

## **Association between migratory experience and sexual behaviors among young adults in Thailand**

Migration to urban areas exposes young adult migrants to new ideas, expanded opportunities for sexual exploration as well as increased risks for exposure to HIV and other STIs. The linkage between migration and change of sexual behaviors has been widely recognized. However, empirical evidence on this association is still limited. This study assesses the sexual behaviors of young Thai adults (age 15-29) and investigates whether this hypothesized association between migration and sexual risk taking occurs in contemporary Thai social context.

Data were collected in a recent community level survey conducted in a demographic surveillance site (DSS) covering 100 rural and urban communities in Kanchanaburi province in Western Thailand. The survey, conducted in summer 2006, covers the entire young adult population (age 15-29, N=6972) of the DSS. A broad range of information is collected, including demographic indicators, migration history, health status and behaviors, history of sexual behaviors and sexual relationship characteristics.

Controlling for age, sex and social economic status, ever-migrants are associated with a higher likelihood of having had sex (OR = 1.81, P < 0.001); a lower likelihood of having used condom during the first sex (OR=0.83, P<0.05); higher likelihood of current use of modern contraceptive method (OR=1.63, P<0.001), and a higher tolerance to female subordination in sexual relationship (OR=1.11, P<0.1); compared with those who have never migrated in their life time. Controlling for reasons of migration, further analysis

among ever-migrants revealed that: Compared with work related ever-migrants, those who migrated for study are less likely to have had sex (OR=0.77; P<0.01); more likely to have used condom during the first sex (OR=1.27, P<0.1), to be younger in age at first marriage ( $\beta=0.41$ , P<0.05), and less likely to be current modern contraceptive methods users (OR = 0.49, P<0.01). Those who migrated for family (or other reasons) tend to be younger in age at first sex ( $\beta = -0.25$ , P<0.05) and age at first marriage ( $\beta=-0.44$ , P<0.001), less likely to have used condoms during first sex (OR=0.81, P<0.05), are more likely to be using modern contraceptive methods (OR=1.37, P<0.01). Additional analyses on male ever-migrants showed that those who migrated for family or other reasons are less likely to have ever had sex with girlfriend (OR=0.79, P<0.05); however, more likely to have ever had sex with sex workers (OR = 1.29, P < 0.1), compared with those who migrated for work.

Finding from this retrospective analysis supports the hypothesis of a potential association between migration and sexual risk taking. Furthermore, the exact situation varies across types/reasons of migration. However, the nature of the study does not allow causal inference between migration and sexual behaviors relationship. More systematic longitudinal studies are needed to understand the interactions between migration and AIDS-related risk behaviors. Results would help programs to more effectively target interventions that reduce the risk of contracting HIV among migrants, and the risk of migrants transmitting HIV to significant others.