

Chapter I

Introduction

Rationale

Over the past two decades our Thai Society has changed in many ways which have affected our way of life. One significant change is that of family structure and values. Our society is moving away from traditional practices to accepting individual expression and nonconformity. While some are loyal to the old practices dealing with individual and family life, others are looking straight forward to new paths for themselves, breaking down barriers for their own satisfaction. One cause of social change is globalization which facilitates the spread of languages, social behaviors and values. Moreover, globalization causes cultural flow. Some people in the east appreciate that westerners are free to be independent from their parents and adopt these attitudes. They think what westerners do is good and it is fascinating for them, which makes them imitate, for example, cohabitation. ไม่เคิด ใจ (2547) stated that whatever westerners do most Thai people accept as good examples and good models.

Today in America cohabitation has replaced marriage as the dominant way male-to-female unions are formed. The number of cohabiting people has grown 100 percent since 1960 with more than 4.7 million American couples currently cohabiting (Whitehead and Papone, 2002). In France between the mid 1970s and the late 1980s, the percentage of women aged 20-24 who cohabited rose from 11 percent to 49 percent, from 57 percent to 78 percent in Sweden, and 48 percent to 75 percent in Denmark. In Great Britain, this percentage increased from 11 percent to 55 percent between 1980 and 1995 (Jenkins, 1998).

Not only do western people cohabit, but also Thais. Nowadays Thai people's cohabitation is accepted as normal (สุรพช ทวีศักดิ์, 2547). Furthermore, their behavior has spread to college students (ໄສພິນ ທມມະກຳວົງ, 2544), for a variety of reasons. They may cohabit because it is the fashion, it makes them feel alive, secure in terms of spirit, more meaningful, or socially accepted. In addition, it is social influence – the tendency to conform one's own conduct to that of others' – that affects an individual's behavior. Such perceptions are often adopted from others' behavior especially those of westerners. Whatever westerners do, Thai people accept and adopt as good patterns or models. Their acceptance and adoption exercise a big effect on the spread of cohabitation which is deviant from local culture.

Many research projects on cohabitation have been undertaken. But only a few of those have been done about Thai society. One study found that the trend towards cohabitation of university students in Bangkok was rapidly increasing (พรทิพย์ วงศ์เพชรสังฆ, 2528:2).

Not only does cohabitation occur in the capital or in big cities, but it also happens at Rajamangala Institute of Technology, Lampang campus, which is in a rural area. Cohabitation worries a lot of people concerned for example, parents, teachers, residences' owners and the seniors. For parents, they may not approve of their children's behavior, especially the girls' parents who would not be happy about cohabitation (Isarabhakdi, 2000:94). Parents always say that the main purpose of their children's lives in the college is to study, not to have opposite sex friends of the opposite sex as lovers because it distracts their attention away from their lessons. Moreover, they may not graduate, as they may get pregnant and bear children which would cause the parents to feel embarrassed. Furthermore, their children are not yet economically independent. The parents want them to finish their study and get a good job with a good salary.

Some RIT Lampang campus teachers are also worried about students' cohabitation. People in Thai society trust teachers. The teachers are the parents when the kids are at school. But there are some factors that cause students to cohabit which teachers have no control over.

The residences' owners and the villagers are not satisfied with students living together while studying (ໄຕພິນ ທມະກົງ, 2544). Some seniors around the campus who are worried about those students said that they lacked morality and ethics. They said that cohabitation was deviant and not normative, which would serve as bad examples for their offspring.

As a teacher at RIT, Lampang campus who has been working with students at this level for almost ten years, I have observed this trend towards increasing cohabitation, which inspired me to conduct the research to find out what caused the students to cohabit, what advantages cohabiting students got during their shared lives, and what they expect after they graduate from this school.

Hypotheses

College students cohabit for several reasons. They might need to satisfy their sexual need or just cohabit to have social interaction so that they do not feel lonely or feel unwanted. Their partners may help them with the chores and school work. It is assumed that love, sexual need, less expense or imitating friends and models have caused some college students to spend their lives together while studying. Despite all the reasons that bring them to stay together, they may separate from their partners or may get married to each other after graduation.

Purposes of the Study

1. To identify the factors that make students cohabit.
2. To study the cohabitants' gratification: sexual need, financial supports, social acceptance, feeling loved, and so on.
3. To examine the cohabitants' expectations after graduation.

Application Advantages

As the trend towards college students' cohabitation increases, the study of the factors that cause them to cohabit, gratification during cohabitation, and their expectation after graduation will be conducted in order to understand their behavior, to be aware of globalized society, and to deal with unexpected problems. This study may be useful to any organizations dealing with these kinds of problems.

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted at Rajamangala Institute of Technology (RIT), Lampang campus. The samplings were 100 cohabiting students who completed the questionnaires, and 15 male and 15 female cohabiting students who supplied information through interviews. The research was carried out from October 2003 to May 2004.

Definitions

College students refers to the students at Rajamangala Institute of Technology, Lampang campus.

Cohabitation means students sharing their lives at Rajamangala Institute of Technology, Lampang campus, of opposite sex, in the same room or in different residences but leading their daily lives together like husbands and wives.

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