

## Feature

# Reproductive health research reduces teenage pregnancy

Times Reporters

Sexual and reproductive health literacy (SRHL) in young people is a new perspective for the science of health researchers. Research on young people has indicated that the reproductive health knowledge they receive from school is insufficient.

And knowledge alone may not be enough for them since young people still have a lot of limitations in accessing, understanding, considering and applying reproductive health information to make them healthy and avoid the risk of teenage and/or unwanted pregnancy.

In addition to basic knowledge, young people need skills and competence to access, understand, judge and use the information to help them maintain schooling life and avoid pregnancy at young age. The skills of knowledge use and competence to access, understand appraise and apply the SRH information to real life are called SRHL.

SRHL goes beyond knowledge and behaviour and reflects how the motivation and competences to access, understand, appraise and apply sexual and reproductive health-related information to cope with SRH problems. The quality and accessibility of SRH information directly affect the capacity of adolescents to access, understand, appraise and apply SRH information to maintain their SR health.

Dr Viengnakhone Vongxay, a researcher and technical staff member at the University of Health Sciences who is currently studying for

a Doctorate Degree on Public Health in Vrije University, Amsterdam, Netherlands said that the study focuses on Laos because teenage pregnancy is still a problem. The study was conducted from February-June 2017 in Huaphan and Attapeu provinces and the capital. He started studying for a doctorate degree in 2016 and will complete in 2020.

The study found more than half of school adolescents had an SRHL score lower than average. Because most school adolescents had inadequate SRHL, comprehensive sexual education and enabling information as well as service access for adolescents are essential to ensure that adolescents can access, understand, appraise and apply good SRH knowledge in decision-making to benefit their own health.

For example, teenage pregnancy (TP) and child marriage are more likely to occur in poor, low-educated and rural communities. Worldwide, around 11 percent of all pregnancies are in adolescents aged 15–19 years and about 95 percent of these pregnancies occur in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

The study found that about 19 percent of Lao women become mothers before the age of 18, which is the highest rate in South-East Asia.

A relatively high proportion of 15.1 percent of maternal deaths occur in young girls. The low general health literacy and high teenage pregnancy rate in Laos indicates that there is a

lack of sexual knowledge and effective sexual education among adolescents.

Dr Viengnakhone said that this can be partly attributed to low rates of school attendance, where adolescents usually get SRHL education. The country is still struggling with the availability of youth-friendly services thus adolescents have limited access to high quality healthcare services, which can impede their ability to put knowledge into practice. “Good SRHL is therefore very important for Lao adolescents’ health and future because it can lead to better decisions for their health,” he said.

Teenage pregnancy is associated with adverse health outcomes in mothers and new-borns and is the leading cause of death in girls. The younger the girl, the higher the chance of poor outcomes. Moreover, adolescents are at greater risk for unsafe abortion, young maternal death, violence and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, as well as the social consequences of school expulsion, child marriage and poverty.

All of this maintains the vicious circle of living in poverty, low education and therefore having a higher risk of TP. The capacity of adolescents to make informed decisions based on correct knowledge of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is one of the factors that contribute to the prevention of SRH problems.

Dr Viengnakhone explained that in recent years, more research has focused on the importance



Dr Viengnakhone Vongxay (back row first right) poses with teammates while conducting reproductive health research in Huaphan province.

of health literacy and the association of its lack with adverse health behaviour and outcomes, especially in people with a low education and income. However, most studies focused on word recognition and/or reading comprehension and general health literacy, rather than particularly on SRH literacy (SRHL).

SRHL goes beyond knowledge and behaviour and reflects how the motivation and competences to access, understand, appraise and apply sexual and reproductive health-related information to cope with SRH problems. Studies in the specific area of SRHL are required, as the quality and accessibility of SRH information directly affects the capacity of adolescents to

access, understand, appraise and apply SRH information to maintain their SR health.

For this reason, the aim of this study was to measure the SRHL in adolescents attending school in Laos, as a start to gain insight into their current SRH literacy level and to find out how it is related to socio-demographic factors, sexual knowledge and behaviour, health-lifestyle, and functional literacy. Knowledge gained from this study will contribute to the design of health interventions to improve the SRH literacy of teenagers and thus to reduce TP rates.

Dr Viengnakhone hopes that the research will encourage the health and other sectors involved to encourage young people to

have more knowledge about reproductive health.

It will help them to have more channels to access reproductive health knowledge and reduce pregnancy in adolescents. The Ministry of Health has already achieved family planning for married couples but young people can still not access sufficient reproductive health knowledge so the rate of pregnancy in young women is on the rise.

“Assessing knowledge on prevention methods is essential to guide potential health interventions to reduce teenage pregnancy and to improve the sexual knowledge and skills of all teenagers in Laos for their own health and protection,” said Dr Viengnakhone.



Research being conducted at a secondary school in Huaphan province.

**ໂຮງພິມແຫ່ງລັດ**

ເຄື່ອງຈັກພິມ ອັດຕະໂນມັດ 4 ມີ ຄວບຄຸມການພິມຕົວປະລິມານ ຄວບຄຸມເສັ້ນຮັບໃຊ້ບໍລິການດ້ານການພິມຂອງທ່ານ

**ຕິດຕໍ່ໄດ້**

ສໍານັກງານຕັ້ງຢູ່ເຂື່ອນເລກທີ ໓໑໔ ຖະໜົນສາມແສນໄທ ບ້ານ ຊຽງອິນ ເມືອງ ຈັນທະບູລີ ນະຄອນຫລວງວຽງຈັນ ກົງກັນຂ້າມກັບໂຮງແຮມລາວພລາຊາ

☎ 021 212636, 021 213153, 021 213273  
☎ 021 215901  
✉ [print@213136@gmail.com](mailto:print@213136@gmail.com)

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- ທັງສິລິມ, ວາລະສານ, ປຶ້ມອ່ານ, ປຶ້ມຄູ່ມື, ປຶ້ມວິຊາການ, ພິມເອກະສານກ່ຽວກັບວຽກງານການເງິນ, ການທະນາຄານທຸກຊະນິດ, ພິມບັງ, ໄປສະຕິ້ວ, ນາມບັດ, ບັດເຊິນ, ໄປສະຕິ້ວຊີ, ໄປສະຕິ້ວອື່ນ, ໄປສະຕິ້ວ, ແຜນພິມ, ປະຕິບັດ, ປຶ້ມຊະນິດ ແລະ ອື່ນໆອີກຫລາຍຢ່າງຕາມສິ່ງ.
- ທັງສອດສີ ແລະ ອາວດຳ ດ້ວຍສິນຄ້າທີ່ຊຳນານງານບໍລິການທັງພາກລັດ, ເອກະຊົນ ແລະ ອົງການຈັດຕັ້ງສາກົນ

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ຖະໜົນສາມແສນໄທ

**ຮັບພິມແຊັກ ເອກະສານ ທີ່ມີລະຫັດຄວາມປອດໄພ**