

Sexual Violence Against In-school Female Adolescents

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Introduction

Although, there is much research on sexuality in Thailand, very little of this research examines sexual violence against women. Sexuality is usually combined with other topics, in particular medical and public health issues such as STD infections, Family Planning, Reproductive Health, and HIV/AIDS infection. The AIDS endemic is the main cause for serious research and intervention in the past few decades, and much of this research is multidisciplinary. Nevertheless, there is an increasing problem of sexual violence in Thailand, in particular violence in mainstream sexuality that is sexual violence against women in heterosexual relationships. While there is an increase in violence, there are few studies of the interpersonal dynamic in any specific group - any phenomena from mass media especially newspapers have still illustrated a rising number of such coercion in Thai society (Friend of Women Foundation, 2000). Some researchers estimated that only 5-10% of actual rape cases was reported to the Thai police (Archavanitkul and Jarusomboon, 1997: 1).

It is recognized that the occurrence of sexual abuse is high, and the majority of survivors are girls and young adults. Figure of the United States, where most research results come from, shows that one out of seven women will be survivors of a complete rape in her lifetime (Kilpatrick, Edmunds and Seymour, 1992). According to American national survey, which complete rape is legally defined as rape including forms of penetration other than penile-vaginal intercourse, more than half of first-time rape survivors were less than 18 years old (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998 cited by Koss, 2000:

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1). Furthermore, 53.7% of high education American students were survivors of an attempted rape or a complete rape (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski, 1987: 166), compared to 19-27.5% of students in Canada, Korea, New Zealand and in the United Kingdom (Heise et al., 1994: 1167).

The reason why we should concern this issues because the consequences of sexual abuse have a negative impact upon the survivors, their families, community and society. The survivors of rape and sexual abuse have to face both acute-phase and long-term effects. After the events, some women may suffer from physical trauma such as:-injuries, fractures, sexually transmitted diseases or HIV/AIDS infection. Psychological effects certainly include shock, depression, fear (Shanler et al., 1998), homicide, and suicide (UNFPA, 1998: 11). In the long-term phase, they experience various distresses such as disability, sexual dysfunction (Koss, 1990: 374-380), becoming prostitutes, alcohol and substance abuse (Kalichman et al., 1998: 371-378), post-victimization distress response (Koss, 1990: 374-380), self-confidence disturbance, and behavior dysfunctions such as eating disorders (UNFPA, 1998: 11).

Furthermore, school age survivors are, of course, interfered in their cognitive development, as there are initial effects such as learning difficulties, poor concentration, and declining grades (Barnett, Miller-Perrin and Perrin, 1997: 85-87). The most common symptoms identified in sexually abused children are sexualized behaviors (compulsive masturbation, excessive sexual curiosity). Long-term effects of the psychological consequences of childhood sexual victimization can extend into adulthood and affect survivors over their lifetime (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, 1997: 87). Reproductive health involving STD, HIV/AIDS, unexpected pregnancy, and induced abortion are serious problems for these survivors (UNFPA, 1998).

Because sexual violence studies in Thailand are very limited, most of them collected data from specific groups, especially male sexual offenders in prisons (Srinamngan, 1998; Inthawiwat, 1999). There is no research analyzing a population-based area. This research is an attempt to present some new findings in Thai society,

even if it was done in only one group of adolescents who are studying in an education institute. This study is about sexual violence among both female and male students, which initially examines female students as sexual survivors. The focus of this study involves at least 2 objectives: 1) To illustrate the magnitude and pattern of sexual violence against female students and 2). To explore who are survivors of various forms of sexual violence. The analysis process will be based on 2 concepts;- an ecological framework and a feminist analysis, which considers power relations in patriarchal society.

Definitions and Scope

The most difficult part in studying sexual violence is uncertain definitions. They differ in legal, practical, and research definitions. Various research in an earlier period defined rape specifically as meaning penile-vaginal intercourse (Muehlenhard et al., 1992: 23-44). It includes penetration any orifice as Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) proposed in one study “sexual intercourse, anal, or oral intercourse, or penetration by objects other than a penis”. There are also different terms and meanings used in sexual violence topic such as: sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual coercion, and sexual aggression (World Health Organization, 2000: 5). Some reviewers give sexual assault the same meaning as attempted rape and complete rape, some researchers used sexual contact in the meaning of forced fondling, kissing or other forms of petting (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski, 1987). To avoid this problem, this study divides sexual violence activities into 4 patterns; 1) Non-contact (no touching) sexual abuse, 2). Contact (touching) but no penetration sexual abuse, 3). Attempted rapes and 4). Rape.

Criteria for establishing non-consensual sexual abuse are another important part of the definition, especially in research findings. Besides the perpetrator’s use of force (physical force, threat, trickery, and so on), the survivor’s state of mind is usually used to emphasize the violation of the survivor’s right. Some researchers pronounce non-consensual means “against her will”, and “when you did not want to”. However, there are another criteria, which can be properly identified as: the survivor’s behaviors

(fighting, crying, screaming, and so on);- consent made meaningless due to intoxication (drug, substance, alcohol use), and other factors making consent meaningless; such as economic conditions, and cultural beliefs (Muehlenhard et al., 1992: 29-31).

Sexual violence in this research was, therefore, defined as sexual activities involving girls and women against their will, which concerns the respect to sexual survivors' right. Since in Thai society, rape legally means only penile-vaginal intercourse no matter whether men ejaculate or not (Boonchalermwipat, 1997: 126-129). It was also classified into 4 types 1). Non-contact sexual abuse included innuendoes, sexual letter, e-mail and phone, nudity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, masturbation in front of survivors, and stalking. 2). Contact sexual abuse without penetration including sexual kissing, fondling through clothes, fondling without clothes, masturbation through clothes, and dry intercourse. 3). Attempted rape means the sexual activities: attempted but unsuccessful oral-genital contact, attempted penetration by an object, unsuccessful digit or penile penetration of anus, and unsuccessful penetration by object, digit or penile penetration of vagina 4). Complete rape covers the sexual experiences of: oral-genital contact; object, digit and penile penetration of anus; and object, digit and penile penetration of vagina.

Methods and Materials

Study area

The study population consists of female students who are studying in lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, and vocational colleges in urban area of a province located in Central about 100 kilometers from Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. Because these students are now directly facing a rapidly changing socio-cultural system which impacts their sexual practices, and in particular make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Yoddumnern-Attig, 1994: 15). They are distinguished by adolescents who live in urban and rural areas. As such, the mean age of first sexual intercourse of urban

adolescences is at least one year less than the rural adolescences (Ngamprapasom, 2001).

Samples and methods

The sample was classified into 3 groups by education levels. The reason for this categorization is that there are distinctions in context for each group. Choice of study program reflects not only parent socio-economic background but also students' competence. The vast majority of high competent students study in high schools rather than in vocational colleges. Furthermore, previous studies have mostly focused on sexuality in vocational and upper secondary students at that time of declining age of first sexual intercourse. As a result- there are few findings about sexual aspects among lower secondary school students.

This study uses qualitative methods and a school-based survey to carry out the research. First, in-depth interviews were employed to approach adolescents involving 15 female informants whether they ever had sexual experience or not. Non-participant observation was also used during the first 4 months in various of places where adolescents usually go for relaxation and interaction such as shopping malls, theaters, markets, dormitories, and so on. Further, focus group discussion was used before carrying out quantitative surveys and utilized to interpret any findings of survey research (Parker, Herdt, and Carballo, 1999: 427). Each discussion consisted of all 3 different levels of education. There were 22 female participants in all, and 6-8 persons in each group.

A school-based survey was carried out during 6 weeks in July and August 2002. A 2-stage cluster sampling with systematic random sampling of 2 different types of school: -secondary schools (included lower and upper secondary students) and vocational colleges-, was employed from the lists of all students from 6 schools and 2 colleges to produce a representative sample of eligible respondents. Each sub-category education level consisted of at least 200 students. Finally, the research included 652 female respondents.

A self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was used to elicit information on women's demographic background, family and friends, sexual experience, and experience of sexual abuse. It was conducted in-group about 20-40 persons each time. Questionnaires were considerably developed and tested 2 months before data collection time began. During the pilot study period, the SAQ was filled in and discussed with 2 groups of female students from lower secondary school and upper secondary school. The SAQ was also field-tested 2 times among 56 female students and evaluated for reliability (alpha model), which was 0.6927 and 0.9491. All respondents have informed consent before responding these questionnaires.

Findings

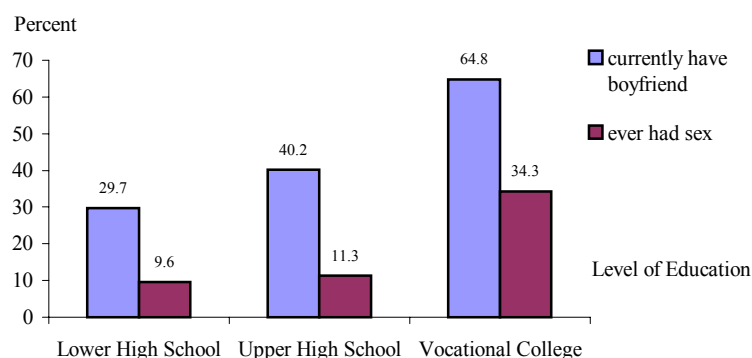
Sexual experience

The results of the cross-sectional survey showed that all 652 female respondents were in the age range of 11-22 with a mean age of about 16 years old. It was also found that about one third of female students currently have a boyfriend since they were studying in lower secondary school, and the number increased by level of education up to two out of three for vocational students.

Female adolescents are less likely to be engaged in pre-marital sex, compared to male adolescents as presented in previous findings (Prasartkul et al., 1987a; Baker et al., 2000: 102-131). It is also recognized that the number increased by level of education. There was also the largest proportion of sexual experience among vocational female students (34.3%) (see Figure 1). This result corresponded with former findings of the rising trend of sexual experience by the year. Other studies, which found 13.7% of upper secondary school students in Udon Thani (Suraiprom, 1995), 9.9% of those in Bangkok and 36% of 2-year teacher students in central region (Baker et al., 2000) have had sexual experience. It should be made apparent that such figure are a very sensitive indicator of Thai sexual studies (Prasartkul et al., 1987b). However, the qualitative

results indicated that sexual activity was probably lower than it was both parts because women has a current boyfriend and have sexed.

Figure 1
Percentage distribution of female students who currently have a boyfriend
and sexual experience by level of education



There were 73 female respondents who admitted having sexual experience. Figure 2 shows the mean age of first sex that is about 16.9 years old. Even the figure was higher than the newest finding among secondary school students at age 10 in Bangkok (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2002). It was very interesting that 11 years was the lowest age of having first sex, when she studied in the fifth year of primary school as supported by qualitative data below.

70% of female students in grade 9 have had sexual experience.

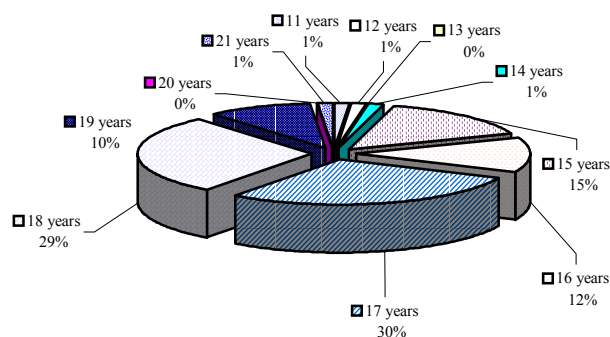
The first sex may start at grade 5 or 6.

(Group discussion, female students aged 14-15 years and grade 9)

It can also be seen from the chart that most female students had first intercourse at age 17 and 18 (30%, and 29% respectively). It was supported by some later research results in that both male and female adolescents tended to accept pre-marital sex (Prasartkul et al., 1987a; Archavanitkul and Chamsanit, 1994; Isarabhakdi,

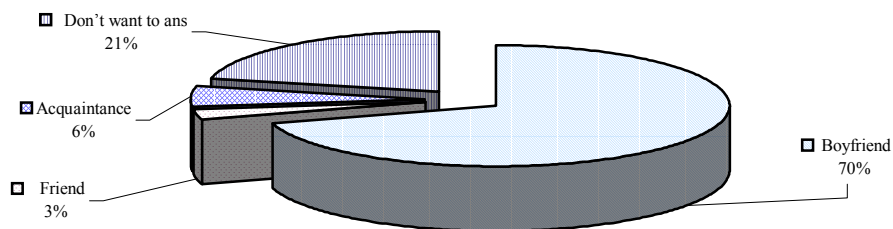
2000). It is, further, obvious that the older adolescents are more likely to engage in sexual union than the younger ones.

Figure 2
Percentage distribution of age of first sexual experience
among female students



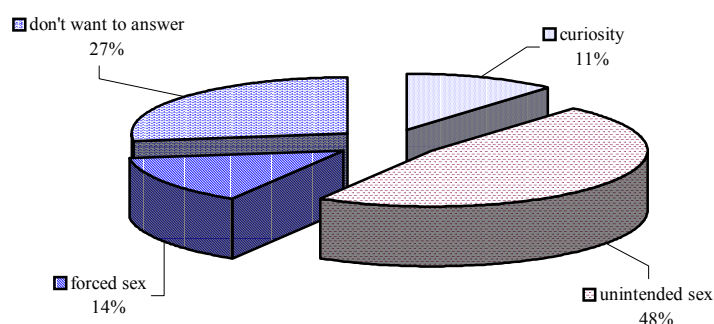
From Figure 3, the largest proportion of the first sexual partner of female students was still their boyfriends or lovers (70%, and in crease to 89.4% if omit "do not want to answer" item) the same as previous findings (Havanon, Knodel, and Bannett, 1992). However, this proportion was lower than the results of Baker et al. (2001), which indicated that 97% of female students had sex with lover.

Figure 3
Percentage distribution of first sex partner of female students



In another part, when 108 female students, who had sex were asked about the situation of their first sexual encounter, more than one quarter of them were unwilling to answer. This showed that sexual issues are still sensitive among Thai female students at the present time. Nevertheless, forced sex or direct sexual violence was found in about 14% of respondents; almost half the female students (48%) have been in a situation of unintended sex (see Figure 4). Importantly, this result embraces other forms of sexual violence, especially cultural violence¹; for example, a girl had her first sexual encounter because her boyfriend asked her to prove her true love. Nucharnat (1988) presented some earlier supportive data of a high proportion (57.1%) of upper secondary school female students having had first sex because of sexual coercion.

Figure 4
Percentage distribution of the situation for having first sex among female students



Consider the reason of having first sex in Figure 5, twenty two percent of female students, again, did not want to answer. The illustration shows that 30% of Thai female students had first sex because of love affairs while other previous finding (Limsumphan, 1997) showed 34%. The reason for having sex in one quarter of Thai female students was direct violence including forced sex and afraid to be beaten up. Almost 1 out of 5 was cultural violence, meaning the girls were afraid of being left by their partners. This finding was supported by in-depth interviews. Female teenagers were key respondents in this research, of the five female students who had sexual

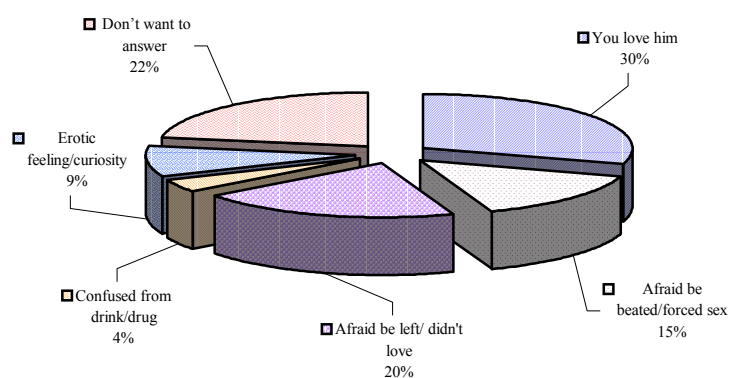
experiences, one of them was raped while sleeping, which is direct sexual violence to women. The interview went as follows:

“I was unconscious. When I woke up, I slept beside him in the hotel. ...

I thought he put some anesthetic into what I ate.”

(Interview with A, a 20-year old girl in the 2nd year of advanced vocational college)

Figure 5
Percentage distribution of reason for having first sex among female students



Magnitude and patterns of sexual violence

The first thing to be considered is the experience of sexual abuse without any physical contact such as verbal abuse or any other actions that make girls feel uncomfortable. As we can see from Figure 6, the largest proportion between 80-94% was a short conversation such as “You are as fat as a pig and your legs as big as a snooker table legs.” Importantly, most of female students did not think that they were abused. In-depth interviews revealed that the girls could avoid such incidents by walking away or even not responding. Certainly, this is a case of a type of cultural violence in Thai society, which is embedded in a long history where women have been treated as a subordinate.

About 3-17% of female students were glanced at or otherwise provoked by males. Another issue is that Thai females believed that such offenders were sick from some types of psychosis, and thus the women were using medical explanations for the actions. Some research results, further, repeated such a wrong interpretation by presenting extreme cases from prisons both in bad characteristics and psychological tests (Buranakhate, 1989; Samsalee, 1996). However, these cases were unrepresentative of 90-95% of sexual offenders, since they have not been arrested. Last, only 1.8% to 5% of female students were persuaded to have sex but the biggest group was lower secondary school student, which also showed increasing tendency of sexual abuse when the students were young.

Figure 6
Percentage distribution of sexual abuse experience
by type and level of education

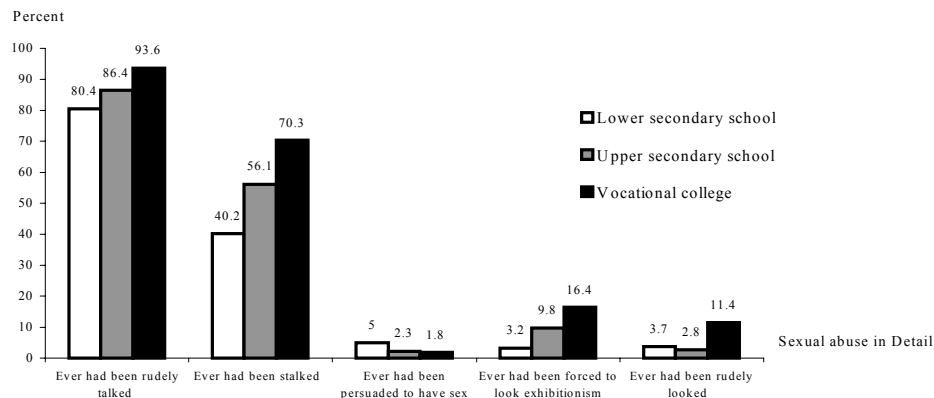
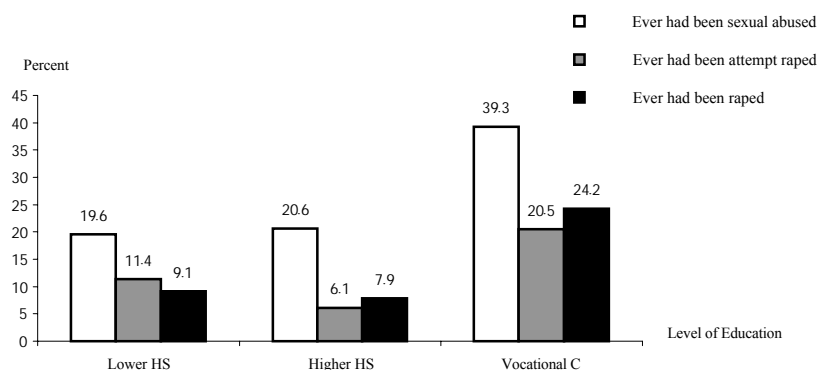


Figure 7 shows that about one quarter of female students both from lower secondary school and upper secondary school (19.6% and 20.6% respectively) were sexual abuse survivors who experienced touching against their wills at some time in their lives; including holding, kissing, petting and so on. Accordingly, those from vocational college were the largest group for all types of sexual violence (39.3% sexual abused, 20.5% attempted rape, and 24.2% complete rape). It was, nonetheless,

surprising that the number of female students from lower secondary school who have ever been sexual violence survivors is larger than those from upper secondary school both in two types of sexual violence (11.4% of attempted rape, and 9.1% of complete rape) as shown in Figure 7. Thus, the conclusion is that lower secondary school female students were a high risk-group of sexual violence survivors.

Figure 7
Percentage distribution of sexual violence experience
by type and level of education



The results from Table 1 also concisely point out a high level of sexual violence among female students in two forms. The respondents were asked whether their friends were sexual abused survivors (by touching without penetration) and complete rape. The study showed a dramatic increase in both forms of sexual violence based on education level among female adolescents. The percentage was higher than former results in Figure 7 in both forms and in all education levels. In addition, it was reported that 28.2% of respondents have friends who survived sexual abuse in lower secondary school students and 9.5% survived a complete rape experience (compared to 19.6% and 9.1% of themselves). In upper secondary school students, the number increased to 36.2% with a friend who survived a sexual abuse experience and 14.6% a complete rape experience. Then, the highest figure was among vocational students; 50.7% with a friend who survived a sexual abuse experience and 27.6% a complete rape

experience. It could be said that female students undoubtedly under-reported their sexual violence experiences.

Table 1: Number and percentage of sexual violence experience of friends by school level

Sexual Violence Experience of friends	Lower - secondary school students		Upper secondary- school students		Vocational College	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Friends ever had been abused	60	8.2	77	36.2	109	50.7
Friends ever had been raped	20	9.5	31	14.6	59	27.6

Who are the sexual violence survivors?

Survivors of direct sexual violence were the last 3 categories. There were 173 female students who were survivors of touching without penetration sexual abuse, 83 survivors of attempted rape, and 90 girls survived complete rape. From the Table 2, it can be concluded that freedom from parent control, in other words, a student who currently did not live with her parent was less likely to be sexual abuse survivor than a student who lived at her home (29.9% compared with 25.9%). Students who were free from parent control were more likely to be a victim of both attempted rape and complete rape (18.7% compared with 11.6%, and 21.5% compared with 12.3%). This is a statistically significant risk factor of attempted rape and complete rape. Moreover, the in-depth interviews gave more background to issue as some parents allowed their sons to have sex with girls in their houses. Students reported that their parents preferred rather than they went outside to have sex. This response fits in to cultural patriarchal beliefs supporting power of Thai males over females.

Table 2: Percentage distribution and chi-square test for 3 types of sexual violence by selected explanatory variables

Explanatory Variables	No of Cases	Ever had sexual abused (Touch /no penetration)		Ever had attempted raped		Ever had complete raped	
		%	Chi-square	%	Chi-square	%	Chi-square
1 - Does not currently live with parents	651	29.9	0.729	18.7	4.064*	21.5	6.324*
- Currently lives with parents		25.9		11.6		12.3	
2 - Parent's marital instability (divorce, widow)	652	31.1	1.830	17.0	2.843	17.8	2.260
- Parent's marital stability		25.3		11.6		12.8	
3 - Low family class (Father; primary school)	647	31.2	13.771***	15.1	6.001**	16.7	8.597**
- Middle/High family class		17.5		8.3		8.3	
4 - Severely quarreled between parents	618	31.5	7.945**	16.1	5.450*	17.7	8.155**
- Never severely quarreled between parent		21.5		9.8		9.8	
5 - Friends ever had sexual abused	641	42.7	53.509***	20.7	22.555***	22.8	26.326***
- Friends never had sexual abused (touching /no penetration)		16.5		7.8		8.4	
6 - Friends ever had complete raped	637	49.1	34.108***	26.4	21.576***	27.3	20.226***
- Friends never had complete raped		22.0		10.1		11.0	
7 - Ever had drunk	630	48.0	6.140*	32.0	8.805**	44.0	20.103***
- Never had drunk		25.7		11.9		12.5	

Chi-square Test; 1-sided p-value

* p < 0.5, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

There were other factors that were more likely to correlate to becoming victims of sexual violence in all 3 types to highly significant level. They are 1). Experience of heavy quarrels between parents such as battering, kicking, slapping, disputing and throwing things, as half of them (50.3%) had parents of this category. 2). Low social class and father's education level at primary school. Two thirds of female students' family classified in this social class. 3). Friends who are sexual abuse survivors and 4). Friends who are a victim of complete rape. This study found that 38.4% and 17.3% of female student's friends have been sexual abused and complete raped respectively.

It could be said that family and peer groups were the important factors for becoming sexual violence survivors in any forms; sexual abuse, attempted rape, and rape. However, one family context factor which is important is that:- marital instability from divorce, and widowing was less likely a risk factor of each type of sexual violence. Other research findings consider this is a determinant of getting into sexual unions. However, here it was not the significant factor about becoming a sexual violence survivor in both the quantitative and qualitative result from this study. Therefore, it is crucial to state that such factors should be more deeply studied.

It is also found that the most sexual violence offenders were the female's lover (70%) as well as their friends and acquaintances (60%). This result corresponded to earlier studies among American college students and American women (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski, 1987; Laumann et al., 1994: 336-338).

Discussion and Conclusions

Even though there is research on sexual violence in Thai Society, most research analyzes specific sample group. The research does not represent the general population, in other words, they could not be generalized as population-based study. The magnitude, severity, patterns of any types of sexual violence, and characteristics of female survivors cannot be inferred from these studies. The present study has

undoubtedly emerged with new findings, even if it was done as school-based study. The approach through an alternative paradigm and methodology gives a good chance for an insider's view of the sub-culture of the adolescence group which is the subject of the research. Finally, this study also tries to access and understand such phenomena as the important contexts of peer groups and family.

A magnitude of sexual violence occurring during a first sex situation was not of a high level, but could conceivably be included in unintended sex. There was also a similar amount of forced sex in reason for the first sexual experience. There are reasons of cultural violence, too. Vocational female students were the largest group of survivors for all 3 types. They were sexually coerced higher than the other two groups; 50.5% in form of sexual abuse, 20.5% in form of attempted rape and 27.6% complete rape. This result was similar to those from American college students in 1986 (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski, 1987). This figure, however, was under-reported when it was compared to their friends' experience of at least 2 types of sexual experience. Nuchanat's finding also supported this finding, in which two-third of upper secondary school students have come into a situation of forced sex at first time of sexual encounter. Furthermore, the last result from the upper secondary school female students in Bangkok presented about 13.2% of lifetime forced sex (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2002).

There was a distinction of sexual perception and experience between each level of education especially between lower secondary students and vocational students. A boy from lower secondary school gave the meaning of "early ejaculation" as "ejaculation in a very young boy". At the same time, female vocational students wrote comments of survey questionnaires as "very common questions". Students of former group, on the other hand, showed their feelings that they "feel frustrated because nobody used to ask something like this before", or one "should not ask such questions because lower secondary school students were immature", and they were asked "too deep questions, it is my private life". These also clearly illustrate that sexual topics are still a sensitive issue among Thai girls. They expected nobody to know their private lives. Accordingly, a high response rate (20-27%) was "do not want to answer this question" in almost all sex items.

Further, this study indicated the risk factors of females becoming victims of sexual violence. A very close context was the family situation; with variables such as not currently lived with a parent, severe quarrels between parents, and low social class showing a high correlation. These finding differ from other studies that show parent's marital instability is not a determinant of becoming a victim. It would be better to say that we have to consider more in details not only the structure of a family but also explore functions or process inside each aspect.

Another, important, risk factor was involved peer context, which most adolescents mentioned rather than their families. One context is peer's experience of sexual abuse and complete rape. The most likely a risk factor was drinking habit, which is related to peer context. All of those risk factors were not precipitating causes. We should analyze other related aspects, particularly the offender's characteristics and social context.

Further researches should explore more deeply each education level, and should be more developed in both methodology and methods to access the adolescents groups. We should create related policies and strategies based upon these genuine analyses.

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Notes

- 1 This study used "cultural violence" as sexual violence against women related to cultural norms in Thai society that differ from other societies such as women had sex because they are afraid of being left. Such issues also reflect Thai women's subordination.

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