

## **ABSTRACT**

This report presents the detailed findings from a study of the sexual lifestyles of young (15-24 years of age), single, factory workers in Thailand. The context of the study includes Thailand's rapid industrialisation and associated gendered pattern of rural-urban migration, and intense HIV/AIDS epidemic and other threats to sexual health. The primary focus is upon young women, but data has also been collected from young men in order to explore the gender and interactional sexual dimensions. The principal objective is to enhance understanding of developments in the sexual culture of young factory workers, in order to derive policy and programme implications and recommendations to protect sexual health.

The study involved a structured qualitative and quantitative methodology, including 18 focus group discussions (undertaken September 1992 - January 1993), a schedule-structured survey (undertaken October 1993 - February 1994) among 2,033, 15-24 year old, single workers in 103 factories in Bangkok and its environs, and finally 25 in-depth interviews (undertaken from October to December 1994) with sexually experienced young workers.

In assessing the prevalence of, and factors shaping, 'safer sex' practices, the study apportioned particular attention to young people's sexual relationships, interaction, attitudes and feelings. Overall there was a high level of convergence between the different sets of qualitative and quantitative data. The findings suggest a growing plurality and complexity in young people's sexual lifestyles and networking. The very low level of condom use within increasing non-commercial pre-marital intercourse within loving relationships is of especial health concern. The findings explain the obstacles to 'safer sex' within relationships in terms of a complex of factors, including, lack of perceived risk, desire for a sense of trust and intimacy, (young women's) emotional inhibitions relating to their sexuality, and low levels of communication between partners concerning contraceptive use. Policy implications are discussed in terms of

addressing the lack of congruence between the public discourse on sexuality and young people's actual sexual behaviour, and the need to further promote consistent condom use. Participative, interactive and informal strategies and programmes are recommended to address young women's and men's sexuality and the obstacles to 'safer sex'.