

Social Network Influences on Reproductive Health Behavior of Myanmar Migrants in Maha Chai, Samut Sakhon, Thailand

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Abstract

When people live away from their partners, they develop their own social and cultural networks. Social networks can influence on health. Social network analysis using in-depth interviews showed that the most important social network for the Myanmar migrants in Maha Chai was their peers, friends and relatives. Often young male migrants want to explore their first sexual activity with commercial sex workers. Some of them believe that Thai commercial sex workers (CSWs) are free of AIDS and do not usually use a protective method. Therefore, health promotion programs should focus on young male migrants to attain positive attitude and protective behavior. Those health promotion programs can be improved by understanding how social structures influence sexual behavior. Further study on social support and social network should be done through participatory observation while living in the migrant community.

Keywords: *In-depth interviews, sexual behavior, health promotion, AIDS.*

Introduction

As people live far away from their near and dear ones, they develop their own social and cultural networks that act as strong emotional supports and influence peer group behavior and activities. To fulfill their physical and emotional needs, individuals create their own social networks and relationships. Social networking starts from living arrangement of the migrants, friendship patterns, interaction with neighbors, and sharing feeling about working and social environment. A previous study showed that for less educated migrants, social network including friends and relative is the major source of health information. On the other hand, peer pressure is the most important factor influencing drug abuse (Gupta and Singh 2000).

Thousands of migrants from Myanmar migrate to Maha Chai temporarily or permanently for their survival. Most of them work in seafood, prawn, fish and fish-canning factories and some work in construction sites. Not only those with work permit are working but also those without work permit have to work with less salary. Myanmar migrants in Maha Chai have a distinct lifestyle. They don't usually get social support from their friends not their families. They developed their social

network during migration, working and living in that particular community.

Social network can affect one's health positively or negatively. It can either be beneficial or harmful to a person's health status. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the social networks among the Myanmar Migrant respondents in Maha Chai, Samut Sakhon, Thailand. This research was based on the theory that young people's behaviors and beliefs are shaped positively and negatively by their relationships with others and the societies in which they live (Bond *et al.* 1999).

Methods

In-depth interviewing was used as an instrument in this study. The 20 Myanmar migrants (10 males and 10 females) in Maha Chai, were interviewed by a researcher of the same sex. To protect confidentiality, the names of respondents were not recorded, but only their socio-demographic characteristics were noted down with a code number; 'M' for male and 'F' for female. The Snowball sampling method was used in this qualitative study to arrive at the ten respondents for each gender group. A logbook and code-book were maintained and tabulation was used to facilitate