

Thailand's Policy Response to HIV Among Sex Workers: A Look Through A Gendered Lens

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The Thai response to HIV/AIDS is often applauded as a model of success. Targeted at female sex workers, the 100% Condom Program was incredibly effective at curbing the HIV epidemic during the 1980s and early 1990s. However, little research has been done since to examine the impact of policies and interventions on HIV/AIDS among sex workers. To address the gaps in existing research and HIV/AIDS policies, this study examines the relationship between gender of sex worker and HIV/AIDS policies utilizing existing knowledge of Thai policymaking, norms about gender and sexuality, and HIV to create a social construction theoretical framework about sex workers. This research analyzes ways that national HIV/AIDS policy reports developed by the Thai Ministry of Public Health discuss male, female, and transgender sex workers. Case study analyses of Bangkok and Chiang Mai using Thai news media that discuss HIV and sex workers are used for an additional layer of analysis.

By using both these approaches, this research uncovers policy priorities and rhetoric around sex workers both in the policymaking landscape and how policies are translated into public perceptions. Findings show that female sex workers, both historically and currently, are the focus of HIV policies and interventions. Male and transgender sex workers are surveyed inconsistently in policy, and are framed differently to female sex workers. This study concludes with recommendations for the Ministry of Public Health as well as implications for the gendered differences in discussing HIV/AIDS among sex workers.