

# Adolescent Research Day 2021

## 'Protection of Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of COVID19'

Crowne Plaza Hotel & Zoom, 15 October 2021, Vientiane Lao PDR

**ກອງປະຊຸມຄົ້ນຄວ້າວິທະຍາສາດ ກ່ຽວກັບໄວໜຸ່ມ ຄັ້ງທີ VI**  
**6<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL ADOLESCENT RESEARCH DAY**

**"ປົກປ້ອງສຸຂະພາບ ແລະ ການພັດທະນາຂອງໄວໜຸ່ມ ໃນໄລຍະການລະບາດຂອງພະຍາດ ໂຄວິດ19"**  
**"Protection of Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of COVID19"**

15th October 2021, Vientiane Capital

**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**  
**4 QUALITY EDUCATION**  
**5 GENDER EQUALITY**

## Brief Report

## Adolescent Research Day 2021

### 'Protection of Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of COVID19'

#### Introduction:

The annual Adolescent Research Day (ARD) was established in 2016 in Lao PDR under the Noi 2030 Framework as a joint initiative by the Lao Tropical Public Health Institute (LTPHI - former National Institute of Public Health), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Medical Committee Netherlands-Vietnam (MCNV). The ARD is held prior to the annual National Health Research Forum, as a one-day conference with a specific theme related to adolescents. It provides a platform for researchers, policy-makers and development partners in the Greater Mekong Subregion to unite and share existing research and collaborate on generating new evidence.

The first adolescent research day in 2016 focused on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). The second ARD was organized in 2017 focusing on SDG 2 (End Hunger) with the theme 'Nutrition and Reproductive Health from a Life-Cycle Perspective'. The third "Social protection for Among Adolescents-Issues, Challenges and Way Forward". The 4th "Gender Equality Research Evidence in the context of the 9th Socio-Economic Development plan. The 5th "Adolescent and Development Adolescent - Removing their barriers towards a healthy and fulfilling life". And this year the 6th Adolescent Research Day was organized on 15 October 2021 at the Clown Plaza Hotel, Vientiane, Lao PDR under the theme **Protection of Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of COVID-19.**

The objectives of the Adolescent Research Day were to promote adolescent research to fill the data gap, build capacity of young researchers as well as build knowledge and research evidence on adolescents aged 10-19 years for promoting evidence-based policies and comprehensive interventions that are vital to achieve the well-being of all adolescents in the region. This year's adolescent research day focussed on adolescent health and development in the context of COVID-19, including Sexual reproductive health, Mental Health and Well-being, Gender Equality, Protection and Education.

167 participants from Lao PDR, Thailand, Japan, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, India, Philippine, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Maldives, France, United States, United Kingdom and Canada participated in the ARD by Zoom and 35 participants joined physically. The researchers and presenters from Lao PDR, Japan, Cambodia and

India presented their research evidence and experiences, which covered the current status of adolescents' issues such as sexual reproductive health, mental health and well-being, gender equality, and education, vocational skills, aspiration in Lao PDR and the Region. They also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on adolescents along with adapting the strategies and ways to cope with those circumstances, which includes discussing further research. This report provides a brief summary of the ARD sessions.

### **Opening session:**

The opening session started with the welcome of guests and participation by the masters of the ceremony Mr. Soukvixay and Ms. Amphaivanh. It was followed by a welcome remark by Dr. Latsamy Siengsounthone, Acting Director General, Lao TPHI. She stated the impressive messages and gave appreciation to all guests and participants. She also mentioned that the Adolescent Research Day was established in 2016 under the Noi Ecosystem Approach and this event is a platform, where researchers, policy makers and development partners can share their latest research evidence and panel discussion to improve the youth and adolescent well-being. She shared that the Adolescent Research Day is a stage to provide useful resources that people can use to improve sexual and reproductive health, mental health psycho social support, gender equality, education and shape better policies, strategies and action plans for youth and adolescents in Laos and in the region. She also thanked the Ministry of Health, UNFPA and Luxembourg embassy for their support and continued collaboration over the past 5 years.

Ms. Mariam A. Khan, UNFPA Representative, in her opening remarks emphasized that the research in Lao PDR is progressing with Noi 2030. She highlighted that the COVID-19 outbreak has been a challenge to achieve SDGS, ICPD2025 commitments and other National Standard, but there is a hope that we can prioritize where to invest. She further said the solid, recent data and research evidence will help guide investment, planning and implementation of interventions to support the lives of adolescents, girls and boys. She also mentioned that 60% of the Lao population are youth, investments on them are crucial. She hoped to improve the understanding of promising practices to address adolescent pregnancy, unmet need for family planning, gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial issues and school drop-out during and post COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Nicolas Tasch, Attaché from Development Cooperation, Luxembourg Embassy in Vientiane. delivered his remark by describing the corporation and overview of Luxembourg in ICP5 and RMNCAH Strategy. He stated that this year's topic is very

special and offers a great opportunity to work on youth protection in times of crisis. He emphasized that Lao PDR has a large percentage of young population, so we should take special measures to protect adolescents and understand the limited factors that they are facing. He also talked about the development of adequate tools to make appropriate information on SRH available and reachable, adolescents from risk factors. He further said the evidence in this forum will help us to improve the right measures and adapt the existing policies to protect adolescents from harmful behaviour and practices.



*Mr. Soukvixay, Ms. Amphavanh , Ms. Mariam A. Khan at the opening session*

## Session I: Sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents

(Chair: Dr. Latsamy Siengsounthone, Acting Director General Lao TPPI)

There were 3 presentations focussing on adolescent girls. The first one was: An Analysis on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Early Marriage in Sekong provinces by Ms. Casey Morrison, Gender Equality Advisor, Care International in Laos. Her objectives were to find ways to improve adolescent sexual reproductive health behaviour and reduce early marriage in remote ethnic communities in Sekong. She highlighted the needs to increase access to social support, livelihood opportunities, family planning and maternal health services. Furthermore, she also mentioned how to mobilise girls, boys, parents, community authorities to challenge discriminatory gender norms, and how to address root causes and end the culture of normalcy around early marriage.

The second presentation was: the Menstrual health and factors associated with school absence among secondary school girls in Luang Prabang Province, Lao People's Democratic Republic, which was presented by Ms. Souphalak Inthaphatha, PhD Candidate, Department of Healthcare Administration, Nagoya University Graduate School of Medicine, Japan. She mentioned that as to fill the gap of the limited information on school sanitation and menstrual health among secondary school girls, she explored knowledge and practices surrounding menstrual health including identifying factors associated with school absence due to menstruation. She highlighted that school toilets should be more separated and equipped with more waste bins, as well as menstrual education that should start at elementary schools and teacher training on menstrual health should be promoted.

The third presentation refers to the factors associated with knowledge of HIV/AIDS among adolescents in Lao PDR, which was presented by Mr. Soulinthone Phandavong, a researcher from Luangprabang Provincial Health Sciences College. This study aimed to assess the knowledge and related factors of HIV/AIDs among adolescents aged 15-19 in Lao PDR, who are at high risk to contract HIV/AIDS. She mentioned that education and access to information are key factors, to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. She highlighted the importance of delivering sexual and reproductive health information and education including on HIV/AIDS to school curriculum, on television and online platforms to help adolescents girls and boys protect themselves from risky behaviors and help them have a non-discriminatory attitude towards people living with HIV.

## Recommendations during the discussions:

- Delivers training about health education ( SRH, Menstrual health,..) in villages especially to promote mothers and children's wellbeing
- Improve the policies of school toilets and develop a checklist (using UNICEF standards) of elements to make available the toilets with inclusive design for better access.

## Session II: Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents

(Chair: Dr. Tej Ram Jat, Program Specialist, ASRH, UNFPA, Lao PDR)

There were 3 presentations from different researchers, this session mainly focuses on mental health and well-being among adolescents in Lao PDR and the region by exchanging research studies with other researchers both from Cambodia and India. The first presentation is Unmasking COVID-19 mental health and Psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents, which was presented by Ms. Roslyn Gabriel, Country Program Director, World Vision International, Lao PDR. This study aimed to understand the socio economic impact of COVID-19 on the lives of vulnerable children in Asia and the way forward, and showed that children were the most affected group by the severe consequences of lockdown and major economic crisis. She mentioned that during the pandemic, vulnerable children in Laos experienced desperation, terror and irritation, which they couldn't control by themselves.

The second presentation was on mental health of adolescents and young people during and post COVID-19 pandemic and adaptation strategies in Cambodia by Dr. J. Bhoomi Kumar, Director and Consultant Child Psychiatrist, Caritas-CCAMH, Chey Chumneas Referral Hospital Takhmau, Cambodia. His study found that during the pandemic and post pandemic, adolescent boys and girls puberty, education status and mental health conditions will be affected. He highlighted that adolescents girls and young people in LMICs are unable to cope with educational, social and economic impact of the pandemic and are more vulnerable for emotional, behaviour problems including suicide. As a result, he suggested the digital platform for young people to access the help services with confidential settings, he also highlighted how to promote participation to become active change makers to meet the psycho-social and mental health needs of their peers during the pandemic.

The third presentation was on promoting social inclusion for young people affected by psycho-social disability in India: A realistic evaluation by Mr. Varadharajan Srinivasan, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India. His study aimed to evaluate social inclusion and resilience intervention, and sought to understand how and what conditions can improve participation and mental health among young people with psycho-social disabilities (PSD). As a result, he highlighted that Mechanism facilitating and role modelling by peer facilitators can contribute to increase the support on mental health and social inclusion.

### **Recommendations during the discussions:**

- Work in diversified partnerships to promote child well-being including nutrition, reducing risk of early marriage, preventing GBV and violence against children
- Provide health and child protection messaging and psychosocial support reaching every vulnerable child and family
- Strengthen child protection systems and partner with community leaders to address the physical and emotional abuse of children.
- Support care giver on making child protection and mental health psychosocial support.
- Where financial resources on care services are limited, build the community support groups
- Develop a Mental Health Psychosocial Support Strategy
- Innovate on child and adolescents mental health policies and therapies.
- Promote healthy coping mechanisms and positive mental health through life skills education

### **Session- III: Gender equality among adolescents and protection from harmful practices**

**(Chair: Dr. Sengchanh Kounnavong, Consultant of Lao TPHI)**

In this session, three presentations were presented by researchers from different fields of study, which mainly focused on gender equality, including people with disabilities. The first presentation is the Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Paktha district, Bokeo Province, Lao PDR, which was presented by Mr. Amphone Vongsouphanh, National University of Laos. This study aimed to provide further analysis on child marriage and forced marriage among minority ethnic groups in Laos. He highlighted that patriarchal

culture forces young girls to get married , so that parents can invest in sons rather than daughters. Therefore, the girls have to drop out from school and take full responsibility for household chores. He further mentioned that parents do human trafficking by selling their daughters to foreigners (chinese).

The second presentation was one Women and Girls' Labour Migration in Luang Namtha and Phongsaly provinces, which was presented by Ms. Pimpisa Sriprasert, Gender Equality Manager, Care International. This study aimed to investigate the situation around women and girls' labour migration in Northern Laos. As a result, it was found that most migrants engaged in seasonal agricultural migration. She highlighted that the reason for migration is lack of rural livelihood options, relative poverty, influence of consumerism, and social norms pushing young people to financially support their parents. She also mentioned that the COVID-19 has affected the pattern of migration. Due to the pandemic, there is a huge number of returning migrants to Laos from abroad.

The third presentation was on the Protection of Women and Girls with Disability in the Context of COVID 19 by Ms. Chanhpheng Sivila, Lao Disable Women's Association. She described that there are still some barriers that women and girls with disability have to face such as the health services, educations, communications etc..., she also highlighted that because of the COVID-19 outbreak, women and girls with disabilities faced increased risks of losing income and were unable to work from home, because their products have to use looms and potter's wheels in the workplace.

### **Recommendation from the presentation:**

- Reevaluate the school year calendar to make it more suitable to the needs of upland adolescents
- Increase support for the LWL shelter (capacity building and finance) in

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