

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter draws conclusions based on the major findings of this study and provides recommendations for both interventions and research.

7.1 Conclusions

The first hypothesis of this study was that there was a relationship between the socio-demographic background of respondents (age, attending school, education, employment's status, sufficient income, living arrangement, feeling towards family, main source of sex education) and sexual attitudes and behaviors. Based on the bivariate and multivariate analyses, the first hypothesis was partially supported. For males, high education was significant related to liberal sexual attitudes, whereas for females, none of the respondent's background were associated with sexual attitudes. For males, age, attending school, education level, sufficient income, feeling less happy and feeling lonely were statistically significant predictors of sexual behavior, while for females, none of the socio-demographic background variables were significantly related to sexual behaviors.

The second hypothesis was there was a relationship between the family structure variables (parent's marital status, parents' education, employment status of mothers, parent's living in the same house with youth, family size) and sexual attitudes and behaviors. For males, maternal education was a significant predictor of sexual attitudes, while none of the family structure variables were significant predictors for females. For male sexual behaviors, children of mothers who worked, had a higher likelihood of having had sex, and if the mother was living in the same house, they had higher odds of condom use. However, for females, none of the background characteristic of parents was significantly related to sexual behaviors. Therefore, the second hypothesis of a relationship between family structure variables (mother's education, mother's working,

and mothers living) and sexual attitudes of male youth was accepted and the correlation between family structure variables and female youth sexual attitudes and behaviors was rejected.

In the analysis, Model A included socio-demographic characteristic of respondents and parents, and explained only 5.6 percent and 8.6 percent of the variance of sexual attitudes for males and females respectively. For sexual activity, several outcomes were examined (ever had sex, age at first sex, condom use, and number of sex partners). Overall, for males Model A explained a significant proportion of the variance of the outcomes of ever had sex, and age at first sex, but not condom use and number of sex partners. Family structure variables are not sufficient to explain large amount of variance in sexual attitudes and behaviors (see Chapter 2.6.6.5). Donovan (1995) found that demographic variables alone explained approximately 16 percent of the variances in sexual activity in his study. Family structure variables were less important than demographic variables in determining youth sexual attitudes and behaviors.

None of the perceived parent-respondent connectedness variables emerged as statistically significant predictors for males and females sexual attitudes. For male sexual behaviors, mother-son connectedness was related to a lower likelihood of having multiple sex partners, whereas for females, there was no relationship between parent-respondent connectedness and sexual behaviors. Thus, the third hypothesis that there was a negative relationship between parent-respondent connectedness and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors were only partially accepted.

The fourth hypothesis was there was a negative relationship between parent-youth communication about general issues and sexual topics and sexual attitudes and behaviors. Mother-son general communication was significantly related to sexual attitudes for male youth, while for female youth none of the parent-daughter general communication variables were related to sexual attitudes. None of the parent-respondent general communication variables were significant predictors of sexual behaviors of male or female respondents. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was also only partially accepted.

Among the parent-respondent sexual communication and sexual attitudes variables, a higher level of father-son communication on sexual issues was related to more liberal sexual attitudes. None of the parent-daughter sexual communication variables was significantly related to sexual attitudes. For sexual behaviors, there was a mixed result, with mother-son sexual communication related to an early onset of age at first sex and a higher likelihood of having multiple sexual partners. In contrast, father-son sexual communication was related to lower odds of having multiple sexual partners and a lower likelihood of condom use. Thus, the fourth hypothesis was partially accepted.

There was a relationship between father-son discussion about birth control and condoms and high levels of condom use, whereas mother-son discussion about birth control was associated with reduced the odds of condom use. There was an association between mother-son discussion about when to start having sex and delayed first sexual intercourse. Overall, the fourth hypothesis of a negative relationship between parent-respondents sexual communication was partially accepted for male youth sexual behaviors, but rejected for females.

Introducing the family context into Model B significantly increased the amount of explained variance in sexual attitudes and behavior. For sexual attitudes, Model B explained 9.2 percent of male and 16.6 percent of female variance in sexual attitudes. For sexual behaviors, Model B for sexual experiences provided a reasonably good fit to the data and explained a significant proportion of the variance. Model B appeared to fit than model A in predicting sexual experimentation among males and females. However, model B did not explain a significant proportion of the variance for age at first sex for females, and condom use and multiple sex partners for males.

The fifth hypothesis that there was a negative relationship between perceived parental expectations regarding sexual activity and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors were partially accepted, with a negative relationship between perceived mother disapproval of sex and conservative sexual attitudes of female youth.

The sixth hypothesis was that there were correlations between intimate relationships, partner behavior and peer influences and the sexual attitudes and behavior of youth. This hypothesis was also only partially accepted. There was a relationship between dating, peer influence on dating and liberal sexual attitudes of male respondents. For females, there was a relationship between peer influences about having sex and sexual attitudes. There were correlations between having girl friend, dating, kissing, petting lower part of the body and male sexual behaviors. For females, there were significant correlations between having a boy friend, kissing, peer influence on having steady friends and peer influence about having sex and female sexual behaviors.

The seventh hypothesis was there were a relationship between socio-demographic factors, intimate relationship and peer influence, parent-youth connectedness, parent-youth communication and perceived parental expectation regarding sexuality, intimate relationship, partner behavior and peer influence and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors. The multivariate analyses indicated that there was a relationship among the socio-demographic characteristic of respondent, parents, peer influence and intimate relationships and parent-respondent interaction. The full model was formed by adding variables related to perceived parental expectation regarding sex, peer influence and partner's behaviors and intimate relationship to the variables in Model B. Among these variables (33 for 'Sexual Attitudes', 'Ever Had Sex' and 'Number of Sex Partners', 34 variables for 'Age at First Sexual Intercourse' and 37 variables for 'Condom Use'), for sexual attitudes, the most important factors for males were socio-demographic characteristics, mothers characteristics, parent-son general and sexual communication and peer influence on dating; while for females the most important factors were perceived mothers expectation regarding sex and peer influence about having sex. For sexual behavior only a few of the variables were significant predictors.

The Full Model provided the best fit to the data. However, it was still not able to explain a significant proportion of the variance in the male equations for condom use and multiple sex partners and for age at first sex for females. The results suggest that youth sexual attitudes and behaviors are not homogenous and have a complex set of determinants.

Overall, this study addressed the important and sensitive issues of youth sexual attitudes and behavior and the influence of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their parents, parent-respondent interaction, intimate relationships and partner behavior and peer influence on male and female youth sexual attitudes and behavior. It should be noted that while there is considerable overlap in the socio-demographic, family relationships and extra-family predictors of sexual behaviors for males and females, but there are also important differences. The study highlighted the importance of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and parents such as age, education, mother's education and mother's working status as influences on male and female sexual attitudes and behavior. It illustrated the role of parent-respondent communication, especially specific communication on sexual matters, in influencing the sexual behavior of male youth. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of peer influence as a strong psychosocial predictor of sexual attitudes and behaviors of young men and women. Another variable found to be related to sexual attitudes and behaviors were intimate relationships, which was a strong predictor of youth sexual attitudes and behavior.

7.2 Program Recommendations

The findings of this study suggested that determinants of sexual outcomes of youth vary by gender and hence there is a need for gender-specific content in health interventions for adolescents.

- 1) The findings showed the role of peer influence on sexual attitudes and behavior, and this suggests the need for interventions to incorporate peers in the promotion of sexual abstinence, in general, and delayed sexual debut, in particular. This strategy will involve the use of multiple channels of communication, including the use of the mass media, community activities and peer-to-peer activities to change negative group norms and encourage youth to abstain from sex.
- 2) Predictors of the outcomes in this study come from different levels of the system and hence a multi-system approach (individual, family and extra familial level) will be necessary for effective prevention and intervention.

- 3) The study also highlighted the importance of general communication and specific discussion of sex as protective factors. Efforts should be made to promote discussion between parents and youth. Since parent-child communication about sex is not normative in Laos, promoting this behaviour would involve attempts to change social norms about parental roles in the sexuality education of their children. Changing the social norms about the roles of parent in adolescent sexuality education will require consistent and persistent interventions at multiple levels.
- 4) Parents will need education about sexuality and birth control themselves to help them communicate with their adolescent children more effectively. Nevertheless, family-based interventions represent an additional tool in the attempt to reduce sexual-risk behavior in adolescents.

7.3 Research Recommendations

- 1) More research is needed on the influence of gender roles on youth sexual behavior within the Lao socio-cultural context.
- 2) The overall process by which contextual and individual socio-economic factors influence youth was difficult to capture in a single model. This study was an attempt to understand the complexity, but future research is needed to capture all antecedent factors affecting youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors in their complexity.
- 3) There is a need to explore in-depth the sexual attitudes and behaviors of unmarried youth in other settings, particularly in rural areas of the Lao PDR.
- 4) Research on sexual attitudes and behaviors among rural youth and minority ethnic groups are needed.
- 5) A longitudinal study on sexual attitudes and behaviors of unmarried adolescents from different age groups should be considered in order to determine the causal relationship of sexual attitudes and behaviors among youth.