

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

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The Key Question

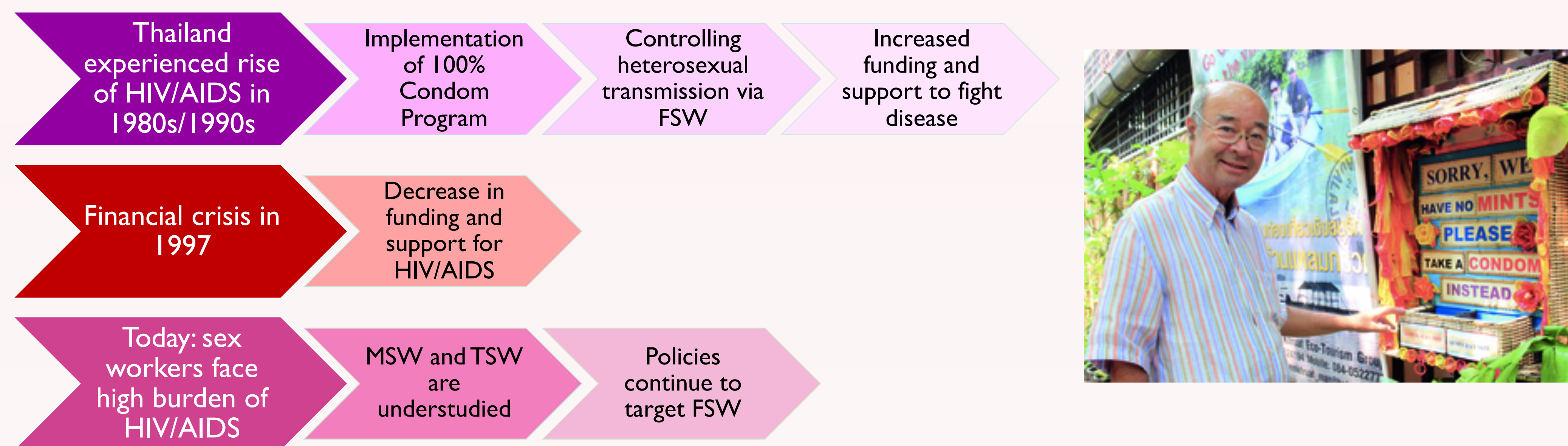
What is the relationship between gender of sex worker and national HIV policy intervention in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Thailand?

Significance:

- Limited research evaluating Thai policies on sex workers
- Male (MSW) and transgender sex workers (TSW) have been historically underserved, most research focuses on female sex workers (FSW)
- Local implementation of policies unclear

Goal: Providing targeted direction for future policy interventions addressing sex worker populations!

Historical Background



Methods

Data Sources: UNAIDS and Thai Ministry of Public Health reports, Thai news articles

- Methods: Content analysis and thematic qualitative analysis of national policies and case studies
- National policies: Examining type and intensity of intervention

Case studies: City, HIV/AIDS surveillance, gender of sex worker, sex work industry, specific interventions

- Picking Cities:
 - Bangkok is political capital, economic center, international hub, and hot spot for sex tourism (Nuttavuthisit 2007; Singh & Hart 2007)
 - Chiang Mai is economic and cultural center for northern Thailand, but less studied (Tangmunkongvorakul et al. 2010)

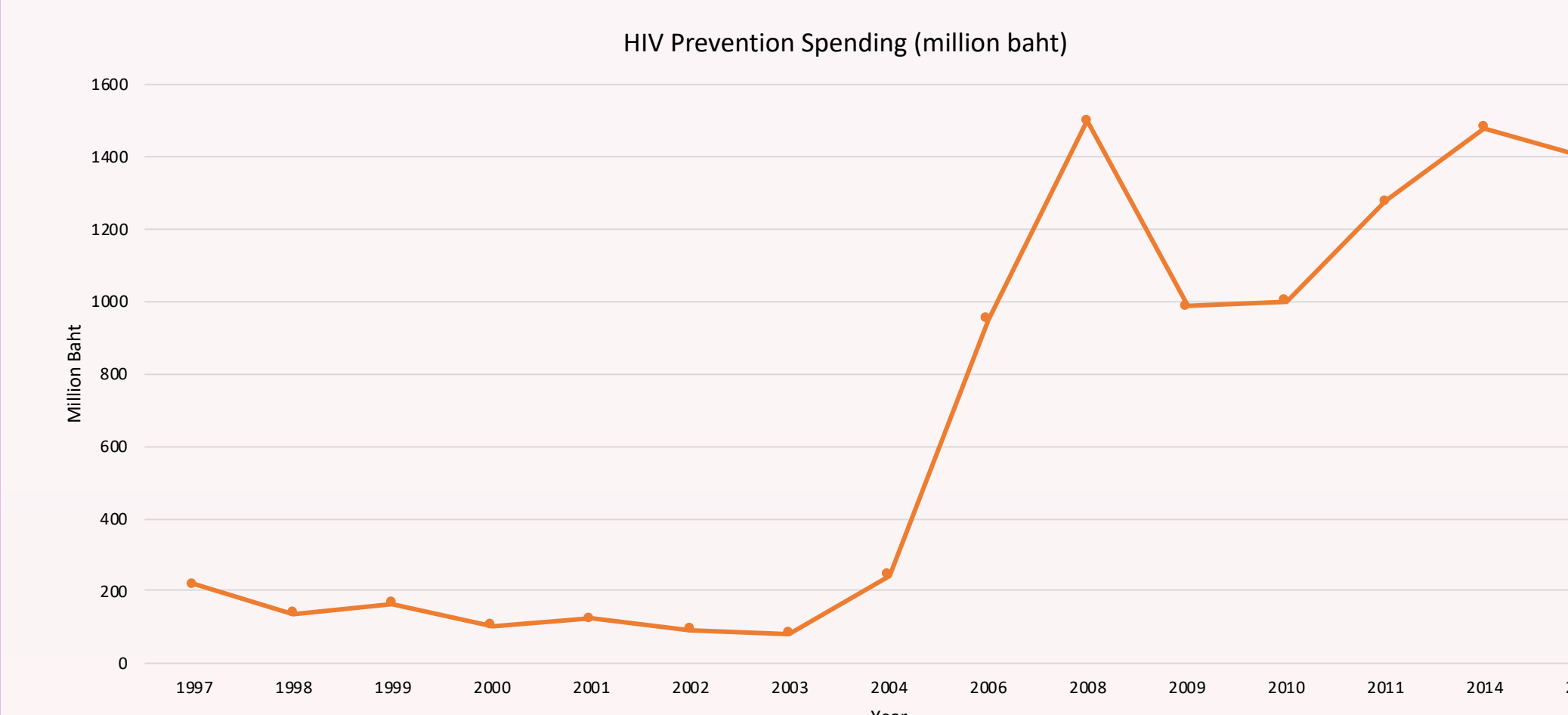
Limitations: English-only documents, limited existing research

Findings: Policy Analysis

Changes in policy imperative: Prevention-based → Reach, Recruit, Test, Treat, and Retain model

Funding allocations:

- Focus on prevention: condom distribution



Policies reflect inconsistent groupings by gender

Policy change keeping up with changes in HIV and changes with sex work

- “By risk group, 44% of the new adult infections were among MSM (including TG), 11% among PWID, and 10% among sex workers and their clients. It is projected that, in the subsequent five years, more than half of all new infections will be among MSM (including TG).” (Thailand AIDS Progress Report 2017, p. 13, 2017)

Focus on FSWs – in collecting surveillance data

- “...The effective prevention should be sought like the success with female sex workers.” (Follow-Up to The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, p. 19, 2006)

Findings: Media Analysis

Policy Discussion:

- 23.7% of articles advocated for changing prostitution laws
- 13.6% mentioned the effects of condom distribution
- 11.9% mentioned education and/or awareness campaigns about HIV/AIDS
- 8.5% included the need to provide police training for interacting with sex workers
- 42.3% of all articles did not mention any type of policy or intervention

Male Sex Workers as deviants vs. Female Sex Workers as victims:

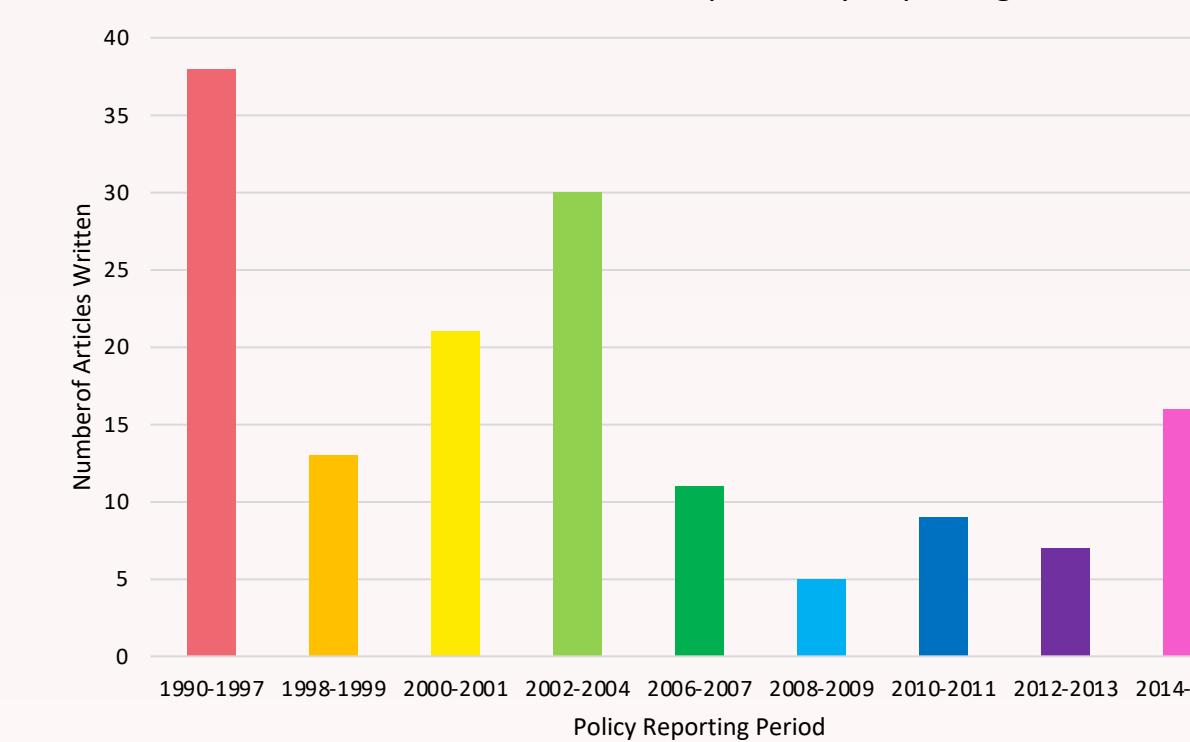
- “The daughters of Dok Kham Tai contracted HIV en masse. Thus the circle of life was lucrative but short. The girls left at 12... came back home, pustuled and emaciated, to die.” (Bangkok Post, 2015)

Sex work and HIV go against traditional Thai family values:

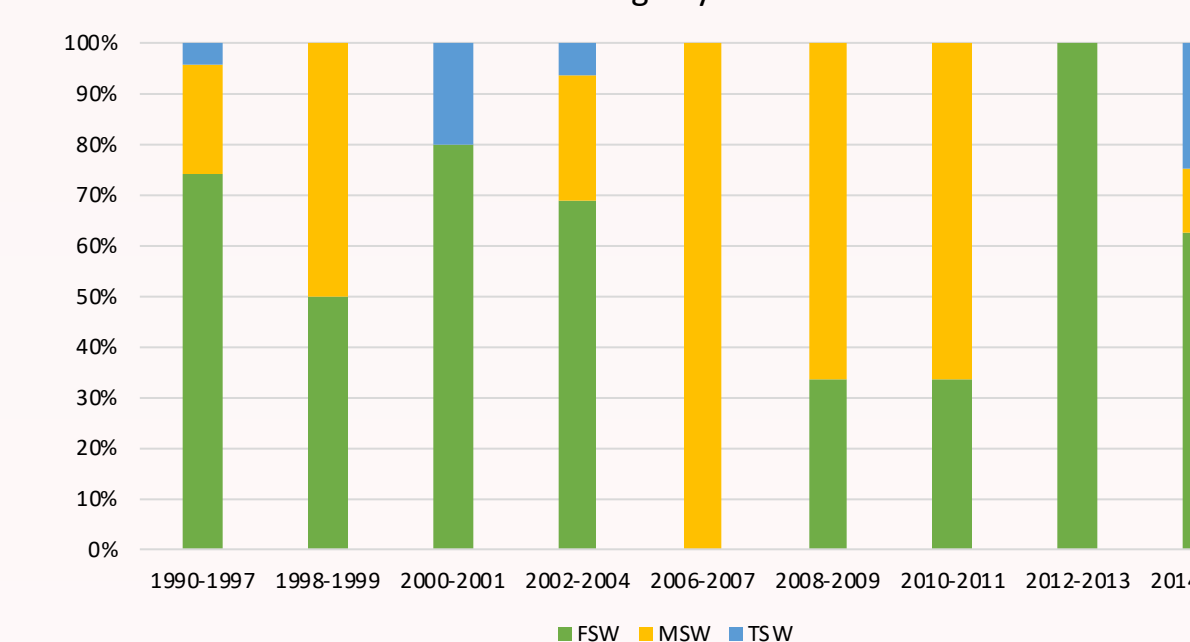
- “‘I was driven away from home. They could not accept that I had been a prostitute,’ she says. ‘Worse still, they did not want me around because I was infected with the deadly disease.’” (The Nation, 2002)

Focus on domestic sex trade between Northern Thailand → Southern Thailand

Number of News Articles Written per Policy Reporting Period



News Article Coverage by Sex Worker Gender



Over time, the substantive coverage of FSWs has changed to include more coverage of MSWs and TSWs

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Implications:

- Making sure there are specific and consistent groupings of sex workers
- Creating targeted interventions by population
- Equal coverage for MSWs, FSWs, and TSWs
- Coordination between public perception and policy perceptions
 - Defined by the language used to describe sex workers
 - Social constructions part of setting the policy agenda

Recommendations:

- Develop standard group definitions
- Expand surveillance data collection
- Engaging with community organizations
- Keeping up-to-date with technological developments
- Improving the sex work environment

Intersections Between Policy and Media

Strong association between sex tourism and HIV

Exclusion of the impact of sex trafficking in HIV policies, strong emphasis in news media

- 20.1% of all news include mention of trafficking

Emphasizing the importance of community organizations

- SWING: “‘There were no proper support group for male sex workers, so together with a group of like-minded people, we began Swing,’ ... have campaigned hard to get all male and female sex workers treated as people and with fairness.” (Bangkok Post, 2009).

References

- Nuttavuthisit, K. (2007). Branding Thailand: Correcting the negative image of sex tourism. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 3(1), 21–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000045>
- Tangmunkongvorakul, A., Banwell, C., Carmichael, G., Utomo, I. D., & Sleigh, A. (2010). Sexual identities and lifestyles among non-heterosexual urban Chiang Mai youth: Implications for health. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 12(7), 827–841.
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- Follow-Up to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS). (2006). National AIDS Prevention and Alleviation Committee.
- The village that swept away evil. (2015, October 4). *Bangkok Post*.
- Danger, but it's all we have. (2002, May 15). *The Nation*.