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Masculinity and Risk Behavior Among Youth in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the relationship between masculinity and sexual as well as other risk behaviors among male youth in the context of rapid social and economic change in Thailand. Using data collected through participatory and qualitative methodologies, our analysis is aimed at capturing the scope, nature, determinants, and implications of risk behaviors. We argue that for Thai youth in general, but for males in particular, recent processes of modernization have crystallized adolescence as a life course stage that is increasingly seen as a period of life in which opportunities for experimentation, adventure, and thrill should be maximized. Consequently, these processes have served to sharpen the association between male adolescence and risk behavior, in part because of the normative acceptability of risk taking, but also because of the increasing range of options and opportunities for undertaking risk behaviors that includes sexual activity, but also drugs, drinking, motorcycle racing, and gang activity.

Our findings indicate that recent changes have shaped sexual risk taking in major ways, with a decline in commercial sex among young men, but a concomitant increase in unprotected sex with girlfriends. Unwanted pregnancies are now the major concern with regard to sexuality among young people, and girls are bearing a disproportionate health and social burden from the consequences. The two most prominent negative influences that are contributing to expanded risk behaviors in Thailand are young men's direct and frequent contact with peers, and their virtual contact with the media, leisure, and consumption ideals. Moreover, parental influences are largely negative, serving to increase risk behaviors because Thai parents are not equipped to effectively cope with the rapidly changing context of adolescent lives.

Given the focus in the literature on youth and masculinity as "problems," however, it is important to emphasize that our findings also show that risk behaviors are not the only expression of masculinity among Thai young men, but rather that positive ideals are also critical elements. The same forces that are fueling risk behaviors are also creating aspirations and ambitions for success and achievement among adolescents. Moreover, schooling and work opportunities are motivating young men to view adolescence as an important preparatory period for acquiring the skills, training, freedom, and respect necessary for a successful adulthood. For policymakers, ensuring adequate resources and opportunities that build young people's human and social capital are essential investments for the future of the current generation of youth in developing countries.

Introduction

In this paper, we examine the relationship between masculinity and sexual as well as other risk behaviors among Thai male youth in the context of rapid social and economic change in Thailand. Using data collected through participatory and qualitative methodologies, our analysis is aimed at capturing the scope, nature, determinants, and implications of risk behaviors among the current generation of young men in Thai society, especially as they face the confluence of traditional social and familial influences with newly emerging opportunities and options. The central questions we address are:

1. What is the overall scope of masculine risk behaviors among young men in Thailand today, and how are different risk behaviors interlinked?
2. Is masculinity among young men expressed only through risk behaviors or are there other channels for its expression?
3. What are the key factors shaping expression of masculinity for young men in Thailand?

Demographers have only recently turned their attention to the study of masculinity in non-Western settings, and much of this interest has been due to the spread of HIV/AIDS. As it has become clear that gender norms and social scripts are critical in defining appropriate, expected, and actual male and female sexual behavior, it has become important to understand masculinity and its manifestation through sexual risk taking which then has implications for both the spread and prevention of HIV/AIDS (Pleck, Sonenstein et al. 1993; Barker 2000; Greig, Kimmel et al. 2000; Scalway 2001). In the last two decades, however, a number of other critical demographic, social, and economic phenomena besides HIV/AIDS have been sweeping through countries such as Thailand, with enormous implications for the emerging generation of youth. These include fast-paced economic growth, shifting demographic regimes, rural to urban migration, increased governmental responsiveness and accountability, and shifting gender and generational relations. For the current generation of young men (and women) on the edge of sweeping change, these phenomena are shaping gender identities, current behaviors, and future life outcomes with regard to sexuality and a range of other interactions and relationships (Podhisita and Pattaravanich 1995; Scalway 2001; Soonthorndhada, Punpuing et al. 2005).

A focus on masculinity and risk behavior, therefore, becomes important for not only disease prevention, but also for realizing the potential of the largest generation of youth in the history of the world. In this paper, we make an effort to delineate the ways in which these larger forces are shaping the transition to adulthood for young Thai men, and thus defining the nature of masculinity as it relates to sexual as well as other risk behaviors. We argue that for Thai youth in general, but for males in particular, recent processes of modernization have crystallized adolescence as a life course stage that is increasingly seen as a period of life in which opportunities for experimentation, adventure, and thrill should be maximized. Consequently these processes have served to sharpen the association between male adolescence and risk behavior, in part because of the normative acceptability of risk taking, but also because of the increasing range of options and opportunities for undertaking risk behaviors that includes sexual activity, but also drugs, drinking, motorcycle racing, and gang activity.

We also argue, however, that the crystallization of adolescence as a life stage and the resulting definition of masculinity have implications beyond risk behavior to fulfill the potential of youth more constructively. This is because the emerging definitions of masculinity also include aspirations and ambitions for success in the modern economy, and these more positive ideals provide one potential route for policies and programs to harness and divert potential risk behaviors into more productive channels.

The paper is part of a larger collaborative study on transitions to adulthood in Thailand, undertaken jointly by Mahidol University, Princeton University, and the International Center for Research on Women. The present analysis is based on participatory and qualitative data collected in 2002 using two participatory research tools: life lines and mobility maps. Data were collected from two rural and one urban areas in the province of Kanchanaburi, Thailand, and covered young people 15-24, as well as community leaders, mothers and fathers of adolescents, covering 56 focus groups discussions with over 30 different subgroups. The data provide extensive and rich information on sexuality, social relationships, youth activities, support systems, aspirations, and mobility associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood for young men and young women.

The Thai Context

Thailand is one of the Asian countries noted for rapid globalization, both in economic and social terms. During the late eighties and early nineties, Thailand experienced among the world's highest rates of economic growth, and in the past decade, it experienced both a downturn and a recovery (Soonthorndhada, Punpuing et al. 2005). Much of the economic boom was both fueled by and resulted in migration from rural to urban areas, a process in which young men and women were prominent actors. In fact, the largest proportion of migrants continues to be comprised of young people aged 15-19 who are attracted to urban destinations temporarily and permanently because of work, schooling, and increasingly, leisure opportunities (Chamrathirong, Archavanitkul et al. 1995; Podhisita and Pattaravanich 1995; Fongkawe 2000; Soonthorndhada, Punpuing et al. 2005).

Youth are also an important demographic group because of the rapid fertility declines that Thailand experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s, resulting in a youth bulge during the past decade. The prominence of youth in the population has required policy attention and investment in the education, training, employment, and health needs of young people (Podhisita and Pattaravanich 1995). For example, in the last two decades, Thailand has increased its investment in secondary schooling in order to maintain its competitiveness in global labor markets, while at the same time expanding vocational training opportunities (National Statistical Office 1992; UNESCAP 2001; Prohmino 2004). Attention has also been paid to making secondary school enrollment ratios more gender equitable.

Youth health concerns became a primary policy focus with the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the 1980s Thailand was one of the countries most heavily affected by HIV/AIDS, with the majority of cases affecting people aged 15-29. Today, however, Thailand is considered a success story in reversing the spread of the HIV epidemic. With concerted governmental, NGO, media, and community action, Thailand became one of the few countries to create and document sexual behavior change. New HIV infections were reduced from 143,000 in 1991 to 29,000 in 2000. ((UNAIDS 2001; UNESCO Bangkok 2003; Prohmino 2004). This remarkable turnaround was led by a responsive government

that indicated early and clear commitment to taking action to address the epidemic on a number of fronts, social as well as public health.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic was highly instrumental in bringing to the forefront the link between masculinity and sexual risk behavior (Knodel, VanLandingham et al. 1996; VanLandingham and Grandjean 1997; Curran and Saguy 2001). Traditionally, a Thai male is expected to be a risk-taker, sexually promiscuous, and impulsive. Young men in particular are allowed to be self-indulgent and aggressive, with the idea that their behavior will be calmed by Buddhist practice as a novice at a temple, and later by the positive influence of a wife (Hanks and Hanks 1963). Research on male sexuality in Thailand conducted during the 1980s and 1990s documents that Thai men are assumed to have a strong desire for sex, and the need for multiple partners. Sexual experience during adolescence is seen as critical to the creation of masculinity. These studies also note that for young men, the first sexual experience at the time was often with a sex worker. In fact, male visitation to sex workers, along with increasing non-commercial sex, and inconsistent condom use were identified as the major factors fueling the HIV/AIDS epidemic (VanLandingham 1993; Podhisita and Pattaravanich 1995; Knodel, VanLandingham et al. 1996; Podhisita, Xenos et al. 2001; Knodel 2003; Thianthai 2004).

More recent studies, however, show large decreases in some high-risk behaviors, fewer visits to sex workers, increased condom use, and higher proportions of men having sex with girlfriends instead of sex workers. These trends have been documented largely as indicating the effectiveness of the Thai response to HIV/AIDS (Podhisita, Xenos et al. 2001; Nelson, Eiumtrakul et al. 2002; VanLandingham and Trujillo 2002). Research indicates that AIDS has made both young men and women realize that the masculine norm of sex with sex workers is a dangerous practice. However, the rapid and widespread changes in the types of sexual behavior for young people in Thailand are being fueled by more than just fear of commercial sex. Broader social change, including increasing willingness of young women to have premarital sex, their growing intolerance of boyfriends and husbands visiting sex workers, declining parental supervision because of

youth migration, and a general shift in attitudes and norms, are also identified as important factors (Knodel, VanLandingham et al. 1996; VanLandingham 1997).

Attention to broader factors has also meant that masculine risk behaviors besides sexual behavior are now gaining public and policy attention. Boys and young men tend to maintain strong group ties with their friends, have a strong interest in conforming to group norms, and so drinking, smoking, and drug use become a part of common group activities. A 1994 study shows that rates for ever and current drinking and smoking among young men in Thailand are significant, and comparable to other middle-income Asian societies (such as the Philippines) (Choe, Thapa et al. 2001). Studies also show that drug use among Thai youth is rising and higher than neighboring countries. Amphetamine use was found to be rampant among children outside of formal education, including juveniles in detention, street children, and children engaged in the sex service industry. Studies of drug use among in-school youth also show widespread access to and use of narcotics. (Choe, Thapa et al. 2001; Nelson, Eiumtrakul et al. 2002).

The socio-economic shifts in Thailand have had important implications for both the dichotomy and the convergence between the modern and traditional worlds, as well as for changing gender, generational, social, and economic relations, especially as they impact young people. The implications of these shifts are yet to be fully understood and addressed systematically. Presently, there is growing concern about adolescents' futures and the potential resources they represent for a country desperate to restore sustainable economic growth. Within the country, there is strong interest among research, governmental, and non-governmental institutions in addressing the full scope of issues related to adolescents, and their health and life outcomes.

Theoretical Context

Masculinity, Risk Behavior, and Youth

While masculinities, or ideals of manhood, vary across and within cultures, there are certain concepts that tend to be inherent in the definition of masculinity across most societies. For example, though there are multiple masculinities in any society, all carry

with them some notion of power (Connell 1993; Kaufman 1999). Similarly, risk-taking tends to be a defining feature of masculine performance in most cultures. The concept of risk-taking often encompasses an expression of daring, adventure, virility, strength, power, and entitlement to pleasure (Barker and Lowenstein 1997; Greig, Kimmel et al. 2000). Moreover, in most cultures, the expression of masculinity through risk behaviors is especially strong during the adolescent years, a life stage during which beliefs regarding masculinity tend to crystallize and young men are often under strong pressure to initiate a number of behaviors proving their manhood (VanLandingham and Grandjean 1997; Barker 2000; Scalway 2001; Lusthaus, Adrien et al. 2002).

The link between masculinity and risk behaviors in non-Western cultures has attracted Western scholarly interest only in recent years, largely due to its implications for HIV/AIDS. Attention has focused mostly on sexual risk behavior, as it has become evident that masculine ideals of sexual conquest, experimentation, and entitlement are a major contributing factor to sexual behaviors directly associated with the spread of the pandemic. These include early and unprotected sexual activity (especially during adolescence), sex with multiple partners and with sex workers, and sexual relationships in which women's negotiating ability is limited (Barker 2000; Greig, Kimmel et al. 2000).

But ideals of manhood often involve risk behaviors beyond sexual activity, and it is only recently, as youth have begun to be recognized as an important demographic group, that the literature has begun to explore and document these for Southern settings (Nelson, Eiumtrakul et al. 2002). In her quantitative analysis across several Asian societies, Choe finds a consistent pattern of much higher levels of early sexual activity, as well as the use of cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol among young men rather than young women (Choe, Thapa et al. 2001). Moreover, the literature in a number of settings has highlighted the extent to which early sexual activity among boys is related to these other forms of risk behavior. Studies in Latin America, Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and North America have found that early sexual activity for boys is often accompanied by alcohol and drug use, and that these factors often lead to unsafe sexual practices, coercion or violence with their female partners (Barker 2000; Barker 2000). For example, in their work on Thailand, VanLandingham and

colleagues document that alcohol and drinking play a critical role in groups of young men visiting sex workers, especially as part of the process of sexual initiation (VanLandingham 1997). In Brazil, Barker and colleagues find that beliefs about masculinity are the biggest predictor of risk-taking behavior among young men: those with more traditional views about gender roles are more like to use drugs, be violent, delinquent, and have unsafe sexual practices (Barker and Lowenstein 1997; Barker 2000). Why and exactly how male risk behaviors associated with masculinity may come as a “package” is a question that requires further exploration.

The upsurge of interest in men and masculinity reflects the growing recognition that societal norms around masculinity and related risk behaviors can have a harmful impact on men’s and women’s lives. The most obvious argument is that a range of the risk behaviors undertaken by men to demonstrate their manhood are bad for men themselves in terms of health outcomes; they expose men to disease, injury, and death (Barker 2000; Shears 2002; Ruxton 2004). By extension, there is also discussion of gender relations and the impact on women: male risk behaviors often mean the codification of power relations in male-female interactions, such as direct violence against women or non-negotiability for women in sexual relationships. This harms women’s health, but also perpetuates their lack of agency in social and economic systems (Connell 2000). There is also discussion of the harmful implication for men themselves beyond the health outcomes. Socially and psychologically, ideals of masculinity may create frustration and stress among men in trying to achieve them, and a sense of failure when these are not achievable (Kaufman 1999; Scalway 2001). Recent work indicates that some of the risk behaviors and harmful impact of male risk behaviors may in fact be an expression of the failure to meet masculine ideals. For example, ICRW’s work in India indicates that men are more likely to use violence against women or have multiple sexual partners if they cannot fulfill the expectations of a hegemonic masculinity (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) 2002).

To the extent that the larger literature on masculinities is driven by a focus on gender relations and HIV/AIDS, or with adolescence as a problematic life stage, it tends to highlight mostly the “toxic” effects of contemporary masculinities(Connell 2000). There is

relatively little discussion that in addition to being a harbinger of death and disease, and a perpetuating mechanism for inequitable gender relations, masculinity can also be a formula for success and achievement (Scalway 2001). This is despite the recognition that although some ideals of masculinity can promote risk behavior, others can form a foundation for constructive and protective behavior. In addition to being socialized to be aggressive, competitive, and pleasure seeking, boys are often also socialized to produce, achieve, perform, provide, and protect (Ruxton 2004).

Studies in a number of different settings confirm this inherent duality in masculine ideals. In Brazil, Barker and Lowenstein find that it is almost universal to define manhood in terms of productivity and ability to be a provider. Two steps to becoming a man are becoming sexually active and becoming financially independent or able to support a family (Barker and Lowenstein 1997). In a study across three states in India—Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab--ICRW researchers also document that certain commonalities in the definition of masculinity stress positive rather than negative aspects: men are expected to fulfill the roles of protector, provider, and procreator. Moreover, mature men correlated masculinity with being married, sexually faithful, and able to sexually satisfy their wives (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) 2002).

Globalization and Factors Influencing Masculinity

Ideals of masculinity vary in different cultures and evolve as ideas are borrowed from other cultures. With the social, economic, and demographic forces of globalization, gender relations are becoming globalized and so are masculinities. Traditional masculinities are converging to new hybrids as local concepts merge with international ones (Connell 1995; Barker 2003; Ruxton 2004). For adolescents in particular, the emergence of a global youth culture is a major factor defining gender identities (Santana 2003; Chotnapalai 2004).

There is speculation in the literature that there may be greater convergence across developed and developing societies in the concept of adolescence as a clearly defined life stage that serves as the gateway of entry to adulthood (Lundgren 2000; Scalway 2001).

There is also the argument that globalized masculinities are relatively unfettered by local cultural and social constraints (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Connell 2000).

In many societies, traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity for youth are being challenged, in part because of the emergence of adolescence as a critical life stage, and in part because of the increasing options for girls and women in terms of schooling, work, leisure, and sexual behavior (Barker 2000; Thianthai 2004). Increasing options and exposures are also likely to be affecting boys' and young men's behaviors and attitudes, their view of adolescence, and especially their understanding of manhood, but there is very limited discussion of these processes for developing country settings. For example, studies indicate that in Northern settings, young men see adolescence as a time to experiment and have fun before assuming the responsibilities of "becoming a man," at which stage fidelity and taking care of a family become much more important (Marcell, Raine et al. 2003). Whether a similar separation of ideal masculine behavior across adolescence and adulthood is present or emerging in Southern settings is less well documented.

It is equally important to understand the factors that are most influential in shaping the impact of globalization on gender identities in Southern settings. This understanding is essential for devising effective programmatic and policy strategies for maximizing the impact of positive influences, and minimizing the impact of negative influences. In considering the factors that may be driving the changes in masculinity and risk taking for youth in countries such as Thailand, it is important to consider social networks and relationships as well as the range of institutional and cultural stimuli influencing young people. For example, a number of development theories argue that modernization is characterized by the increasing importance of non-familial institutions including schools, workplaces, and the media. Intergenerational relations among parents and children, it is argued, are especially weakened by the importance of these non-familial institutions (UN 2004). Conversely, intra-generational relations are strengthened as young people spend much more time with their peers. Additionally, the literatures on modernization and adolescence emphasize the importance of the media and consumption patterns in the socialization of youth as societies gain exposure to globalization. Recent research on the growing marketing of youth culture identifies media and consumption as a critical pathway

to adolescent identity formation (Pye and Muncie 2001; Chotnapalai 2004; UN 2004; Soonthorndhada, Punpuing et al. 2005).

Although studies in developed countries generally demonstrate that schooling and work opportunities tend to reduce risk behaviors among young men, much less is known about this relationship in developing country settings (Soonthorndhada, Punpuing et al. 2005). Do the skills, compensation, and rewards these settings provide reduce the need for risk taking, or do these non-familial settings set the stage for additional temptations and opportunities for risk? Similarly, only a handful of studies have explored the importance of social capital and social networks in defining masculinities and risk behaviors. For example, the literature theorizes that social relationships that create social capital may provide many resources for success, but also that the social capital from social relationships may be limiting or even harmful when it enforces obligations that undermine success or encourage risk (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Fernandez-Kelly and Patricia 1995; Soonthorndhada, Punpuing et al. 2005). A range of literature--mostly on sexuality and HIV/AIDS in developing countries--indicates that the social capital from peer networks may exert a negative influence by pressuring young men into sexual risk-taking, as well as smoking, drinking, and violent behavior (VanLandingham 1993; VanLandingham 1997; Barker 2000; Scalway 2001). However, less is known about the actual or potentially positive effects of peer influence. Given the trade-off in familial versus non-familial influences under conditions of rapid social change, little is also known about the relative importance of family versus peer networks in shaping positive or negative ideals of masculinity.

The sparsest set of literature about adolescent lives in developing countries addresses leisure and fun. Ironically, the discursive and media imagery about youth and adolescence displays this moment in the life course as a time of experimentation, free-spiritedness, and adventure. A critical issue for understanding the link between masculinity and risk behavior is to review the relevance of leisure pursuits among youth as both a response to, and as a means of coping with, rapid social and economic change.

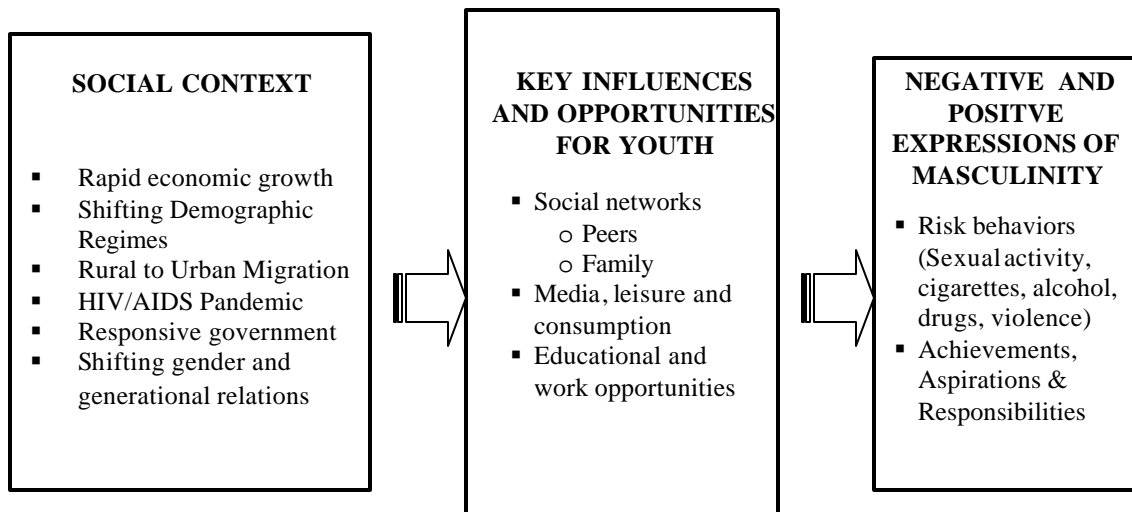
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for our analysis of the scope, nature, determinants, and implications of masculinity and its expression through risk and other behaviors in Thailand. The box on the left in the figure encompasses the most exogenous, societal level influences shaping masculinity and its expression. It describes the broader environment and nature of social change. In the Thai context, these societal level influences include rapid economic growth, shifting demographic regimes, extensive rural to urban migration, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a responsive government, and shifting gender and generational relations. For youth in Thailand, this broader environment has meant rapid and extensive social change, considerable uncertainty and concern about the future, but also opportunity, options, affluence, adaptation, and optimism.

Next in the figure, the larger societal context is shown to shape the key influencing factors that define masculinity. These are indicated in the middle box, and include family and peer networks, media, leisure and consumption patterns as well as schooling and work opportunities. These factors are the most “proximate determinants” of masculinity and risk behavior. Finally the expression of masculinity itself is shown in the box on the right and is posited to include both positive and negative aspects. While the negative aspects include risk behaviors in terms of sexual activity, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and violence, the positive aspects can emphasize achievement, aspirations, and responsibility.

In our analysis, we examine the relative balance of the negative and positive expressions of masculinity among young men in Thailand as well as the linkage between various types of risk behaviors. We also examine the relative role of key influencing factors, paying attention to the relevance of familial versus non-familial influences, including schooling, work, and peer networks. The positive and negative impact of social networks is of special interest as is the specific role of media, leisure and consumption.

Figure 1



Data and methods

This paper is part of a larger collaborative study on globalization and transitions to adulthood in Thailand. The present analysis is based on qualitative data collected in 2002 through focus group discussions using two participatory research tools: life lines and mobility maps. Data were collected from two rural and one urban area in the province of Kanchanaburi, Thailand. The life line and mobility map tools involved a combination of visuals and focus group discussions with eight to ten participants.¹ The visuals were created jointly by the participants and moderator, while the focus group discussions were

¹ The lifeline tool required participants to draw a picture of a hypothetical life course of a young person's transition from childhood to adulthood. Participants identified and discussed key transition points and illuminated perceived and experienced opportunities and constraints influencing a young person's transition to adulthood. For the mobility map, youth were asked to draw boundaries and landmarks in their community and talk about their ability to move within and outside of those boundaries. Young people talked about distance and transportation to various destinations included in the map, how they get to these places, who goes there, whether going there is prohibited by others, what their costs are, and what their activities go on at that destination. They were also asked about their perceptions of those destinations, their feelings about them, and others' perceptions and feelings.

recorded on tape and in writing by two note takers. The life lines and mobility map exercises were conducted with youth aged 15-24, parents of adolescents, and community leaders. The youth groups were stratified by age (15-19, 20-24), sex, marital status, and school enrollment status. Adult groups were separated based on sex. A snowball technique was used to recruit participants, resulting in 56 focus group discussions.

The study was designed to elicit information about two aspects of the lives of Thai youth: how youth experience and perceive the transitions to adulthood from a life course perspective and how physical and social mobility affects young people's exposure to risks and opportunities related to the home, education, health, work, and leisure. In both cases, we were interested in how particular outcomes change youth life course trajectories or mobility, how particular events or relationships influence those outcomes, and how experiences differ from perceptions. The tools were also aimed at capturing the nature and influence of social capital and social networks, both within the family and outside it.

For data analysis, the raw data from visuals, notes, observations, and transcription of the focus group discussions were translated and merged to form summaries for each group exercise. These merged summaries were coded using NVivo qualitative software. The following codes were used for examining the content of the data for the present analysis: health, leisure, aspirations, generation, gender, problems, punishment and rules, violence, consumption, social network, relationships that matter, motorcycles, and money. A more comprehensive description of the data coded is provided in Appendix 1.

Results

Scope and Nature of Risk Behaviors

Our data paint a picture of masculine ideals among Thai youth that are clearly in a rapid state transition. The scope and nature of masculine behaviors among young men is changing from traditional, even recent patterns. As youth adapt to a new and globalized environment, new and expanded forms of risk behaviors are emerging. The data show that young men in Thailand undertake a variety of risky behaviors, which in moderation can be part of the normal transition to adulthood, but in excess can lead to negative life outcomes.

Though sexual risk behaviors were most prominently mentioned and discussed, violence in gang activities, and experimentation with cigarettes, drugs and alcohol were also commonly practiced by adolescent boys. Moreover, these behaviors are frequently interrelated in that they either facilitate each other or share common underlying motivations.

Our data also indicate, however, that in response to the socio-economic changes in Thailand, masculinity during adolescence is not being defined just as an opportunity for expanded risk behaviors. It is also emerging as a preparatory stage for adulthood in which achievement and ambition play a major role. Although men see their teen years as the time to sow their wild oats, and they do not expect to be financially responsible, married, and supporting families until they are in their twenties, they do have a clear sense that the teen years need to be well spent in preparing for this next, more responsible stage of life. In fact, the requirements of the modern world make it essential to make the most of adolescent years for future success.

Sexual Risk Taking

Both in the life lines and mobility map discussions, much of the conversation of young men revolved around sex. Sex during teen years is a major preoccupation for them, and sexual experience and conquest are clear indicators of masculinity. However, there are equally clear signs that the sexual landscape has changed in just a few years because of the AIDS epidemic. Our data support the findings by others indicating that commercial sex is increasingly understood by boys and young men as non-desirable. Traditionally, young Thai men drank and visited sex workers in groups for sexual experiences that occurred outside of, and as a precursor to marriage. Though some of this traditional behavior is evident in our data, it is also clear that sex with girlfriends is fast replacing sex with sex workers as the norm.

The shift in the way young men talk about sex is evident from the different types of sexual partners emphasized by the young men 20-24 as compared to the adolescents 15-19. It is mostly the older youth who show awareness about the possibility of visiting sex workers.

But even these young men realize that disease from engaging in commercial sex is a possibility, and that girlfriends are a preferred option. This awareness is present among both urban and rural young men.

Respondent: Men this age (20-24) don't usually visit commercial sex workers.

Moderator: They already have someone they're serious with?

Respondent: ...Men this age find girls who are at home...They don't visit commercial sex workers... Girls who are at home have less disease.

-urban single males age 20-24

Respondent: They don't go to prostitutes because they are afraid of getting diseases.

Moderator: How safe do you think it is if you frequent prostitutes at Tasao (nearby place)?

Respondent: You can catch every disease...30 baht, 30 diseases. (Group laughs)...

-Rural single males, age 20-24

For boys in both the younger and older age groups, girl friends and “fans”² are increasingly a matter of status and a means of impressing male peers. “Cool”, modern (“mo”) young men have sex with their fans or girlfriends, not with sex workers.

Respondent: We revel, but not to the prostitution house sir, it is dangerous.

Mostly we meet one another, and we court girls, Mostly they get themselves into pairs, courting.

-Rural single males, in school, age 15-19

Moderator: They (the boys in another group) told me they had fans, ... they said they had sexual relations with their fans.

Respondent: ...they would keep boasting...They would boast in order to impress their friends...They are afraid of being inferior to their friends.

-Rural married males 20-24

Although sexual risk taking among young men in terms of commercial sex seems to have declined, current expressions of masculinity include some continuing and some new elements of sexual risk taking. First, interest in sexual activity is early, and the data suggest that boys initiate sexual activity at relatively young ages. Second, the data suggest that while the practice of visiting brothels may have declined, it has not disappeared. A related cause for concern is that commercial sex may be becoming diffused as it shifts from

² "fan" is a Thai colloquialism for spouse and is also used for boyfriend or girlfriend; it may indicate a love partner, or a serious relationship without sex.

brothels to more informal, routine, ordinary commercial and social spaces. Finally, and perhaps most critically, our findings indicate that sex with girlfriends is largely unprotected; because they are considered safe in terms of disease, protection is not considered appropriate or necessary.

Among boys, talk about sex starts early, and discussions from our data indicate that many become sexually active in their early to mid teens.

Moderator: How old are most of the guys that go there (to brothels)?

Respondent: People started going when they were 15...Some went when they were 14.

-Urban single males, out of school, age 15-19

Moderator: Boys had their first sexual experience when they were in grade 7?

Respondent: They were already lustful...It was around that time.

Moderator: At what age did girls have their first sexual experience?

Respondent: They can be lured during this time (age 14-15).

-Rural married males, age 20-24

Teen boys often seemed knowledgeable about brothels and sex workers even though they stated that they had no personal experience with either. It is difficult to tell whether these young men have acquired this knowledge second hand, especially given the prominence of this form of sexual initiation traditionally. Conversely, it could also be that HIV/AIDS campaigns have been so successful in stigmatizing sex with sex workers that young men were reluctant to admit to it in a group discussion. An additional concern is that with a number of new entertainment spots, commercial sex may have moved out of brothels to more socially acceptable spots such as restaurants and karaoke bars.

Moderator: What is it like at Tasao?

Respondent: Restaurants...Karaoke places too

Moderator: It's a restaurant, but it also has prostitutes.

Respondent: There are also prostitutes.

-Rural single males, 20-24

Moderator: What do you get from the masseuse? Is it just massages or have a special service?

Respondent: Yes, we have a special service. It depends on the arrangement or it depends on how do they get paid for it beforehand.

Moderator: What about at the Karaoke, do they provide this kind of special service?

Respondent: Yes, some. It's normally hidden at the back.

-Urban single males, 20-24

But perhaps the phenomenon that is of greatest concern in terms of potential negative outcomes—for boys, girls, and gender dynamics--is the rise in unprotected sexual activity with girlfriends. Among boys, sexual activity with girlfriends is not only more common, it is increasingly one of the most critical means for expressing masculinity during adolescence. This is because in addition to being driven by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, “romantic” premarital sex among couples is also being driven by larger social change. In particular, new social and economic opportunities for girls are also pushing sexual boundaries, making it normatively much less taboo for girls to show an interest in boys and sex during their adolescent years. Girls are more willing, more available, more able to engage in pre-marital sexual activity than was the case traditionally. These shifts, in turn, are requiring young boys to push sexual boundaries for masculinity even farther by showing their success with girls and entitlement to sex.

Mo. Before, girls were shy about this (sex). Nowadays, they are more open about it. Why do you think this is so?

A: They have a lot of experience...Girls grow up fast...There's stimulus on TV...Girls start to have strong sexual feelings...They are tempted. (Laughs) Maybe because they are exposed to more nowadays.

Mo: It's common for boys. They've done it for a long time.

A: It's just starting for girls...Girls watch pornographic movies.

-Rural married males, 20-24

However, the clear dichotomy in the minds of young men that sex workers are “unsafe” but that girlfriends are “safe” means that they consider it unnecessary and inappropriate to use condoms with girlfriends. At a minimum, unprotected sex with girl friends is opening new channels for the spread of disease. However, it has larger implications for young people and gender relations more broadly. Our data indicate that the fear of unwanted pregnancy is emerging as a major concern among youth in Thailand. In fact, in our discussion groups, this was the primary worry expressed by both boys and girls with regard to premarital sexual activity, far more so than the fear of disease. Moreover, given the current ideals of masculinity, boys are aware of unwanted pregnancies, but see it largely as a problem for girls to resolve. For them, contraception for pregnancy prevention or abortion for dealing with an unwanted pregnancy is largely the responsibility of the girl. At the same time, it is not acceptable for girls to carry condoms or suggest their use. Young men themselves are inconsistent and reluctant to use condoms, often using them incorrectly.

Moderator: How did you protect yourself when you had intercourse (with girlfriends)?

Respondent: We didn't use protection. It was fresh... We didn't like dry things. (Laughs)

Moderator: Did you ejaculate inside or outside?

Respondent: We ejaculated inside.

Moderator: Were there problems with the girl getting pregnant?

Respondent: The girl took care of it herself... That was her problem.

-urban single males age 20-24

Moderator: How about girls? Have you seen any girls carrying condoms in their purse?

All Respondents: Never... it's normally guys.

-urban single males age 20-24

Respondent: Men are so selfish about sexual matter

Moderator: Why do you think that men are selfish?

Respondent: Because men are not the one who get pregnant, they will enjoy themselves... men are not the one to be blamed

-rural females in school 15-19

Stimulants

As social change pushes the boundaries on gendered behaviors, young men are combining old and new ways of expressing the freedom, independence, and experimentation associated with masculine behavior. While drinking was always in the male domain of bonding and at least temporarily shunning social rules, cigarettes, and especially drugs are emerging as the new means of expressing these masculine ideals. Young people in our discussion groups say that it is very common for boys to smoke cigarettes. They also discuss drug and alcohol use, specifically mentioning methamphetamines, almost exclusively among males. Both young women and young men describe drug use especially as within the male domain: taking drugs expresses defiance of both social and personal responsibility. Beyond acting as a means of rebellion, stimulants are also another way for boys to experiment and experience freedom, something often mentioned by the young men in conjunction with drug use. Adults in the community are aware of the stark differences between young boys' and young girls' risk behaviors.

Moderator: Are there differences between boys and girls?

Respondent: They are different.

Moderator: Are they different regarding whisky and cigarettes?

Respondent: Oh, they are different ...Girls would never touch those two things at all... Girls won't have anything to do with whisky. Boys would enjoy themselves talking and laughing.

-Rural male community leaders

Su: There are also drug addiction problems.

Mo: Does this problem involve girls or boys?

Su: Drug addiction involves boys. Girls don't usually have problems.

-Rural female community leaders

Moderator: Who becomes a drug addict?

Respondent: Wanting to be like their friends who are wealthier.

Moderator: What else?

Respondent: Wanting to be independent. More freedom.

-Rural males out of school 15-19

Moderator: What about those who became drug addicts, what do you think their problems might be?

Respondent: They wanted to have more freedom. They would argue with their parents and leave home.

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

The data also indicate that boys may be initiating smoking, drinking, and drug use at quite young ages, creating a greater likelihood of addiction.

Respondent: Boys (10-14) were addicted to drugs and were more wayward.

Moderator: Kids started to be involved in drugs at this stage?

Respondent: Kids started smoking cigarettes

-Rural married females, 20-24

Moderator: Do you think at what age they try drug?

Respondent: 11-15

Moderator: Have you ever seen those who are at 11 tried drugs and smoked?

Respondent: Yes, they started smoking...They try alcohol too

-Rural married females, 20-24

Violence and Gangs

Violence is a surprisingly prominent feature in Thai youth's descriptions of boys' lives. Even the Thai researchers in our team were surprised by the frequent mention of gang

activity among male youth groups—especially in the urban area--as a routine part of their social lives. According to the participants in our study, it is not unusual for boys as young as 12 or 13 years old to travel in gangs, fighting with each other using guns, knives, and broken bottles. Being chased by other gangs or the police were often part of the process. The youth describe in detail the numerous situations in which violence occurs, including wanting to impress girls, seeking revenge, proving power over other gangs, and for no reason at all.

The data suggest that the traditional masculine activities of “pai tieu” (“wandering”) and “reveling” (making the rounds) are expressing themselves through new options. In particular, the combination of urban settings, motorcycles, and new destinations for socializing make for new dynamics and opportunities for expressing male aggression and dominance over other males. Gang activity was frequently mentioned in the context of young men riding on and “souping up” their motorcycles for reveling and attracting the best looking girls. The youth recognize that the reasons for violence, and the manner in which it takes place, are both important means for young men to express their dominance and power, both to girls and to other young men.

Moderator: Do you fight monthly or yearly about girls, how often do you fight about it?

Respondent: Very often sir, almost everyday.

Moderator: Mostly did you go to them (other gang) or they came to you as far as you...?

Respondent: When we meet them, we would punch them... At the school...Seeing each other we would fight...At temple fairs...They would use disparaging words towards us..

-Rural males in school, 15-19

Moderator: Teenagers have to go there, a lot of them, because they were arrested and taken there. Did they do anything wrong before being arrested?

Respondent: Fighting, group fighting...Shooting each other, and quarrelling about their motorcycles.

-Urban fathers

Linkages between Risk Behaviors

The various risk behaviors through which Thai young men express their masculinity are linked in two important ways. First, different risk behaviors facilitate each other. For example, it is easier to try sex in a brothel after drinking, as is gang violence after drinking or taking drugs.

Moderator: So if inexperienced people want to try (brothels) do they wait for someone to take them there or just go on their own?

Respondent: They go with friends...They go with friends or someone they know...You have to go with someone who has been before. They would know what to do...They would drink before they go in.

-Urban single males, 20-24

In particular, engaging in one risky behavior puts young men in a “certain scene” where other risky behaviors also occur. In this sense, motorcycles are perhaps the most exemplary symbol of the fast-paced masculine life style desired by young Thai men. Motorcycles facilitate and are associated with other risk behaviors, ranging from sexual activity, to violence and alcohol use. Boys use motorcycles as tools for sex with both girlfriends and sex workers. Having a motorcycle attracts girls, who are impressed by souped-up motorcycles and winners of races. But motorcycles also provide the means of mobility to escape adult supervision for sexual escapades with girl friends, visits to brothels, drinking or doing drugs with friends. Motorcycles also serve as a primary means for gaining stature among male friends. In fact, young men in every one of our study sites discussed the importance of owning a motorcycle and the lengths they will go to in order to own one, working, and borrowing or stealing money from parents.

Respondent: If he enters the motorcycle racing, a lot of girls will come to see him. They like him.

Respondent: Wanting to have a car, wanting to have a motorcycle for reveling with friends...For reveling with girls...Having a motorcycle, one can have a fan.

-Rural married males, 20-24

Additionally, risk behaviors are linked because they often have similar underlying motivations. For young Thai men, the range of behaviors from drinking to unprotected sex, to violence provide different channels for proving their manhood, gaining status among peers, and exploring and experimenting with different options for having fun during the

prime years of their life. Moreover, in today's environment where young Thai girls are also exploring adolescence through a number of similar behaviors, boys need to push the boundaries even further than before and show that they are riskier than girls.

Respondent: Girls are just like boys, that is, wanting to try things, wanting to try drugs, and things like that, it depends on friends.

-Rural married males 20-24

Respondent: Boys are more daring/quick... Girls are conservative...Girls grow up fast, but they don't usually think about sex...Girls can control/hide their feelings better than boys can.

-Rural married males, 20-24

Positive Expressions of Masculinity

However, our data indicate that for young Thai men, adolescence is emerging not only as a life stage for experimentation, fun, sexual initiation, and gaining peer approval, but also as the critical period of preparation for adult success and responsibilities. Young men repeatedly articulate that they must lay the foundation for economic and familial success during adolescent years and that if done in excess, the above-noted risk behaviors can have long lasting negative consequences for their futures.

Respondent: If we can earn enough money and look for a girlfriend and sometime we are confused what we want to do then we might not succeed. It is better to settle down our financial status first and get married later

Moderator: So you would rather wait until you can support yourself first before starting a family.

Respondent: Yes. You should be stable first before chatting up girls.

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

Most young men have a clear understanding that although youth is the time for irresponsibility, the next stage of their male roles as providers and supporters is around the corner. In the new world they are facing, aspirations and expectations regarding consumption and lifestyles are much higher than before, and so are concerns regarding achievement and success.

Moderator: So if the family wants to survive, does it depend on the men or women?

Respondent: The men...Men.

Moderator: How do men have to behave then to get the family going?
Respondent: They have to support the family as best as possible... First of all they need to save up lots of money.

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

Moderator: What is important in your life now? Apart from girls and going out?
Respondent: How to make tomorrow better than today

-Urban married males 20-24

Key Factors Influencing Expression of Masculinity

In considering the “proximate determinants” of masculine risk behaviors in Thailand, two influences stand out as overwhelmingly important: the sweeping “virtual” influence of media, leisure and consumption expectations, and the direct and negative social capital derived from peer groups. Family networks are also important, but surprisingly, more so for inadvertently encouraging rather than discouraging risk behaviors. Rather, it is schooling and work opportunities that seem to be having the most positive influence on the expression of masculinity among young men.

Media, Leisure and Consumption

Thailand’s pace of globalization, economic growth, and expanded consumption patterns are first and foremost expressing themselves through youth. Thus, media, leisure, and consumption are having an enormous impact on young people generally—both boys and girls—and are intimately linked to the expansion of risk behaviors. These forces are exposing young people to global youth culture, and therefore global gender identities. The influx of the outside world through globalization brought about by the growing economy has also given Thai youth exposure to the habits and styles of youth worldwide. Now young men must not only compete with each other to prove their masculinity; they must compete with young men in other cultural contexts as well.

This is resulting in the emergence of hybrid masculinities that combine the new and the old. The traditional leisure activities of wandering and reveling for young men are now experienced through motorcycles, chasing girls, malls, youth hangouts. Money in the hands of young people, along with increased freedom and competition to show off through possessions are major contributing factors in the escalation of risk behaviors. These factors

combined make not only behaviors such as drinking and drugs possible, they also make dressing up to impress girls, motorcycles, and cell phones as necessities for young men.

Respondent: Nowadays girls court boys.

Moderator: Someone told me that when he had a motorcycle, girls came to him automatically. Is that true here too miss?

Respondent: It seems to be the same. Girls would look at his dress, his motorcycle, if he does not have them, he would not come. Most girls would look at his dress and his motorcycle...They look at materials... In case of a boy looking at a girl, he won't be able to tell whether she has such good things or not...A mobile phone, her dressing, her clothes... Sometimes the boy would look at her family backgrounds also madam...Nowadays he would even look at her shoes madam, if they are not of a good brand, he won't accept her.

-Urban fathers

Q: Who do kids age 12-15 imitate?

A. Movies and the media...They imitate many things, for example movies...Mostly, they imitate speech...They imitate popular words from the movies.

-Urban fathers

Moderator: What do you think that those who aged 15-18 try sex?

Respondent: I think the media have influence about this matter

-Rural females in school, 15-19

Consumption goods are giving young people new ways of having fun, and new ways to compete with each other. Girls and boys judge each other on the basis of the quality of goods and clothing owned, and one of the most popular places to hang out is the mall, which only fuels the desire for more goods while making access to them easy.

Social Network: Peers

Peer networks are the other most important factor shaping the behavior and attitudes of young men, largely in terms of increasing the likelihood of risk behaviors. The social capital derived from peer networks is critical to young boys' social survival and success as adolescents. However, this social capital most often means that young boys have to conform to their peer group's rules, fulfill expectations, and prove their manhood by risk-taking with sex, drugs, drinking, and violence.

The crystallization of adolescence in the modern world of Thai youth means that the social world of friends is important for both boys and girls: both want to be accepted by their male and female peers because of the way they look, dress, act, etc. However, this social

world is especially for boys who have more mobility (with motorcycles, etc.) and compulsion to prove manhood in terms of sexuality, freedom, and daring to friends.

Moderator: They (girls) are attached to friends as well?

Respondent: Their feeling of this sort may not be as intense as that of boys. Boys have stronger attachment to friends.

-Rural married males, 20-24

Proving one's manhood to friends through sexual experience and conquest is one central focus of discussion for the groups we interviewed. Much of young men's discussion about early sex revolves around impressing or competing with friends.

Moderator: Why were some boys courting girls faster than others? Did they mature faster or did they already have sexual needs?

Respondent: Mostly, they were showing off to friends. (Laughs)...It was a value...

Moderator: It was a value. If a friend successfully courted a girl at age 12-13, how did other friends see that?

Respondent: It was considered cool. He had style...They were envious. (Laughs)

-Rural single males, 20-24

Respondent: We didn't think about sex... We just followed friends.

-Rural single males, 20-24

But friends are equally critical in young men's desire and opportunities for engaging in all the other risk behaviors we have documented earlier. Friends are often the defining factor in whether and when young men engage in these risk behaviors. The data indicate that both youth and adults are acutely aware of the defining role of peer groups in male risk taking.

Respondent: ...some drank. There were also drugs. Some wanted to try drugs... We followed friends

-Rural single males, 20-24

Respondent:...Some people persuaded them to try drug, to smoke and to drink

Moderator: Who are they?

Respondent: Friends

-Rural married females, 20-24

Respondent: More men are addicted to drugs, they follow friends to get addicted.

- Rural females out of school, 15-19

Moderator: Besides movies, what do kids age 12-15 use as role models that affect their actions and behavior?

Respondent: They want to be like their friends. If their friends smoke 2-3 cigarettes a day, they do the same.

Moderator: If their friends smoke, they smoke too.

Respondent: They're cool together.
-Urban fathers

Young men also articulate that peer pressure can be strong enough to make risk taking compulsory rather than voluntary.

Moderator: Who did they meet and asked them to try drugs?

Respondent: Friends...Friends.

Moderator: Their friends recommended them?

Respondent: No, their friends forced them to.

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

While much of the evidence points towards the overwhelmingly negative influence of peer networks, the data do indicate that the social circle of young men has the potential to be a positive influence. Youth and adults told us that there is “good” company and “bad” company in the lives of young people. Good friends encourage achievement, while bad friends encourage risk behaviors.

Respondent: (speaking of boyfriends or-girlfriends) if a good person has got a good person together they would take each other to goodness. But if the boy is bad or the girl is bad, both of them probably could not be learning, being addicted to drugs, sneaking out of school, skipping classes, and finally quitting school all together.

-Urban fathers

Respondent: If we have good friends they would lead us to class rooms, if we have bad friends they would lead us sneaking out of school, taking drugs, reveling and things like that.

-Rural single females, 20-24

To the extent, therefore, that achievement is encouraged as a masculine ideal for young men, peer groups have the potential to be a more positive influence than is currently the case.

Social Networks: Families

Although the literature emphasizes the positive social capital associated with family networks, our findings indicate that in the context of fast-paced change in Thailand, much of the parental influence for masculinity and its expression during adolescence is in fact negative. The most important reason for this seems to be that Thai parents--especially fathers—are adapting slowly and poorly to the sweeping changes associated with

adolescence. From their traditional understanding of parenting as a natural rather than a learned skill, parents are ill-equipped to adequately deal with all the complexity of their children's lives. Boys, in particular exert a lot of independence, and to some extent, parents are almost deliberately uninformed about what they do with their time and money. At the same time, parents are financing many of the risk behaviors as a matter of resignation.

Respondent: In some cases parents are tricked by their children into giving money, but in others parents give money even if they think the money is being wasted, feeling unable to control or regulate them

Moderator: Do they use their own money to buy things?

Respondent: Yes, it's their own money. They ask for money from their parents... When they ask for money from their parents, they tell their parents that they will use it to buy school supplies... Parents don't usually know what they need the things for... they are deceiving their parents to get money.

-Rural female community leaders

Moderator: How do adults feel about teenagers buying clothes and CDs?

Respondent: We think that they are wasting money, but we don't know how to handle them. We are troubled by it, but we can't forbid them.

Moderator: Why can't you forbid them?

Respondent: They work, so we don't want to forbid them.

-Rural female community leaders

Parents disapprove of risk behaviors such as violence or drugs, and adult men are especially reluctant to admit that these problems actually exist close to home. In some of our study sites, there was extensive evidence from youth discussions that young boys are engaged in these risk behaviors, but in discussions with male community leaders and parents we were told that these are problems plaguing other communities, not their own. Moreover, despite their disapproval, fathers often serve as the role models for some of young men's risk behaviors.

Respondent :I wanted to try smoking because I saw adults doing it (around age 15)

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

Moderator: Fighting and drug addiction are major problems. In the viewpoint of adults, where do you think they learned this behavior?

Respondent: They learned from their parents. Sometimes they drink with their father.

Moderator: Currently, do many kids drink with their father?

Respondent: Yes. In almost every household, kids drink with their father.

-Rural female community leaders

Schooling and Work Opportunities

In contrast to the negative influence through familial institutions and networks, our data indicate that schooling and work opportunities may be shaping masculinity during adolescence more constructively. Clearly, these institutions do serve as the venues for the negative influences through peer networks, since it is at school and at work that young people tend to bond and are most surrounded by their peers. The data also suggest that for girls, the demands of schooling and the opportunities through work may be providing both the motivation and means for selling sex.

However, for boys, the data indicate that secondary and post-secondary schooling as well as work combined with study options are largely driving and being driven by young men's aspirations and desire to "make it." First and foremost, young men articulate how essential advanced skills and training are for not only success, but survival in the current economy. Increasingly, they need not just secondary education, but post-secondary education as well, and they know that the teen years should be spent ensuring that they build this essential human capital.

Respondent: In this type of economic conditions, having finished only Grade 12 would be difficult to find job...Those boys who haven't finished schooling find it hard to get employed.

Moderator: What about the rest of you, do you think it is enough to finish Grade 12, concerning your education?

Respondent: Not enough ...(laughing) The lowest for me must be the advanced vocational education ...Not yet having used the teenage life fully according to its worthiness.

-Rural males in school, 15-19

Gaining access to educational opportunities and good jobs in the future is also a source of stress for young men (and young women). Despite the emergence of vocational schools and expanded governmental support for post primary education, most young people do not see the current opportunities available to them as enough, Boys, in particular, are concerned that their family's lack of resources and increasing competition in the labor market may put them at a disadvantage in terms of marketable skills for the future. Many, therefore, are combining schooling and work during their adolescent years, the latter frequently supporting the former.

In addition to providing the resources for advanced education, getting a job and leaving the village serve as important means of gaining respect and freedom from the family. As such, work serves as a positive instrument for some of the masculine ideals men seek through risk behavior.

Moderator: Why is it so different, working and earning money and not working and not earning money?

Respondent: Its very different. They (parents) listen to everything I say now. When I didn't earn money, it was like blowing in the wind when I talked.

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

Moderator. What do they (parents) regard you as, now that you have a job? How do they see you now that you don't have to live off their earnings anymore?

Respondent: They listen to what we have to say more. They understand us more and they don't really stop us from doing things.

-Rural males out of school, 15-19

Conclusions

Our examination of masculinity and risk behaviors in Thailand presents a complex picture of the transition to adulthood among young men in the context of a rapidly changing social context. Our findings indicate that the scope and nature of risk behaviors among young men are intimately connected with the crystallization of adolescence as a life stage in Thailand. Experimentation, fun, and leisure activities for boys have gained increasing prominence and social legitimacy. Since these aspects also increasingly define female adolescence, young men have to continually push the existing boundaries for risk behaviors in order to prove their manhood.

Our findings indicate that recent changes have shaped sexual risk taking in major ways, with a decline in commercial sex among young men, but a concomitant increase in unprotected sex with girlfriends. While the success of AIDS campaigns has made young men acutely aware of the risk of disease in having commercial sex, young people are increasing facing the risk of unwanted pregnancies (and disease) through sex with romantic partners. Since unwanted pregnancies are the major concern with regard to sexuality

among young people, and girls are bearing a disproportionate health and social burden from the consequences, it is likely to emerge as a new and key issue facing policy makers.

Our data also indicate that the scope of risk behaviors related to masculinity goes beyond sexuality. Young men are expressing freedom, defiance, and experimentation through their use of cigarettes and alcohol, and increasingly, drugs and violence. In fact, drugs and violence are activities almost entirely limited to young men rather than young women, while cigarettes and alcohol are prominently, although not exclusively within the male domain. To the extent that these risk behaviors are intimately connected to each other, this broad range of expanded risk behaviors among young men posit an increasingly challenging public policy situation. The consequences from this combination of risk behaviors are relevant not only for the health and life outcomes of young men themselves, but also for social stability and gender relations at a broader level.

Given the focus in the literature on youth and masculinity as “problems,” it is important to emphasize that our findings also show that risk behaviors are not the only expression of masculinity among Thai young men, but rather that positive ideals are also a critical element. The same forces of social change that are fueling risk behaviors are also creating aspirations and ambitions for success and achievement among adolescents. Especially for men, their future role as providers, and current ambition to take advantage of emerging opportunities for financial and social success, are powerful motivating factors during the adolescent years. It is important that policy makers address this positive aspect of youth lives, so as to make young people actors rather than targets in development programs.

Our analysis indicates that the two most prominent negative influences that are contributing to expanded risk behaviors in Thailand are young men’s direct and frequent contact with peers, and their virtual contact with the media, leisure, and consumption ideals. Both friends, and the demands of an increasingly consumer-oriented society, create enormous pressure for young men to compete with each other in terms of possession of material goods such as motorcycles, and the undertaking of risk behaviors related to drinking, drugs, violence. The material goods are also increasingly seen as essential for attracting girls and

proving one's manhood through sexual activity and conquest. Moreover, in contrast to the established wisdom in the literature, our findings also show that family does not serve as a counteracting force in this process. Rather, parental influences are largely negative, serving to increase risk behaviors because Thai parents are not equipped to effectively cope with the rapidly changing context of adolescent lives. On the positive side, however, we find that schooling and work opportunity are motivating young men to view adolescence as an important preparatory period for acquiring the skills, training, freedom, and respect necessary for a successful adulthood.

Our findings have some important implications for policy and programmatic action with regard to youth needs in not only Thailand, but other settings as well. First, they suggest that with adolescence increasingly emerging as a legitimate period for experimentation in many non-Western cultures, a certain level of risk behavior by both boys and girls has to be acceptable. Up to a certain point, a range of risk behaviors may not be bad individually or socially; rather it is often the excess, or lack of protection associated with risk behaviors, that makes them harmful. Thus, it becomes important for policies and programs to consider harnessing or diverting risk behaviors rather than eliminating them. For example, sexual activity in itself is not necessarily harmful, but unprotected sexual activity certainly has a higher likelihood of harm. Policies and programs can effectively harness this risk behavior by providing information and options on means of protection. Similarly, risk behaviors associated with gang violence or motorcycle racing may be effectively diverted and harnessed by providing youth increased opportunities for healthy physical competition or structured recreation areas for racing and other activities. Such outlets for leisure and recreation for youth have been an essential part of the cultural scene in Western societies, but they are still often at the nascent stage in non-Western cultures.

Second, our findings indicate that a focus on youth alone is not enough. The fact that not only media and consumption are negative influences, but also adults in the family, suggests that programs and policies must direct a significant amount of attention to the environment affecting youth. In particular, interventions aimed at equipping parents for the fast-paced changes in adolescent lives may be critical in reinforcing familial institutions shaken by social change. It would be equally important to emphasize and support the positive aspects

of masculinity and adolescence in terms of young men's desire for success and achievement. Ensuring adequate resources and opportunities that build young people's human and social capital are essential investments for the future of the current generation of youth in developing countries.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Coding Descriptions for Qualitative Data

Code	Description
Health	Types of illnesses or accidents or health related problems; Access to health care (clinics, hospitals, or personnel), family planning, or sexuality information or resources; smoking; alcohol; drugs; etc.
Leisure	Hanging out; Disco; Games; Shopping; Free time (including having sex)
Aspirations	Expectations; Role Models; Desires; Wants
Generation	When there is an explicit or implicit comparison between generations; Anything that has to do with disconnects between the generations (i.e. decorum: girls not allowed to wear spaghetti straps; differences in the ways in which parents were raised vs. how they raise their children)
Gender	Includes discussion comparing boys and girls or men and women; when respondents mention boy activities or girl activities or behaviors
Problems	Anytime respondents identified a problem; Perceived problems; Solving problems
Punishment & Rules	What you are and not allowed to do; rules of behavior; obedience; punishment; going to jail; could be punished by parents, teachers, police
Violence	Mention of fights, gangs; corporal punishment
Consumption	Discussion about using money; getting money to spend on goods; spending money; desires for consumption (clothes, toys, motorcycles); going shopping, etc.
Social Network	Mention of friends, teachers, community members, coworkers, bosses, doctors, networks; people they use for help to get work or to talk with about problems or receive guidance; social network does not include kinship
Relationships That Matter	Anytime in the text when they mention the relationships that matter to them or that affect them (either negative or positive). Could be teacher, parent, friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, siblings
Motorcycles	Any mention of motorcycles
Money	Any mention about money; costs; loans; earnings; wages; getting money; wealth; spending money