



CONTEXTS AND PATTERNS OF MEN'S COMMERCIAL SEXUAL PARTNERSHIPS IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND: IMPLICATIONS FOR AIDS PREVENTION

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Abstract—Results of an exploratory research project elaborating the contexts, patterns and specific scenarios of the commercial sexual activity of northeastern Thai men are reported. Data were collected using face-to-face surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews and observations in 32 northeastern villages ($n = 744$ men), 18 migrant labour camps housing sugarcane workers ($n = 219$ men), and five cattlemarkets in northeast Thailand. Fifty percent of married men and 43% of single men had visited female sex workers (FSW). Female sex worker visits occurred primarily prior to marriage, though 13% of married men had purchased sexual services within the past year. Nonmarital sexual activity was set within the socio-cultural frameworks of poverty, circular migration, a large commercial sex sector, and a belief system about men's sexuality and men's and women's gender roles. Sexual services were typically purchased as part of friendship group partying (*paiy tiaow*) and generally included heavy alcohol consumption. The most common scenario for visiting FSWs involved brothels, though cattlemarkets, festivals, and migrant labour situations were also scenarios for FSW contact. These each had unique characteristics that affected the likelihood that condoms would be used. The further the specifics of a scenario (as evaluated by men) diverged from those of brothel contact with an FSW, the less likely men were to identify this as having the potential for HIV transmission and the less likely they were to use a condom. AIDS prevention campaigns must be developed that are sensitive to the socio-cultural framework, contexts and specific scenarios within which nonmarital sexual contacts occur. Copyright © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

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The HIV/AIDS epidemic has swept across Thailand with unprecedented speed. Less than 10 years after the first case of AIDS was reported in 1984, HIV had moved through four successive waves, each associated with infection in a distinct subgroup of the population. Current sentinel surveillance results suggest that Thailand is well into a fifth stage in which HIV has transcended the boundaries defining specific risk groups and is now also present, to a growing degree, in the general population (Ministry of Public Health, 1993; Department of Communicable Disease Control, 1995; Weniger *et al.*, 1991; Podhisita *et al.*, 1994). Two main factors have contributed to the spread of HIV, men's proclivity of having multiple sexual partners (Deemar, 1990; Ford and Koetsawang, 1991;

Havanon *et al.*, 1991; Nopkesorn *et al.*, 1991; Weniger *et al.*, 1991; Muecke, 1992; Sittitrai *et al.*, 1992; VanLandingham *et al.*, 1995) and high rates of circular migration, particularly for young men and women.*

The Thai government has set an impressive record for intervention and control. Efforts have included condom distribution campaigns, widespread availability of HIV testing, educational programmes disseminated through both mass media and specific local campaigns, and a sentinel surveillance programme (Ministry of Public Health, 1991; Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994; Elkins *et al.*, 1996). A dominant prevention goal has been to increase condom use by men in their contacts with commercial sex workers. Recent studies show gains since the initiation of the campaigns in this area (Ministry of Public Health, 1993; Podhisita *et al.*, 1994). However, rates of new infection continue to rise and spread to new regions (Ministry of Public

*See Archavanitkul and Guest (1994) for a review of major migration studies.

Health, 1993; Department of Communicable Disease Control, 1995). Several commentators have addressed this apparent contradiction, observing that success in the area of prevention will require a better understanding of the socio-cultural and interpersonal fabric within which transmission of HIV is occurring (Fordham, 1993; Brummelhuis, 1994) and that prevention campaigns must be directed to more specific contexts and patterns of risk, going beyond the "use a condom with prostitutes" message.

The predominantly rural northeast of Thailand was one of the last regions to experience HIV (Weniger *et al.*, 1991). It was not until the early 1990s that there was clear evidence that HIV had reached the northeast. However, by 1992 several northeastern provinces were documenting seropositivity rates that paralleled those of regions where HIV was first identified.* Sentinel surveillance reports for 1995 documented rates of infection in targeted reporting centres in the northeast of 3.5–36% among direct female sex workers, 0–16.8% among STD (sexually transmitted disease) clinic patients, 0–2.47% among blood donors, and 0–3.38% among pregnant women (Ministry of Public Health, 1996). In the northeast, as elsewhere, the primary vector of spread across specific subgroups and into the population as a whole has been men forming a variety of sexual partnerships (both commercial and non-commercial). This has combined with large-scale migration of northeasterners bringing HIV into and spreading it throughout the region (Larson *et al.*, 1993; National Statistics Office, 1993; Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994). The focus of the research on which this paper is based is men's commercial sexual partnerships, particularly sex with female sexual workers (FSWs). The paper explores the socio-cultural contexts and patterns of men's commercial sexual activity. It is this activity that has been identified in surveillance and epidemiological work (Weniger *et al.*, 1991; Ministry of Public Health, 1993) as the vector along which HIV has spread across this region.

METHODOLOGY

The research for this paper was conducted primarily in Khon Kaen province, northeastern Thailand, from November 1993 through April 1995. It was built on understandings of village life, gender relations, and potential vectors of risk developed from an earlier study of northeastern village women, conducted from 1991 to 1994 (Kuyakanond and Maticka-Tyndale, 1994; Maticka-Tyndale *et al.*, 1994a, b; Elkins *et al.*, in press). Information was collected through observations, structured face-to-face interviews, focus

groups, and informal interviews and discussions with key informants designed to explore specific risk situations and their contexts. In typical exploratory fashion, the precise samples and sites for research evolved as the study progressed and as situations and contexts were identified that required further exploration.

Samples participating in the study

Face-to-face interviews using a structured survey format were conducted with a total of 744 men from 32 villages in Khon Kaen province and 219 men from Khon Kaen who were resident in 18 sugarcane harvesting camps. A total of 21 focus groups of five to eight men each were also conducted. Twelve focus groups were with village men to discuss sexual risk scenarios and contexts of village life. Five focus groups discussed festivals and four the experiences of men in the sugarcane camps. In-depth interviews were also conducted with key informants at cattlemarkets, sugarcane camps, and in villages to elaborate specific aspects of risk scenarios.

Selection of villages. Villages were selected to represent a broad spectrum of potential risk scenarios. Sixteen were selected randomly from a list of all villages in the province, and four were randomly selected from each of four identified types of districts in the province for a total of 32 villages. The four types were: (1) crossroad districts with high levels of transportation and movement through the district; (2) high migration districts with high levels of seasonal out-migration; (3) districts near cities; and (4) isolated districts with little contact with major population centres or transportation routes.

Two sampling strategies were used to select men within chosen villages. In the first group of 16 villages, men between the ages of 18 and 50 years were randomly selected based on an every-household enumeration. However, because of a long succession of dry years, there was an unusually high rate of out-migration in 1994. Most of the men under 30 years of age were not in the villages at the time of the study. To maximize representation of younger men, sampling in the second group of villages occurred during times when the maximum number of villagers were present in the village (e.g. during rice harvest, festivals, etc.) and all men between the ages of 15 and 30 years who were present in the villages at the time of data collection were invited to participate in the study. Prior to data analysis, results from villages were stratified by village types (full random selection, crossroads, high migration, near cities, isolated) and comparisons were made between types. When controls for age or marital status and migration experience were applied, no significant differences were found based on village types. Based on these results, samples from all 32 villages were aggregated for analysis. Overall, fewer than 10% of the men approached

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chose not to participate in the study. A total of 744 men completed structured face-to-face interviews.

A subset of 70 men from six of the first set of villages was randomly selected to participate in 12 focus groups. Six groups were with men under the age of 30 years and six groups with men 30 years or over. Five additional focus groups were conducted with volunteer samples of men from three villages identified as having an unusually large number of festivals for the purpose of collecting more in-depth information on festivals. A total of 17 focus groups were conducted in the villages.

Selection of sugarcane work sites. The two dominant destinations of migrant labourers from this region are Bangkok and more northern areas to cut sugarcane. It was judged infeasible to locate migrants from the northeast in Bangkok with the resources available for this project. *Post hoc* information regarding the experience of those migrating to Bangkok was collected from the village sample. A team was sent to the sugarcane cutting region that receives the largest number of migrants from villages in Khon Kaen to collect data and conduct observations at the camps. Two-hundred-and-twenty-one men from Khon Kaen province were found in 18 camps. Only two men who were approached declined to participate in the study. Four focus groups and 219 structured interviews were completed.

Observations. Observations were conducted in settings judged to have unique opportunities and patterns for sexual activity based on survey and focus group results. These were the migrant labour camps and five local evening cattlemarkets where farmers came to buy and sell cows and buffalo.

Informal interviews with key informants. Key informants included volunteer health workers, staff (or former staff) of NGOs working in the area, various village leaders, cattle sellers, owners of restaurants, truck drivers, sugarcane camp owners, and commercial sex workers at cattlemarkets. They provided the research team with valuable information about local village contexts and situations and were interviewed to elaborate and clarify information obtained from surveys, focus groups and observations.

Survey

The survey combined a modified version of an open-ended questionnaire used by Middlestat *et al.* (1991) in the Caribbean and by this team in its earlier study of northeastern women (Kuyyakanond and Maticka-Tyndale, 1994; Maticka-Tyndale *et al.*, 1994a, b; Elkins *et al.*, 1996, in press, in press) with a survey used by VanLandingham *et al.* (1995) in northern Thailand. Questions covered demographic information, travel and migration, sexual history, experiences with commercial sex, knowledge about AIDS, beliefs about own risk, and actions taken in response to the threat of AIDS. The questionnaire was written in English and translated to the local language (Isan) by members of the research staff. It was piloted and modified for language, format and conceptual clarity based on the pilot results. The village survey required 30–60 minutes to complete as a face-to-face interview. A shortened version, requiring 15–20 minutes, was used in the migrant camps.

Table 1. Profile of samples

Marital status ^a (n)	Village sample		Migrant sample	
	Single (189)	Married (548)	Single (52)	Married (161)
Mean age in yrs	19.8	33.5	20.9	35.8
Completed yrs of education				
≤ 7 yrs	60%	85%	92%	95%
> 7 yrs	40%	14%	8%	5%
Wet season (primary) occupation ^b				
Farming	87%	92%	^c	
Dry season (secondary) occupation				
Farming	8%	27%		
Wage labor	62%	41%		
Usual # trips/yr ^d				
None	22%	32%	0	0
1	26%	27%	0	0
> 1	65%	43%	100%	100%
# men who travel each yr (n)	(146)	(366)	(52)	(161)
Usual time away/trip				
≤ 1 month	35%	57%	4%	4%
> 1 month	65%	43%	96%	96%
Usually travel & stay with				
Alone	16%	23%	10%	0
Wife, family	27%	26%	64%	100%
Friends	57%	51%	17%	0
Usual reason for trip				
Work	72%	72%	100%	100%

^aSeven village and six migrant men were divorced or widowed. ^bMost men have two occupations, one in the wet, and one in the dry season. ^cQuestions not asked in migrant survey. ^dTrips are only those involving staying away from the village overnight.

Focus groups

Focus groups engaged men in discussions of various sexual scenarios and their contexts and correlates. Perceptions of risk were also elaborated and placed within the context of sexual activity.

Profile of samples

Table 1 provides a profile of the village and migrant samples by marital status. Since only 13 men (seven villagers, six migrants) were divorced or widowed, these men were excluded from the analyses in this paper. The profile of the men sampled is typical of northeastern villagers (Klausner, 1987; Mulder, 1990; Fordham, 1993; Larson *et al.*, 1993; National Statistics Office, 1993; Lyttleton, 1994; Kuyyakanond and Maticka-Tyndale, 1994; Maticka-Tyndale *et al.*, 1994a, b; Elkins *et al.*, 1996, in press). The majority of men reported farming as their primary occupation, with a secondary occupation of wage labour. For most, education was completed in less than seven years, though more single (younger) than married (older) men reported some education beyond this. More sugarcane workers were less educated. Specifics of this profile will be addressed in the next sections of the paper.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF MEN'S SEXUAL ACTIVITY

The northeastern region is the largest of Thailand's four regions both in geographical size (170,000 km²) and population (35% of the nation's population). Its inhabitants are primarily Laotian descendants who maintain a distinct culture and social structure that melds elements of Thai and Lao systems within a Theravaden Buddhist belief system. Northerners refer to themselves, their region, and their culture as Isan.* The spread of HIV across the northeast, as elsewhere in Thailand, has been tied to men's multiple sexual partnerships (Ford and Koetsawang, 1991; Weniger *et al.*, 1991; Ministry of Public Health, 1993). These activities are embedded within a socio-economic and cultural context of poverty, circular migration, a large commercial sex sector, and particular beliefs and norms related to men's sexuality and women's gender roles.

Poverty

The northeast epitomizes the economic disparity between the urban and rural regions of Thailand. It is predominantly rural and is the poorest of Thailand's regions, claiming only 15% of the GDP though containing 35% of the nation's population (National Statistics Office, 1993; Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994). Most families live in rural villages where life revolves around the seasons of rice and

upland crop cultivation. Even in good years, rice crops typically do not provide for the needs of a family, necessitating that income be supplemented with production and sale of local goods and migratory labour. Two occupations are typically necessary for economic survival. In our sample, as is general in this region, most men identified farming (90%) as their wet season, and wage labour (80%) as their dry season occupation.

Circular migration

The northeast has the highest rate of circular migration (between home villages and other work locations) of any region in Thailand (Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994). Though it would be expected that the village sample in this study would not fully represent those who were most mobile (since these men would be out of the village), 78% of single and 68% of married men reported they were away from the village overnight at least once each year, with the majority of these men away more than once a year. Travel was typically for purposes of work for 72% of these men. Single men were away more often, for longer time periods, and their most common destination (56%) was Bangkok.

Travel for work is of four dominant types. Every year, during the off-seasons of rice cultivation (November–April) villagers leave for employment in other regions. The most common destinations are in Bangkok for work in factories, construction or the service sector, and rural regions for work in sugarcane cutting, fishing, mining, and other primary industries. Typically workers move from one location to another as work is completed, travelling with friends, co-workers, and at times with family.

Many young adults follow a second pattern of migratory labour. Their destination is typically major urban centres and their absence from the village is for several years, returning home during this time only for major festivals (Larson *et al.*, 1993; Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994; Podhisita *et al.*, 1994; Pyne, 1994). Ties to the home village remain strong, with most young men and women returning home to establish their own families, or, in the case of young men, returning to the village of their wife where family residence was established (Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994).

The third type of migration occurs during dry years when villages may be emptied of all able workers as Isan people migrate in search of ways to support their families.

The final form of travel that keeps villagers away overnight consists of trips to district centres, cattle-markets, and other villages for purposes of trade. This form of travel is more typical of the older, married villagers.

All forms of migration vary by age and education. The young and unmarried tend to be away longer and to be over-represented among those who migrate to Bangkok (Larson *et al.*, 1993;

*Variously spelled as: Isan, I-san, Isarn, Esarn and Ersarn.

Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994). This is particularly the case for those with less education, who are drawn to the factories and service sector of Bangkok.* As men marry and their children grow they travel less, relying on younger members of their family, especially daughters, to assist with economic support.

Commercial sex sector

Though the northeast is considered sexually more conservative than other areas of Thailand (Ford and Koetsawang, 1991; Lyttleton, 1994), the commercial sex sector still figures prominently in the spread of HIV in the region. Several studies of Bangkok sex workers have found that between 20 and 27% are migrants from the northeast (Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994; Podhisita *et al.*, 1994). These women return to their villages for festivals and most eventually return to live, bringing any potential HIV infection home to the northeast. Sexual services are also widely available for sale within the region. In July 1991, for example, the regional STD Centre for Khon Kaen province counted 400 female sex workers in the capital city of Khon Kaen. These women worked out of 130 identified establishments including brothels, massage parlours, snooker halls, barbershops, night clubs, restaurants and short-stay hotels. Sexual services were available in all cattlemarkets visited by the study team, villagers claimed that sex was available for sale at most festivals, and northeastern villages participating in AIDS prevention campaigns identified establishments within or near their villages that provided sexual services (Muecke, 1992; Elkins *et al.*, 1995, in press).

Several authors have provided a comprehensive description and analysis of the factors that contribute to maintaining Thailand's commercial sex sector, including the economic and familial roles and obligations of men and women and cultural beliefs and expectations related to sexuality (Klausner, 1987; Mulder, 1990; Muecke, 1992; Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994; Lyttleton, 1994; Pyne, 1994). Four of these factors are particularly relevant to HIV spread. First is women's gender roles. In the northeast, women share responsibility for economic support of parents, siblings (usually younger) and children. This obligation to provide economic support to the family is among the strongest of all obligations placed on women. Though women are expected to be virgins at marriage and to remain monogamous after, a woman who violates these

norms in order to provide well for her family may be forgiven the transgression. This is particularly likely if these violations are not directly visible to villagers. Work in the sexual service sector provides an income many times higher than that available to women in other occupations. Women maintain their village's approval by working away from home if they are employed in the sex sector (Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994; Podhisita *et al.*, 1994). Second is the wide variety of sexual services that may be purchased and for which a woman may earn payment. The entertainment industry includes a variety of jobs that entertain through sex such as: sexually suggestive dancing (stripping), massage, and what Thais refer to as "full service", i.e. sexual intercourse. It is not uncommon for women working as nightclub performers, dancers, waitresses, bar-girls or masseuses to provide full sexual service for a fee. The principal of paying for sex is also rooted in village traditions that levied fines against men who "deflowered" virgins. Though this is no longer practised, it has been argued (Lyttleton, 1994) that the tradition set a pattern or norm associating nonmarital sex with payment. The third factor is the fluid boundary between various nonmarital partnerships. These include FSWs, girlfriends and minor wives. The transition between statuses is a very slippery one with a regular customer of an FSW coming to be seen as a boyfriend by the woman and she a girlfriend by the man, though a financial exchange continues to occur. A girlfriend or regular commercial partner may also move into the status of minor wife with the financial and status expectations associated with this, as the relationship continues. While Thai men associate commercial sex with a danger of HIV transmission and speak of using condoms with FSWs, this is not the case for girlfriends or minor wives. Finally, cultural beliefs and norms regarding male sexuality support multiple sexual liaisons preferably with minimal commitment or attachment to partners. It is believed that men require regular "sexual servicing", are unable to control their sexual drives under certain circumstances, and should not forego opportunities for sex when these are available. However, men's sexual activities are governed by norms of discretion, not squandering money needed by the family, and not forming emotional attachments (Havanon *et al.*, 1991).

SEXUAL HISTORY OF NORTHEASTERN MEN

The purchase of sexual services is an activity engaged in by a sizable proportion of northeastern men. As seen in Table 2, 48% of the village sample (50% of married men and 43% of single men) had, at some time, purchased sexual services. Table 3 provides a profile of the variety of sexual histories of northeastern men. For the men with some FSW experience, 70% report an FSW was their first sexual partner. Though the majority of married men

*This was evidenced in the village sample, where 68% of single village men with only an elementary education listed Bangkok as the primary destination as compared to 35% of those with higher education. Work was the primary reason for travel for 91% of the less educated compared to only 40% with some post-elementary education, 36% of whom travelled for "relaxation".

Table 2. Risk category and sexual history: village sample

(n)	Single (189)		Married (548)		Total (737)	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
I. ^a Never sexual intercourse	46%	87	0	0	12%	87
II. Never with FSW	11%	21	50%	276	40%	297
Wife only sexual partner			27%	145	^b	
Have had > 1 partner			23%	131		
III. Last FSW > 1 yr ago	15%	29	41%	227	35%	256
IV. Last FSW within past yr	28%	52	8%	45	13%	97
Total with some FSW experience	43%	81	50%	272	48%	353
1st partner was FSW	70%	57	70%	190	70%	247
FSW only prior to marriage			53%	144		
FSW since marriage			47%	128		
Began prior to marriage			81%	104		
Began after marriage			19%	24		

^aRoman numerals indicate risk group.

^bWhere total is without substantive meaning it has not been calculated.

Table 3. FSW experience within the past year: village sample

Marital status (N)	Single (52)	Married (45)	Total (97)
Total # times to FSW in past yr			
1-2	33%	44%	37%
3-4	33%	29%	30%
> 4	33%	27%	29%
Total # FSWs in past yr			
1	39%	36%	37%
2-5	48%	47%	45%
5-10	10%	10%	11%
> 10	4%	7%	5%
Have gone to same FSW more than once	42%	44%	44%
Last FSW			
Located in brothel	84%	89%	87%
Went with friends	100%	87%	93%
Was drinking heavily	75%	91%	81%
Used a condom	96%	84%	90%

with FSW experience do not report purchasing sexual services in the past year, it is important to note that 47% of these men have purchased services since marriage and 19% only began purchasing services *since* they were married. The profile of single men closely parallels that of married men when their younger average age is taken into consideration. Though 57% of single men have not purchased sexual services (compared to 50% of married men), this might yet occur prior to marriage. In addition, if they replicate the patterns of married men, we would expect some of them to initiate the purchase of sexual services after they are married, lowering the percent of these men with no FSW contact.

Initiation of sexual career

Figure 1 graphs the cumulative percent who have engaged in sexual intercourse at each age separately for those whose first partners were FSWs, girlfriends, or wives as well as the total who have become active at each age, regardless of partner. Female sexual workers and girlfriends are equally likely to be the first sexual partner for those who initiate activity prior to marriage. Activity most typi-

cally begins between the ages of 15 and 20 years with the mean age 17.3 when an FSW is the first partner and 17.6 when a girlfriend is the first. Mean age of marriage is 21.8 years for the entire sample, and slightly younger (21.0 years) for those with no prior sexual intercourse experience. Of interest is that by the age of 21 years, those who have not initiated sexual intercourse activity are most likely to do so with their wives; i.e. if sex has not been initiated with a girlfriend or an FSW by this age, the first partner will be the wife.

FSW experience in the past year

Though more single men reported purchasing sexual services in the past year (28%) than married men (8%), there were no differences in the profiles of these two groups with respect to their last year's activity with FSWs. Most men reported infrequently purchasing sexual services (67% four times or less in the past year), and few partners (82% five or fewer partners). These encounters were most typically in brothels (87%) and were in the company of friends (93%), friends figuring more prominently for single than married men. Almost all men (90%)

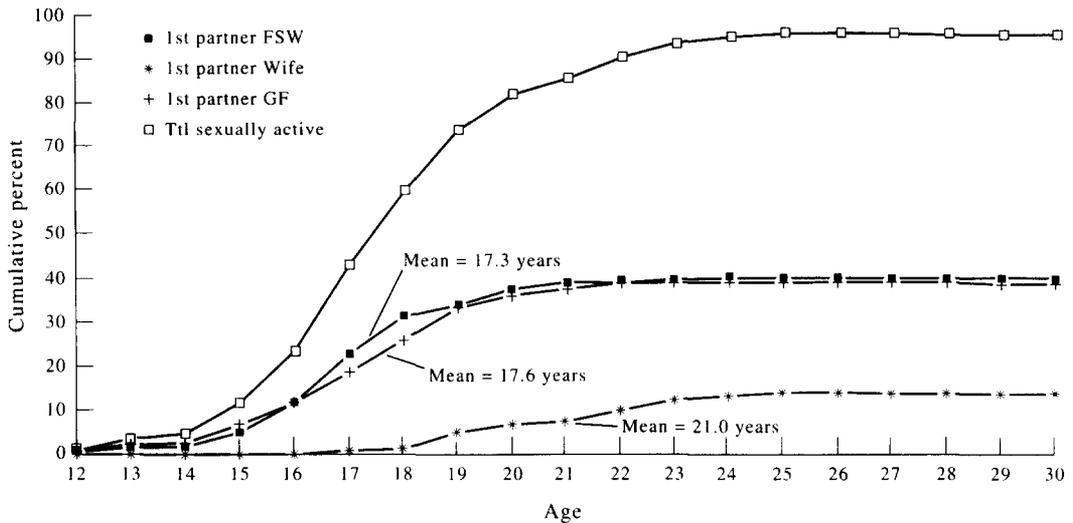


Fig. 1. Cumulative percent initiating sexual activity by type of first partner and age, all men in village sample.

reported condom use even though 81% reported that they had been drinking heavily.

Belief systems

The actions of the men in our sample coincided with the attitudes they expressed. Sixty percent of men agreed with the statement: "It is only natural for men to visit female prostitutes." Eighty-one percent agreed that "Men go to female prostitutes because they are horny." Though men who had purchased sexual services were the most likely to endorse the first statement (73%), there was no difference in endorsement of the second statement, or of the statement that "A married man should only have sex with his wife" (90% agree). From this we can conclude that northeastern men believe that purchasing sex is a way to deal with arousal, and it is considered "natural" to do so (particularly by those who have); however, once married, a man should remain monogamous. For most men in this sample, these were the patterns that were followed. Sexual services were most commonly purchased by single men. First sexual intercourse was as likely to be with a girlfriend as an FSW; however, even for those whose first contact was a girlfriend, most eventually had experience with an FSW. Twenty-eight percent of married men had restricted their sexual activity, throughout their lives, to their wives. The majority of the remainder of married men did not report recent (i.e. within the past year) FSW experience.

Implications for spread of HIV and other STDs

The comparative role played by men with different sexual experiences in the spread of HIV is seen in the differential rates of infection with sexually transmitted diseases. Only 1% of village men (and none of the migrant sample) who had restricted

their sexual experience to non-commercial partners reported ever having had an STD. This compared to 40% of village men and 47% of migrant men who had purchased sexual services. The Pearson's correlation coefficient between number of STDs and number of years since first sexual intercourse activity was 0.30 ($P < 0.0001$) for village men with commercial sex experience, suggesting that STDs accumulate over the life course of men who purchase sexual services. Taking STDs as a marker of potential for HIV infection, the purchase of sexual services clearly heightens this potential.

CONTEXTS AND SCENARIOS FOR PURCHASE OF SEXUAL SERVICES

Four distinct scenarios for the purchase of sexual services were identified. These included brothels, festivals, cattlemarkets and sugarcane work. Three contexts cut across these scenarios. All scenarios were set within a context of peer group activity and alcohol consumption. In addition, the likelihood of purchase of sexual services was higher when men were away from their home village. In this section, the influence of the contexts on purchasing sex will be described, followed by a description of each of the scenarios.

Contexts of purchase

Peers. Kanato and Rujkarakorn (1994) stressed the importance of men's friendship groups in their review of lifecycle phenomena relevant to the sexuality of northeastern men and women. From early childhood boys spend much of their time with their male peers. As adolescents and young men, learning about sex occurs within the context of these peer groups, with friends partying (*paiv tiaow*) and visiting brothels together. Fordham, in his ethnographic

work in north Thailand (Fordham, 1993) and VanLandingham *et al.* (1993) in their surveys of northern Thais have made similar observations for single men. Purchasing sexual services is rarely either a solitary or an isolated activity for Thai men, but rather something which typically is done with friends and set within the context of eating–drinking–partying. Thus, to understand commercial sexual activity in Thailand, it is necessary to consider the nature and influence of the friendship groups that are part of its context (Kanato *et al.*, 1992; Kanato and Rujkarakorn, 1994; VanLandingham *et al.*, 1995).

Several questions were asked in the structured interviews about group involvement and influence on commercial sex activity. The degree of communication between peer groups about sexual matters was judged based on questions about ever having talked to men friends about AIDS or about condoms. In both cases a high percentage of men, regardless of type of sexual experience, responded that they had spoken with male friends. For condom conversations this percentage increased with sexual experience and recent FSW contact.

In considering the role of friends in “visiting prostitutes”, only men who had such experience were questioned. Results are reported by marital status and for married men by recency of FSW contact to reflect the patterns of variation in responses.

Two statements were offered about men’s experiences: “Men go to female prostitutes when their friends go”; and “If a man’s friends pay, he goes to the prostitute.” Single men who had purchased sexual services and married men with FSW experience in the past year were the most likely to agree with the first statement. For the second, it was married men with recent FSW experience who almost uniformly agreed, suggesting financial considerations may be an important influence on the purchasing of sexual services by married men. These results are corroborated by the reports of actual commercial sex activity. Almost all men reported commercial sex was a group activity with the same group typically involved over repeated occasions. Most often the group was composed of close friends or co-workers. Married men (80%) were more likely than single men (32%) to believe that the group expected them to go along and that it was important to comply with these expectations. Comparing this to the percent who always visit FSWs with friends (97% of single, 85% of married men) leads to the same conclusion as drawn in studies of men in northern Thailand. Though most young men feel that their decisions are made independent of group influence, they generally decide to do as the group does (Kanato *et al.*, 1992; VanLandingham *et al.*, 1993). The difference in responses of single as compared to married men on these items may reflect either greater recognition of group influence among married men, or a greater desire to be, or to appear to

be, an independent thinker on the part of single men.

These survey findings were corroborated and elaborated in focus groups where men said they never engaged FSWs alone. If a friend pays, the opportunity is not to be missed, even if the individual does not want to go.

Alcohol. Several researchers and commentators have observed that alcohol and drunkenness have prominent places in the lives of Thai men (Mulder, 1990; Havanon *et al.*, 1991; Fordham, 1993; VanLandingham *et al.*, 1993; Lyttleton, 1994; VanLandingham *et al.*, 1995). Mulder commented on the high tolerance for excessive alcohol consumption and the expectation of rowdiness and recklessness when drinking, using drunkenness as an alibi for a wide variety of norm-breaking (Lyttleton, 1994). Drunkenness is seen at festivals and celebrations, and also on many occasions when men merely gather together. The association between alcohol and sexual activity cut across the full age range, all commercial sex scenarios, and included both married and single men. Over half of the men with any experience with FSWs reported “often” drinking with friends and getting drunk, and well over 80% reported alcohol was part of the commercial sex experience.

Kanato’s in-depth interviews with men engaging FSWs provide some insight into the alcohol–FSW connection (Kanato *et al.*, 1992). The men Kanato interviewed expressed the belief that drunkenness released a power within the body (*khong*). This power threatened to control the men and it was essential for them to re-establish control over the *khong*. *Khong* could only be brought back under control through sexual intercourse (*kha khong*), necessitating that men have sex when they are drunk. Or, as men said in focus groups:

Before they were drunk they could control it. Once they were drunk, they didn’t think about it. They see it [the women] and then they stop thinking. It goes with being drunk.

Beliefs about the release of the *khong* through drinking are used to explain and justify rowdy, reckless behaviours and a high incidence of sexual activity when drinking. This is much like the “I couldn’t help myself, I was drunk” statement typically heard in Western cultures as an excuse for much norm-breaking.

In focus groups alcohol was presented as a *necessary* and *sufficient* condition for sex with FSWs:

If you don’t drink you’ll end up at home. But if you drink, forget it. You won’t end up at home.

I am drunk first. If I am not really drunk I am afraid to talk to them. But when we are drunk we always want to go.

Several men offered the following equation to explain when men purchase commercial sex: “When

people have money, they get drunk. If they are drunk they go [to the brothel]."

Travel. In focus group discussions men insisted that those who travelled frequently or who were away for long periods of time commonly purchased sexual services while they were away, even for married men.

Most people look for it when they are working in other places far away from their wives. It's like that. It's normal.

The belief in the necessity for men to have their sexual needs serviced combined with being away from home to provide a rationale for purchasing services. In the women's study, women frequently used the phrase "he travels" as a stand in for "he goes to prostitutes" and separated their judgements of men, including their own husbands, between those related to times they were in the village and periods of time when they were away. For some of the women, even whether a husband was considered monogamous or not related to his activities when he was at home, ignoring what he did when away from home with explanations such as, "that doesn't count/matter", "I can't see that" and "what can you expect?" For men and women alike, sex while away from home was set within its own normative structure:

If they go *tiaowing* far away they still think about their wife and family at home. They think about what is appropriate to do and what is not.

What was "appropriate" referred to the norms governing sex, i.e. not "squandering" large amounts of money, not forming an emotional attachment, and being discrete so that the wife did not find out.

When provided with the statement, "When men travel they find women to have sex with", 61% of single men and 47% of married men agreed. This did not vary based on experience with commercial sex, suggesting it was a belief that was commonly held, rather than a rationalization applied after the fact. When actual experiences with travel and purchasing of sexual services were compared, the pri-

mary difference was between men who had purchased sexual services within the past year and all other men. Almost all men with recent FSW experience had been away from the village overnight, most were typically away more than once a year, remained away for longer than a month, and travelled to Bangkok.

Both focus group discussions and survey results support the conclusion that travel away from the village, particularly as the time away is longer, contributes to the purchase of sexual services. Though single men are away more often than married men, the rationale for involvement with commercial sex while away is somewhat stronger for married men since absence from the home village facilitates maintaining discretion, i.e. the wife is unlikely to find out.

Scenarios of commercial sex activity

All men who provided information about where they had engaged FSWs indicated brothels as one such location. Some men had also purchased sexual services at festivals and celebrations in villages and migrant labour camps, at cattlemarkets, and while waiting in line to unload sugarcane at factories. Scenarios differed in the typical age and marital status of men, the frequency with which they occurred, the factors that formed either barriers to or facilitating conditions for condom use, and men's perception of the risk for HIV and other STDs posed to them in each case. Results for each scenario are summarized in Table 4.

Brothels. Not only had all men who had purchased sexual services done so in a brothel, but when asked where they most often purchased services, the common response was brothels (90%). When presented with the scenario of eating and drinking with friends and then engaging an FSW in a brothel, 38% of men said they had this experience locally (i.e. in the home village or a nearby location) in the past year, some as often as 30 times. The impact of travel on purchasing sex is seen in re-

Table 4. Scenarios for visiting FSWs^a

	Brothel	Cattlemarket	Festival/movie	Sugarcane truck
Total ever went to FSW at this location (<i>N</i>)	301	50	50	14
% of total sample who ever went to FSW at this location	43%	14%	14%	4%
Total this yr at this location (<i>N</i>)	90	18	45	9
% this yr (of total ever)	46%	18%	90%	19%
Marital status				
Single	58%	3%	52%	83%
Married	42%	97%	48%	17%
Times past yr				
1-4	69%	50%	59%	50%
>4	31%	50%	41%	50%
# different FSWs past yr				
1-4	82%	67%	59%	75%
>4	18%	33%	41%	25%
Have gone to same FSW > once	43%	67%	41%	75%
Ever STD	38%	83%	29%	24%
Mean # STDs	2.4	4.4	1.6	1.0
Mean charge for short stay	210 baht	100 baht	200 baht	175 baht

^a353 men have been to a FSW at some time, 97 in the past year.

sponses to the same scenario, but set in Bangkok. Of the men who reported travelling to Bangkok, 74% responded that they had participated in the experience of *tiaowing* with friends and going to a brothel, some as often as 20 times.

The majority of men who had purchased services in brothels within the past year did so four or fewer times, with nearly half engaging the services of the same FSW on more than one occasion. Alcohol, friends and condom use were almost uniformly part of this experience and FSWs charged just over 200 baht (U.S.\$8) for a short stay (i.e. not overnight). Brothels were divided into categories by the characteristics of the men who frequented them. While government reports distinguish between “high” and “low” price brothels and “high” and “low” price prostitutes (Ministry of Public Health, 1993), northeastern men used categories associated with the occupations of the clientele. There are brothels typically frequented by students, others by farmers, others by government workers, others by the military, etc.

In focus groups, men described brothel sex as both the commonest scenario and that in which condoms were most likely to be used. This was related to the availability of condoms—most of the women had a supply—and the relatively “unhurried” nature of the encounter set within the privacy of the woman’s working room.

Festivals. The cycle of work and daily life in northeastern villages is broken by frequent festivals. These may involve from one to several villages, and may be a single day or evening or several in duration. The men interviewed in focus groups listed six major festivals, several of which could occur on numerous occasions during the year, and an additional four minor festivals. Men reported that there may typically be a festival each month, with additional festival-like celebrations commemorating marriages, men entering the monkhood, etc. occurring throughout the year.

During festivals many people come from outside the village, including FSWs:

If there is a *maw lam* [local dramatic presentation] or a big festival, once you hear the sound of the big *maw lam* band, they are here by then. They [FSWs] walk around and listen to the *maw lam*. They find a dark place...

Q: Are they prostitutes or just people who like to have fun?

A: They are looking for money. They don’t do it unless you pay them.

Sexual services may be bought from several different types of women at these times, with most of the women coming from outside the village. Women were categorized as: prostitutes (*khong*) who were differentiated from other women by the presence of middlemen who solicited their clients; “loose girls” (*luey, luey*) who weren’t FSWs, but who came to the village and were available for sex

at festival times; women who sold mostly alcohol but also sex on the side; and transvestites and transsexuals (*gratuey* or “lady boys”) who may pay their “clients”, reversing the commercial sex roles. The “loose girls” were younger, primarily single women, while the women selling alcohol were older, often married or formerly married.

The larger the festival, the more who come. Fourteen percent of the men surveyed reported that they had been approached by middlemen at festivals. Of note is that 90% of the men who had been approached reported purchasing sexual services within the past year. This suggests that the availability of commercial sex at festivals may be more common today than it was in past years. This coincides with comments in focus groups that purchasing sexual services at a festival or movie is more “modern” than going to brothels.

They find a time when there is a movie. They have a wife and kids but they tell them that they are going to watch a movie. This is the more modern way.

Locations for sex during festivals or movies included: in fields, behind buildings, in the school, in a car, anywhere on a mat. The men rated these as situations that “carried the highest risk” for several reasons. Sex was very hurried. “It is an emergency situation. That means you have sex in the rice field or the sugar field. You do it in a hurry.”

Often many men lined up and if a man hesitated or went to find a condom he “lost the opportunity”. “They say ‘hey, get in the car’—If you wait all your friends will get her first.”

Married men had to be on the watch for their wives or children. “These days women and kids go to see the *maw lam* and they get the kids to go and find out where the father is.”

This was described as a major deterrent to married men participating in sex at these times (though 48% of the men who reported their last FSW contact was at a festival or movie were married), but also as a reason for speed if they did.

Sometimes it is late and they come and are talking to us and touching us. Our hands are burning up. We are just looking for a way to leave without our wives seeing. When we do we have to hurry so we don’t get caught.

A final reason given for the risk was the excessive rate of alcohol consumption at these times, with drinking beginning before festivals. Men and women alike described these as the “most drunken” times. The hurried nature of the episode, the line-up of men, hiding from a wife, excessive drinking and a sense of safety in the familiar surroundings of the village all detracted from the likelihood that condoms would be used.

Sugarcane camps. One prime destination of northeasterners during the dry season is sugarcane cutting camps. Months before the cane is ready to cut, representatives circulate in villages recruiting workers. Both men and women work the sugarcane,

frequently travelling as family units. One appealing aspect of sugarcane work is that a portion of pay is provided in advance of the work. This is particularly important during dry years or for families with fewer resources. In addition, the companies employing workers commonly provide camp accommodation and transportation to and from the camp location. Though the condition of both the accommodations and the transport is poor, these allow villagers to count most of what they earn as profit. Since transport is in village groups, camps frequently contain many workers from the same village.

Working the sugarcane is physically demanding and spans long hours each day. The difficulty of the work was a frequent theme of conversation in focus groups. Men spoke of the exhaustion at the end of the day, leaving them without energy for anything but sleep.

Though work in the field is divided into several tasks, the salient division of labour for this study was between fieldworkers and truck drivers. The majority of labourers worked in the fields, cutting, bundling, and loading trucks. When trucks were full (usually at the end of the day), they were driven to factories for unloading and processing. Trucks approached factories in the late afternoon or early evening with the day's load and it was not uncommon to see them lined up waiting to unload well into the night. Food booths and restaurants could be found in this vicinity, providing a locale for men to congregate while they waited to unload.

Only five of the 219 men from sugarcane camps who completed the survey said they had purchased sexual services while at this camp, though 32% of the men stated they had done so at other camps. The primary reasons given for "inactivity" at this camp were fatigue, and, for married men, the presence of their wives in the camps. Two scenarios were described as the most typical for purchasing sexual services in conjunction with migration for sugarcane cutting. The first involved the truck drivers. As the trucks waited in line at the factories, it was common for women to circulate, letting the men know they were available for sexual servicing.

Most of them go under the sugarcane truck and get laid. Some are 100 baht, some 20 or 30 baht a head...sometimes the owner of the truck will cover the cost.

Women were also available in the foodshops nearby:

...we asked the owner whether there were any girls to come serve drinks. She comes over to talk. It takes about 10 minutes and we talk about the price. Then we go in the room.

Q: Is there a room there just for this?

A: There is. It is just a normal room.

This form of sexual service was available only to the small number of men who drove trucks, and po-

tentially any passengers who came along for companionship. Four percent of village men said they had been involved in such an experience, and only 19% of these men reported they had purchased sexual services in such a situation within the past year.

The second scenario was when all the sugarcane had been cut for the season and men celebrated with food, drink and entertainment. This could be in the camps or in nearby restaurants or brothels:

Then we are paid...we find a good place to eat and drink, with good food. Then we are drunk and look for women. It doesn't matter who it is.

This latter scenario involved a larger number of men and shared characteristics with festivals or celebrations when they were in the camp, or with visiting brothels when the men left the camps. Though no specific questions were asked in the structured interview, the 32% of men who referred to purchasing sexual services in other camps may have been referring to these celebrations.

Condom availability varied in these scenarios. Truck drivers were typically dependent on the women who serviced them to supply condoms, as were men celebrating in the camps. Both scenarios shared many of the characteristics of festivals including the hurried nature of the encounter, waiting in line, drunkenness, and, in the camps, potentially the presence of wives.

Cattlemarkets. Farmers regularly travel to cattlemarkets to buy and sell cows and buffalo, and often are away from the village for one or more weeks at a time, depending on the distance travelled. Of all the villagers, those who travelled to cattlemarkets were away the most frequently, but stayed away for the shortest time each trip. Our research team visited five major cattlemarkets and found FSWs at each one. The numbers ranged from as few as two to five at the smaller markets attended by 100–150 people, to as many as 30 at the largest market where about 1500 people regularly attended. The women generally worked out of restaurants. At some markets police had actively discouraged commercial sex and the numbers of FSWs had dropped. At no market had the police activity eliminated commercial sex.

The research team interviewed four FSWs at different markets as well as market owners and cattle salesmen. In general, the women selling sexual services at the markets were between 25 and 40 years of age and most were married or divorced with children. Their children were typically in the home village with the grandmothers. Sex work was not the sole source of income for most but supplemented that of farming. The time they had worked in commercial sex at markets varied from under a year to over 12 years. All said they regularly went to be tested for STDs and for medical check-ups. These could be as frequent as every month. One woman elaborated the reasons as:

"...for protecting myself. Women have to love themselves."

Many travelled among all the markets. They typically charged 100 baht (U.S.\$4) or 500–1200 baht for the entire night, and earned an average of 400–600 baht a night. Both the FSWs and the men who were interviewed claimed that condoms were almost always used. A common response of the women to queries about condom use was: "You must use them. I am afraid not to. They must."

Even when a customer was very drunk, the FSW helped him to get the condom on, or would masturbate the customer rather than having sexual intercourse. "Some drunks, who don't use condom, we don't let have intercourse. But I would help them by my hands."

However, when our interviewers probed further they learned that in some instances men paid several hundred baht more in order *not* to use a condom. "If they insisted to have intercourse I would ask for more, 300–400 baht. Some give me much, some give me little."

The men who came to cattlemarkets tended to be in their mid-30s (average age 34.3 years) and married. Those who did not purchase sexual services at the market said they were there to make money, not to have sex, and that they were concerned for their wives and families. Those who did purchase services, described what occurred:

After a sale there is the habit of buying alcohol and cigarettes to show your generosity to the customers and the people who came as witnesses. They drink every time. The people get drunk. They do not go to sleep because they have to stay up and tend the cattle. The women are available and they (the men) are far away from their families so it makes them wild. This is all week.

As in the festivals, sex occurred on mats in fields or in bamboo thatch bungalows.

Other situations of casual sex. Other scenarios of casual sexual encounters were described in focus group discussions. These did not necessarily involve a financial exchange, but in all cases involved sexual activities with women on a casual basis and often with local women: "Sometimes we don't go to prostitutes, but sleep with some of the young girls in the village. It is like *tiaowing*."

A unique aspect of these encounters was that local women and women not identified as commercial sex workers were rarely considered to pose a risk: "It is in our village, no. We do not use condoms, it is safe."

This sense of "safety" at home combined with one of "small risk" at local brothels: "There are small brothels and small risks in our village. Not like Bangkok. There the brothels are large and the risks are too."

The sense of safety at home was much like that discussed in relation to the festival scenarios. The potential for HIV transmission in a sexual encounter is not associated with whether or not a price is

paid. Commercial sex is merely a marker of a large number of sexual partnerships. However, in sexual liaisons formed with a variety of partners without a financial exchange, there is also a heightened risk of HIV transmission. The danger here is compounded if these are not perceived as carrying a risk for HIV transmission since this sense of safety may preclude the use of condoms.

Relative risk

The two contexts of friends and alcohol cut across all scenarios. However, the nature of the contact with an FSW and the perception of the "type" of women involved varied between the different sites and circumstances. Though reports of condom use were high for all scenarios, data on prior STDs suggested that unless condom use was a new behaviour that had recently and consistently been adopted, there were variations in use between the scenarios that reflected the focus group discussions. The percent of men who reported ever having an STD varied from a low of 29% for festivals to a high of 83% for cattlemarkets. Mean numbers of STDs also varied from lows of 1.0 for those reporting commercial sex associated with driving sugarcane trucks to a high of 4.4 for those attending cattlemarkets. These variations related not only to the scenario of commercial sex, but also to age. As discussed earlier, STDs accumulate over the sexual lifecycle of these men. If, however, younger men are adopting condom use behaviours, lower rates may be seen in the future.

HIV/AIDS KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTIONS AND ACTIONS

These findings raise the question of how north-eastern village men perceive their risk of HIV infection, whether this perception varies with sexual history or scenario, what they know about transmission and prevention, and what actions they have taken to prevent becoming infected with HIV.

As in other studies, we found a high level of knowledge about HIV transmission, prevention and the consequences of infection with no significant variations based on age, marital status, FSW experience, commercial sex scenarios, or migration. Most men, in both the village and migrant samples, regardless of the specific scenarios of commercial sex they had engaged in, did not consider themselves to be at risk for HIV infection. Those who *did* consider themselves to be at risk most typically identified the source of risk as their own commercial sex experiences. Of those who contracted for sexual services within the past year, 76% reported condom use as their form of protection, and 90% reported they used condoms with their last commercial sex partner. Thus, though there appears to be a significant proportion of northeastern men who purchase sexual services, the self reports of condom use suggest men are attempting to take effective action

to reduce their risk of HIV infection. Based on the research conducted in this project it is clear that the ability of men to use condoms consistently enough to prevent infection varies with different scenarios for purchasing sexual services.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIV TRANSMISSION AND PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

The analysis of observations, survey interviews, focus groups, and interviews has elaborated the socio-cultural contexts and local scenarios within which men engage in commercial sex activity. Based on seroprevalence surveillance and epidemiological studies (Weniger *et al.*, 1991; Ministry of Public Health, 1993; Department of Communicable Disease Control, 1995), it is these activities which are the major vectors of transmission of HIV across the northeastern region.

In considering the sexual life histories of the men in this study, it is important to note that 27% of the married men in this sample could be considered to be following the most stringent of Western guidelines for safety, sex with only one partner over an entire lifetime. At the opposite extreme are the 8% of married men and 28% of single men who have purchased the services of an FSW during the past year. These men represent recent, and potentially ongoing, exposure to risk of sexual transmission of HIV. Though their reports of condom use with the last FSW are generally high, there is evidence that this use is not consistent. Between these two groups we find the majority of single and married men. They have had multiple sexual partners over their lives and most have purchased the services of an FSW. These men are less likely to report using a condom in their last FSW experience. However, in the past year they have not purchased any sexual services. This may be indicative of a longer-term change in their sexual practices that will prevent future exposure to HIV through sexual contacts. If Thailand's AIDS prevention campaigns are to be successful, it would be beneficial to consider how to increase the size of this last group relative to the group of men who continue to engage in multiple sexual contacts, as well as how to increase consistent condom use. The results of this project suggest that closer examination of the specific scenarios and contexts within which commercial sexual activity takes place is necessary if campaigns are to be made relevant to the lives of northeastern men.

Probably the most typical picture that comes to mind for commercial sex is the brothel. Though all men with FSW experience had at some time gone to a brothel, and the majority of men identified this as the most typical place where FSWs were found, other scenarios were also identified as locations for commercial sex. These included cattle- (and potentially other) markets; festivals, celebrations and movies; and waiting in line-ups to unload trucks. In

focus group discussions, survey responses, and key informant interviews, these other scenarios appeared to be more problematic from the perspective of potential HIV transmission than were brothels. Scenarios varied by the typical age of the men and women involved and by the presence of conditions that facilitated or were barriers to condom use. In addition, in focus groups men described other casual sexual encounters. These included local women, and women visiting the village, and did not necessarily involve a financial exchange. In these encounters, and also when services were purchased from local FSWs in the home village, men considered there to be, at most, "small risk" and consequently did not use condoms. Finally, a scenario not explored in this project was sexual activity with girlfriends. Though traditional norms dictate virginity until marriage for young women, these norms are weakening. In this study, men were as likely to report a girlfriend as an FSW as the first premarital sexual partner, and men in some focus groups spoke casually about having had several girlfriends, or engaging in sex with a girlfriend during the same period in which services were being purchased from FSWs. The unique profiles in each of these scenarios have not been taken into consideration in the development of prevention programmes. This has facilitated a stereotyping of sex into risky and not risky, large and small risk, based on factors that are irrelevant to the actual likelihood of HIV transmission.

All the scenarios elaborated in this study were typically set within a context of group partying and consumption of alcohol. The key factor was that "sexual servicing" was considered part of entertainment, much as eating and drinking were. Peer involvement and peer pressure can either pose impediments to safety as peers encourage each other to participate in risky activities, or they can facilitate safety if peers endorse norms of risk reduction such as condom use. Peer pressure and influence were important factors to the men in this study. Research in other countries has demonstrated that the effectiveness of intervention programmes in increasing risk reduction practices improves if the peer group context of sexual activity is used to foster risk reduction (Fisher and Fisher, 1992; Kelly, 1992; Maticka-Tyndale, 1991, 1992). Heavy drinking, on the other hand, is uniformly seen as an impediment to risk reduction. This research provided mixed results on the influence of alcohol on condom use. Though men reported both heavy drinking and condom use in the survey, in focus groups, drinking was described as focusing attention on "getting sex" regardless of whether a condom was used or not. However, interviews with FSWs at cattlemarkets suggested that heavy drinking did not necessarily prevent condom use. Faced with men who were drunk, FSWs described putting condoms on them or providing for their sexual needs with

masturbation. It was only when these men both resisted condoms and offered considerably higher amounts of money that FSWs were likely to forego the use of condoms. This suggests there are ways to facilitate condom use in the face of heavy alcohol consumption, and that FSWs are actively involved in this facilitation.

Travel was the final context associated with purchasing sexual services. Unlike peer partying and alcohol, commercial sex was not always and only related to travelling away from the village. However, focus groups and survey results supported the conclusion that men were more likely to purchase sexual services when away from home. Travel fit the cultural prescriptions for casual, multiple sexual encounters. It facilitated maintaining discretion and was supported by beliefs in sexual release as a necessity for men, and not bypassing any opportunities. Travel was most often for purposes of work, and often left men with some additional financial resources for which they did not have to account. This was particularly the case for single men who did not carry a responsibility for familial economic support, but is also the case for married men whose earnings away from home were not visible to the family. In addition, travel often occurred in the company of peers, adding the dimension of peer group influence.

Questions on HIV transmission and prevention, personal risk, actions to reduce risk, and condom use further demonstrated that though men had absorbed the appropriate factual information and associated commercial sex with risk of HIV transmission, this information and the accompanying realizations remained firmly bound by the stereotypical images of contexts and scenarios of sexual activity that are portrayed in AIDS prevention campaigns. These do not take into account the diversity of scenarios and the specific contexts within which casual sexual encounters (commercial and non-commercial) are set for northeastern Thai men.

A focus, in prevention programming, on sexuality, risk and "safer sex" as individualistically determined does not fit the realities of the men encountered in this and other research in Thailand (Havanon *et al.*, 1991; Kanato *et al.*, 1992; Fordham, 1993; VanLandingham *et al.*, 1993; Archavanitkul and Guest, 1994; Kuyyakanond and Maticka-Tyndale, 1994; Lytton, 1994; Maticka-Tyndale *et al.*, 1994a; Pyne, 1994; Elkins *et al.*, in press). What this research highlights is the need for a better understanding of the place of sexual activity in the social context of the lives of young men, and an incorporation of this understanding into prevention programming.

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