn (2011) which studied knowledge and attitude towards sexual risk behavior among teenagers in Muang District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, found that drinking alcohol prompted teenagers to have the courage to express themselves ($\bar{x} = 3.39$), and that drinking alcohol may lead to unprotected sexual relationships ($\bar{x} = 4.05$). The research of Orapin Maneewong (2005) which studied the sexual behavior of 402 high school students in Mae Tha District, Lampang Province, found that factors correlating with the sexual behavior of high school students included predisposing factors such as age or living conditions, and enabling factors such as access to pornography, hidden places for socialization, and reinforcing factors such as being aroused by sexual

media content and drinking alcohol. The research of Jularat Haohan (1996) which studied sexual behavior and factors correlating with the sexual relationships of male students in Mueang District, Suri Province, found that drinking alcohol led to sexual relationship at 33.2%. The research of Chanram Thongsiri (1996) found that friends had a certain degree of influence in persuading the sample group to have sexual relationships, at 95%, while drinking alcohol led to sexual relationships at 65%.

Staying alone with people of the opposite sex in a secret place or an inviting environment may lead to a sexual relationship, because teenagers were at a stage ready to have sexual relationships and were highly interested and placed importance on people of the opposite sex. Therefore, teenagers tended to build good relationships with friends of the opposite sex which was a social mechanism among teenagers enabling them to feel accepted and to fit in with their peer group. This was in accord with the research of Hatairat Kitbamrung (2003) which found that female vocational college students, the sample group, had good social skills with the opposite sex. Female vocational college students who had experienced sexual relationships had the skill to protect themselves from the opposite sex at moderate level, while vocational college students who had never experienced sexual relationships had the skill to protect themselves from the opposite sex at good level. When socializing, meeting, or staying alone with people of the opposite sex, most students who had not experienced a sexual relationship will not enter a private room, give the opportunity for people of the opposite sex to touch them physically, nor allow themselves to become sexually aroused.

Although teenagers had switched from traditional to modern sexual values parents, adults and other factors still had an involvement and correlation with teenagers' decisions on sexual matters, both directly and indirectly. Prasat Issarapreeda (1980: 153) stated that the change in values among people of new generation influenced the researcher to place importance and interest in the study on asking questions about the value of dating the opposite sex and on marriage. The study found that young people in universities were influenced by the values of dating and marriage in western countries, and they wanted to choose their own partners in the future. The male students were quite radical and did not care much about tradition, while female students were interested in dating but they wanted someone else to accompany them or wanted to date people who they would want to marry. However, they had switched from the significance of having parents choose their spouse, to the value of choosing for themselves, but under the approval or consent of their parents as in the past.

6. Conclusions

Adolescence or the teenage years are a time of rapid physical and emotional development. Social structure and modern technology have a great impact on teenagers' behavior and emotions, especially sexual desire. Sexual desire is a form of emotion that comes and goes but if teenagers cannot learn to deal with their sexual desire properly, it may lead to incorrect behavior, causing trouble to themselves and to other people. For Thai teenagers, educational institutions have several ways to deal with sexual relationships within the limits of Thai culture in order to avoid students being exposed to circumstances that may expose them to the risk of unintended sexual relationships. For example, female students should wear appropriate clothing and should not wear revealing clothes that may arouse sexual desire

in others. They should refrain from alcohol, and should avoid being alone with people of the opposite sex. Participation in their favorite sports and beneficial activities should be encouraged.

Some teenagers believed that certain safe sexual activities, such as masturbation are a sin and are immoral and they may be afraid or embarrassed if other people caught them masturbating and condemned them. They also wanted to advice from their friends about sexual problems more than from their family members.

However, sexual values and culture among teenagers is changing dramatically. Teenagers today have the freedom to think about and make decisions on how they socialize with people of the opposite sex and have become more relaxed. Social institutions and Thai society still have an influence on the sexual behavior of teenagers, and teenagers and their behaviors are still monitored, but not as closely or strictly as in the past. Regardless of how much society has changed, traditional sexual patterns and behaviors of teenagers can still be observed in certain rural communities and societies where families are adhering to and passing on conventional values and culture towards sex, focusing more on the proper behavior of the female.

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