

# **Gender differences in exposure to SRH information and risky sexual debut among poor Myanmar youths**

Phyu Phyu Thin Zaw<sup>1\*</sup>, Tippawan Liabsuetrakul<sup>2</sup>, Edward McNeil<sup>2</sup>, Thien Thien Htay<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Medical Research (Upper Myanmar), PyinOoLwin, Myanmar

<sup>2</sup>Epidemiology Unit, Faculty of Medicine, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Songkhla 90110, Thailand

<sup>3</sup>Ministry of Health, Nay Pyi Daw, Myanmar

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## **Abstract**

Globally, the proportion of youths has been steadily increasing, especially in Asia. This vulnerable population has limited exposure to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information leading to various reproductive health (RH) problems including risky sexual debut, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion as well as STI/HIV infections. Among known social variations which influence youth's RH, gender differences are critical for planning necessary gender appropriate interventions. This study aimed to identify gender differences in exposure to SRH information and risky sexual debut as well as associated factors among Myanmar youths in poor suburban communities of Mandalay City. A total of 444 randomly selected youths (aged 15-24 years) from all poor, suburban communities in Mandalay City took part in our survey. Gender differences in exposure to SRH information and risky sexual debut were assessed by bivariate analysis. Multivariate logistic regression was used to confirm gender differences and identify independent factors associated with main outcomes separately for males and females as well as for both. Of 444 youths interviewed, 215 were males and 229 were females. Gender differences were seen in both exposures to SRH information ( $p = 0.013$ ) and risky sexual debut ( $p = 0.003$ ). These gender differences were confirmed by multivariate analysis even after adjusting for other risk factors. For exposure to SRH information, only age group and schooling status were significant factors for females. As well as those two factors, media exposure and parental guardianship were significant factors among males. Only positive norm of premarital sex increased the likelihood of risky sexual debut among males. In contrast, unwillingness at sexual debut was a risk factor and a higher education level was a protective factor of risky sexual debut among females. Limited exposure to SRH information and high risky sexual debut among poor youths was found. There were different influential factors for RH behaviors between males and females. Policy makers as well as local RH care providers should be aware of these differences. Dissemination of reliable SRH information among youths through possible mass media, especially among males, is an urgent issue.