

Overview

About 14% of Swedish adolescents are immigrants.¹⁻² This population is at higher risk of adolescent pregnancy.¹⁻² These adolescents have been socialized in two different societies and in two different cultures where views of sexuality greatly. In Thailand, sexual activity among adolescents is considered unacceptable and public discussion of such activity is discouraged.³ Sex education services are not widely provided to youth, and service providers are often uncomfortable to address sexual matters.³ On the other hand, acceptance of sexual behavior among young people is high in the Swedish society, characterized by comprehensive sex education, openness and a non - judgmental attitude.⁴

Therefore, these adolescents may encounter very different sexual health systems and community mores regarding sexual behavior, but little research explores the experiences or perspectives of Thai immigrant adolescents in Sweden. Therefore, we aimed to explain perceptions of adolescent pregnancy among a group of Thai adolescents in Sweden.

Methods

We conducted qualitative focus groups to explore and analyze the thoughts, perceptions, and emotional responses of Thai adolescent opinions about adolescent pregnancy. We developed and pilot-tested a semi-structured interview guide to explore participants' perceptions of adolescent pregnancy and its risk factors, impact, and prevention strategies. We used a purposive sampling strategy, with male and female Thai adolescents (age 15-19) recruited from Swedish language classes. Eligibility criteria included: speak Thai-speaking; single; residing in Sweden \geq six months but $<$ 5 years. Focus groups were conducted in the Thai language, lasting 60-90 minutes, and were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. Manifest content analysis was adopted according to the method described by Graneheim and Lundman (2004).⁵ Specifically, author 1 generated line by line codes (meaning units), then grouped similar codes into subcategories and then larger themes, discussing emergent themes with author 2 and 3, a sexual health researcher. A professional translator then translated transcripts into English. The ethical committee at the School of Health, Care, and Social Welfare at Mälardalen University, Sweden approved human subjects procedures.

Results

We conducted four focus groups of Thai youths (N=18), two with females (n=9) and two with males (n=9). Participants perceived adolescent pregnancy as having many negative consequences. For example, they described adolescent pregnancy as stemming from family problems and social perceptions within Thai immigrant communities of pregnant adolescents as "a bad person." They identified risk and protective factors for adolescent pregnancy among Thai immigrant youth, including family problems, parental communication around sexual activity and contraception, lack of contraception access/knowledge, self-control, and peer influences. Participants described misperceptions and attitudes inconsistent with safe sex (e.g., having intercourse only once cannot lead to pregnancy, using a condom is not respectful to the female partner and indicated a lack of love or trust). In terms of protective factors, participants identified family readiness, economic factors, maturity, and cultural influences, in particular related to Buddhist beliefs. Finally, participants described youth clinics and comprehensive sexual education in schools as key factors in preventing adolescent pregnancy, contrasting Swedish services favorably with those available in Thailand.

Table 1. Examples of citations, meaning units, codes, subcategories, and emergent categories.

Citations	Meaning units	Codes	Sub-category	Category
"It depends on family, if families are ready and family members accept what happens, that will be ok"	It's very good, if family is ready and everyone in family accepts that.	-Family readiness (acceptance from family members)	Family	Factors considered for ending or continuing adolescent pregnancy
"Parents cannot certainly accept and they will ignore everything"	Parents cannot accept, they ignore everything.	-Parental non-acceptance		

Table 2. Adolescent pregnancy as perceived by Thai adolescents; sub-categories and emergent categories.

Sub-categories	Categories
Lack of contraceptive protection and insufficient knowledge about contraception Having family problem resulting in getting more chances to be together	Risk factors for adolescent pregnancy
Self-control Parents need to understand the nature of teens. Pay more attention to contraception Friends help friends	Protective factors for adolescent pregnancy
Reducing the chances to get a good education Serious problems in the future Friends stay away Being insulted by society More attention from peers	Consequences of adolescent pregnancy
Family Economics Self-maturity Cultural influences	Factors considered for ending or continuing pregnancy
Youth clinic Sexual education in high school	Strategies for preventing adolescent pregnancy

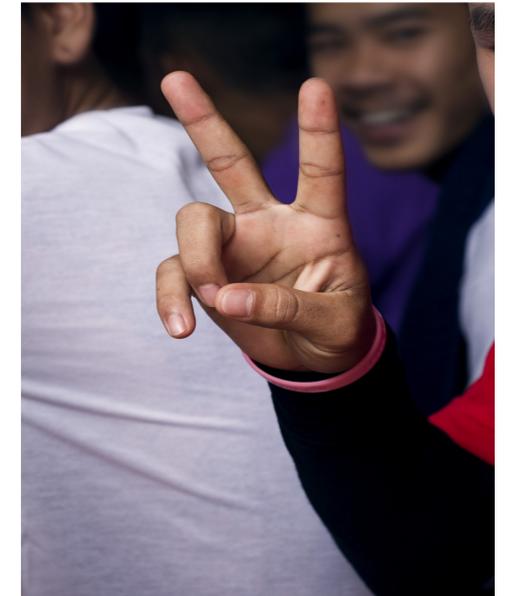


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Conclusions

Although Thai adolescents residing in Sweden live in a sexually open society with comprehensive sexual education and youth services, they perceived adolescent sexual activity and pregnancy as stigmatized and endorsed misperceptions and attitudes likely to lead to contraceptive non-use and adolescent pregnancy. They also described numerous peer, family, and community-level variables that could act to increase or decrease risk, suggesting culturally-specific interventions are needed for Thai immigrant youth in Sweden. Attention to peer, family and cultural variables may be particularly important in sexual health interventions with this population.

References

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