

## GAY INMATES AND SEXUAL INTIMACY BEHIND BARS: EVIDENCE FROM THAILAND

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### ABSTRACT

*Considerable research has found that gay men in Thailand are becoming more socially accepted. However, reliable information concerning gay prison inmates is scarce. This article investigates intimate relationships among gay inmates and the problems that derive from such relationships in a prison environment. Five gay inmates in the Nakorn Pathom Province Central Prison (Thailand) were given face-to-face interviews employing the qualitative research method. Findings indicated that newly-admitted gay inmates felt emotionally unstable because they feared strong social repercussions from straight inmates. However, after receiving support from senior gay friends, gay inmates felt more confident when projecting their gay identities. Gay inmates started their intimate relationships after making friends and having suggestive conversations with another gay inmate. Two major problems arising from same-sex relationships were identified. One is intense jealousy among gay inmates and the outbreak of sexually-transmitted diseases is the other. Very few wore condoms while engaging in sexually intimate acts due to a lack of safe-sex information and regular supply of condoms. Some gay inmates believed that sex without condoms showed sincerity. Others said that condoms were in short supply because of tight security checks from prison guards. In conclusion, there are very few gay inmates projecting their gay identity in prison. The number of hidden gay inmates still remains unreported. The alleviation of the problems from same-sex relationships is very difficult because guards fail to identify those inmates with hidden gay identities. The authors argue that the Department of Corrections realizes the presence and difficulties of gay inmates, but the budget to tackle their problems is lacking.*

*Keywords: Same-sex relationships, Gay men, Gay inmates, Gay in Thailand*