



## CHAPTER III

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical model used to explain the sexual attitudes and behaviors of youth in order to get better understanding and insights in this area of study. There are many theoretical approaches that explain adolescent sexual behavior at different levels such as the individual, the family, and the extra familial level. Each of these theories has their advantages and disadvantages to explain sexual behavior. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of this study is described in detail.

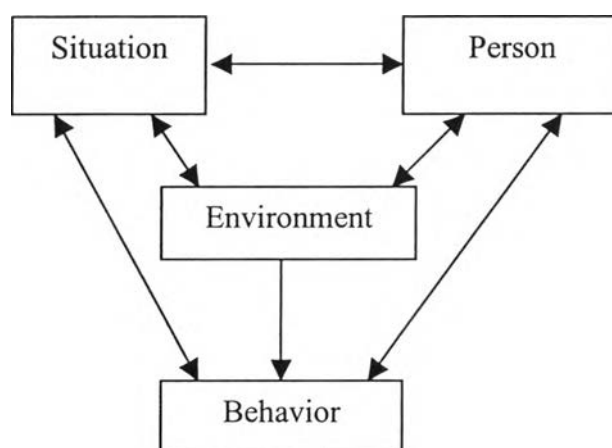
Definitions of theories, concepts and conceptual frameworks were briefly reviewed in order to understand their meaning before describing the theories applied in this study. Theories are designed to explain particular phenomena. A theory is comprised of a series of propositions, each of which is a statement of some association between concepts (Babbie, 1995; Klein & White, 1996). Conceptual frameworks have also been seen as a set of assumptions and ideas about the fundamental features of the world or human life (Doherty et al., 1993). In this view, a conceptual framework serves as a guide to focus inquiry.

Based on the revision of the concepts and theories concerned with psychosocial and behavior aspects (Chapter II), conceptual and theoretical variables were identified for application in this study.

## 3.2 Study perspectives

### 3.2.1 Health related Behavior

Some theorists (e.g., Bandura 1986; Frankenhaeuser 1991; Magnusson 1981; Sadava 1987) have argued influentially that a comprehensive understanding of any behavior must begin with an integrative analysis of (a) environmental factors (including the broad socio- cultural- or macro-environment), (b) situational factors that concern more immediate social situations, contexts, or microenvironments surrounding the behavior, (c) person factors, including characteristics of the person performing the behavior, (d) the behavior itself and closely related behaviors, and (e) interactions among all of these (Figure 2). However, these theories did not identify which environmental, situational, and personal characteristics contribute to health related behaviors (HRBs).



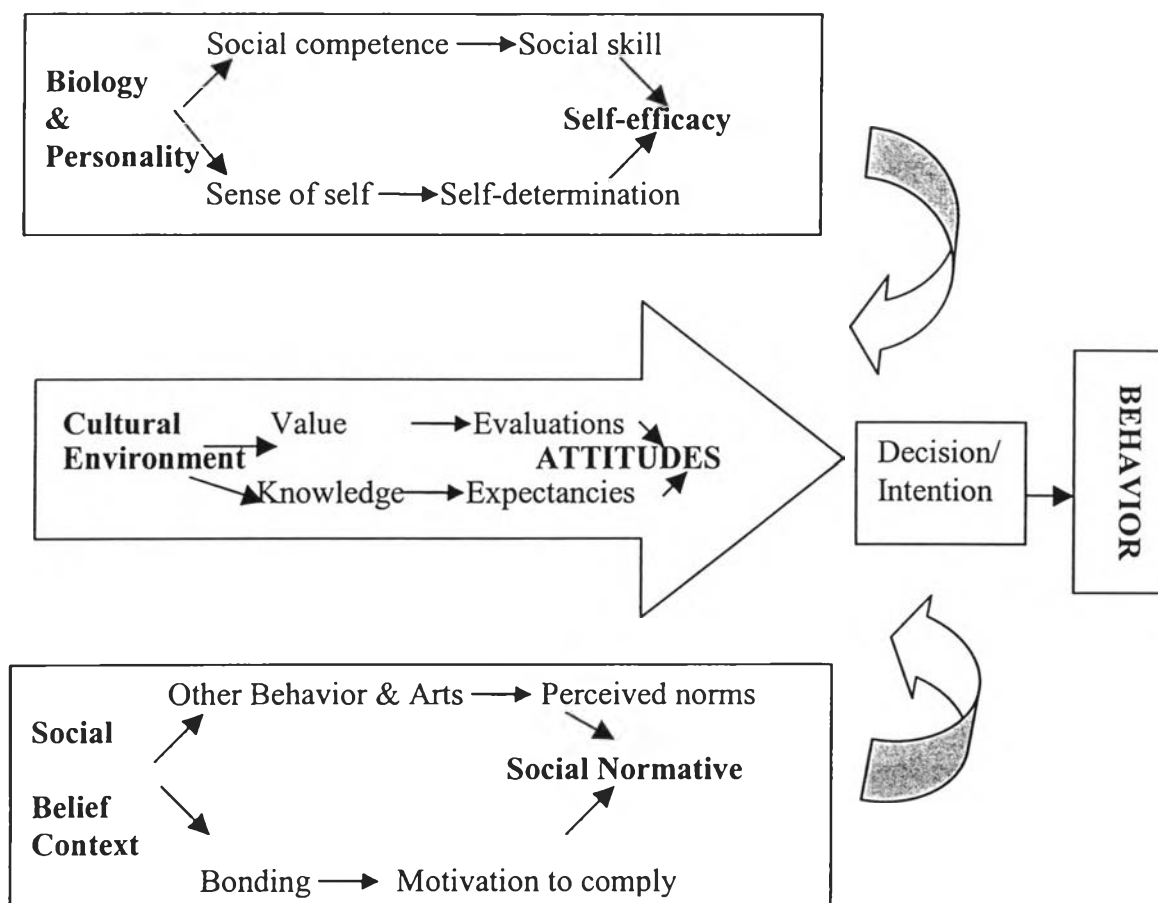
**Figure 2:** General Interaction Model of Health related Behaviors

### 3.2.2 Theory of Triadic Influence (TTI)

In spite of the abundant micro level theories, no one theory tried to assemble together attitudinal, social, and intrapersonal influences on HRBs. In addition, no one theory has attempted to describe the mechanisms by which highly distal or background factors and highly proximal factors work together to influence HRBs. Consequently, the Theory of Triadic Influence (TTI) provides an integration of several influential micro level theories of HRBs (Flay & Petraitis, 1994).

The TTI was designed to provide the specifics, which are absent from Figure 4. Like Ajzen's (1985, 1988) theory of planned behavior, the TTI includes the assumption that HRBs are most immediately controlled by decisions or intentions, and that decisions to perform health-promoting or health compromising behaviors are a function of one's (a) attitude toward performing HRBs, (b) social normative pressures to perform HRBs, and (c) perceptions of self-efficacy in performing HRBs. Unlike Ajzen's (1985, 1988) model, the TTI theory assumes that health-related attitudes, social norms, and self-efficacy represent three "streams of influence" that have different origins and flow through different variables.

The TTI is a new comprehensive theory that integrates constructs from all previous theories. This theory includes seven "tiers" of "causes" of behaviours that range from very proximal to distal to ultimate, and three "streams of influence" that flow through the seven "tiers": social, attitudinal and interpersonal factors (Figure 3). The first stream represents attitudinal influences. Attitudinal influences are thought to originate in the broad cultural or macro-environment, and flow through factors that affect health-related values, knowledge, expectations, and evaluations regarding the personal, financial, and social consequences of HRBs. The second stream represents social influences. Social influences are thought to originate in one's current social situation or immediate microenvironment, and flow through factors that affect social normative beliefs regarding HRBs. The final stream-intrapersonal influences are viewed as inherited dispositions and personality characteristics through competence and health-related sense self-efficacy. In general, the TTI contends that attitudinal; social, and intrapersonal influences independently and in unison affect health-related decisions (Flay & Petraitis, 1994). The TTI also specifies different levels of influence on behavior for various factors (Flay & Petraitis, 1994).



Source: Flay and Petraitis (1994)

**Figure 3:** Three streams of Influences on Health related Behaviors

### 3.2.2.1 Attitudinal Influences on HRBs

The TTI contends that health-related beliefs and personal values converge to shape attitudes toward HRBs. In a manner similar to other theories (Becker 1974; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Rogers 1983), the TTI adopts an expectancy-value notion of attitudes. It contends that attitudes toward most HRBs are shaped by (a) expectations regarding the health, financial, and social consequences of a given HRB (i.e., outcome expectancies); and (b) evaluations of those consequences. Moreover, the theory assumes that expectations are shaped by exposure to health-related information from the broad socio-cultural environment, and evaluations are shaped by health-related values, which are transmitted from the socio-cultural environment. These forces combine to shape health-

related attitudes that, in turn, contribute to decisions to engage in a health-promoting behavior or a health-compromising behavior (Flay & Petraitis, 1994).

### ***3.2.2.2 Social Influences***

The social influences come from the individual's setting, which consist of perceived social pressure to adopt HRBs. The origin of the social influence streamline is derived from justifying the attitudes and behaviors of other people to whom one is most closely bonded.

The conditions in an individual's immediate social setting operate in two ways. First, immediate social settings or contexts will directly affect to whom an individual becomes most closely connected and will indirectly affect with whom an individual is motivated to comply. Second, social settings or microenvironments can contribute to an individual's HRBs by affecting the health-related attitudes, values, and behaviors of other people in the same environment. In turn, these factors are thought to affect one's perceptions of norms concerning a given behavior. In addition, the TTI assumes that perceived norms and motivation to comply combine to affect social normative beliefs directly, and shape decisions to adopt a particular HRB indirectly (Flay & Petraitis, 1994).

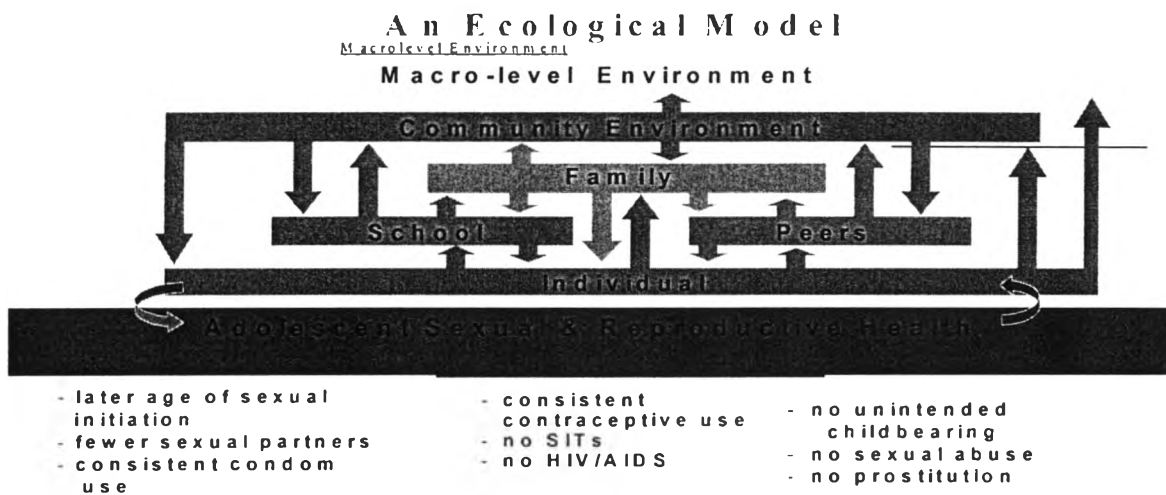
### ***3.2.2.3 Intrapersonal Influences***

The theory recognizes that inherited traits and personality dispositions might also contribute to health-related decisions and behaviors. Several personality theorists have argued that personality can be characterized with five basic dimensions, sometimes called "The Big Five" such as:

- 1) Behavioral control (e.g., behavioral constraint, impulsivity, task persistence, hyperactivity, aggressiveness, and motivation to achieve);
- 2) Emotional control (e.g., psychological adjustment, emotional stability, neuroticism, and emotional distress);
- 3) Extraversion/introversion (e.g., social activity, social adaptability, and assertiveness);
- 4) Sociability (e.g., likability, friendliness, compliance, and conformity); and
- 5) Intellect or general intelligence.

### 3.2.3 Ecological Model

The ecological systems theory emphasizes multiple systems that influence a person's behavior and the reciprocal relationships among them as mentioned in Chapter 2. At a minimum, the primary systems of influence are the self, the family, and extra familial systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). However, these risk factors exist at multiple levels of an adolescent's life, namely individual, family, and extra familial levels such as peers, school and neighborhood (Figure 4).



Source: Blum and Nelson-Mmari, 2003.

**Figure 4:** Ecological Model

### 3.3 Research Questions

1. What is the level of sexual attitudes and behaviors of unmarried youth in the Vientiane Capital City by gender?
2. What is the relationship between socio-demographic background and individual characteristics of youth (including feeling towards family, main source of sex education) and parents, intimate relationship and friend's undesirable behaviors, peer influence, parent-youth interaction namely perceived parental-youth connectedness, parent-youth general and sexual communication and parental expectation regarding sexuality and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors?

3. What influence, if any, does the gender of youth have effect on the relationship?

### **3.4 Research design**

To research the sexual attitudes and behaviors of unmarried youth, which are the sensitive and private issues, it is needed to design the study more appropriately. Moreover, sexual behavior is largely private activity, subject to varying degree of social, cultural, religious, moral and legal norms and constraints. A challenge faced was to generate unbiased and precise measures of individual and population pattern. As Catania, Binson, Van der Straten et al. (1995) noted that methods for the sex survey are required to reduce the measurement error, which may be introduced, by participation bias, recall and comprehensive problems and respondents' willingness to report sensitive and sometimes socially censured attitudes and behaviors.

A cross-sectional descriptive design was employed in this study using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to answer the research questions aforementioned. As Baker (1998) states that a cross sectional study can accomplish the aim of exploration or description. It can also be used explanatory studies since background information and retrospective data can be related to current statuses, and current statuses to future expectations and aspirations.

### **3.5 Rationale for the Study Approach**

A cross-sectional study is a descriptive study in which aims to describe the overall distribution of behaviours in population. Since cross-sectional studies can be thought of as providing a "snapshot" of the frequency and characteristics of a social event at a particular point in time (Baker, 1998; Fenton, Johson, Mcmanus & Erens, 2001).

A cross-sectional study is the simplest form of an observational study. The distinguished feature is that exposures and outcomes deal at the same time. Population for this type of study might be without exposure and no events, with exposure and no event, no exposure and with event and with exposure and with events. Data was collected retrospectively in relation at a point or period in time. All information was

collected from the subject at the same time and subjects are contacted only once. It describes an association between exposure and event simultaneously (Babbie, 1995). The cross-sectional design is more appropriate research method for studying several factors and outcomes at one point in time due to short time and less expensive than other study design (Page et al., 1995).

The nature of this research is required qualitative research method such as focus group discussions to understand the social context of sexual attitudes and behaviors of unmarried youth such as why do they engaged into premarital sexual behaviors and the role of parents as protective factor particularly in a salient Lao culture. The use of combination research design is to better understand the phenomena of event of interest such as sexual attitudes and behaviors of unmarried youth. Qualitative research generally seeks answers to questions by examining various social setting and the individuals who inhabit these settings, or understanding how human arrange themselves and their setting and how inhabitants of the settings make sense of their surroundings through social structures and roles and so on (Berg, 2001).

### **3.6 Conceptual Framework**

From the review of theories and literature (Chapter II), there are different factors influencing youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors. Many reports (Miller & Fox, 1987; Moore & Rosenthal, 1993) pointed out that youth sexual attitudes and behaviors are influenced by biological and psychosocial factors within individual, proximal relationships in family, peer groups and socio-cultural context. The conceptual framework can help provide guidance to the research teams in the implementation of the research. The ideas involved in the conceptual framework are developed in the Figure 5. The conceptual framework of this study is driven from the Ecological Model and Theory of Triadic Influence. According to the TTI, behaviors are driven from the social, attitudinal and interpersonal factors as mentioned earlier in this chapter. These three factors and the decisions are a function of one's social normative pressure to perform health-related behaviors, attitudes toward performing health-related behaviors and perceptions on self-efficacy in performing health-related behaviors.



In addition, factors that influencing sexual attitudes and behaviors are functioning through three levels namely socio-demographic characteristic of respondents and parents (Model A); family relationship (family-respondent connectedness and general and sexual communication- Model B) and perceived parental expectations, intimate relationship, partner's behavior and peer influence (Full Model).

### **1) Socio-demographic Characteristic of youth**

Various literatures (Eggleston et al., 1999; Allen et al., 1997; Taris & Semin, 1997; Rossa et al., 1997; Laura et al., 1996) demonstrated that youth's socio-demographic and parent's background factors have an influence on youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors. Age, education, working status, sufficient income of youth for expenses, main source of sex education, feeling towards family and living arrangement have a direct influence on sexual attitudes and behaviors (Path 1) and parent-youth connectedness and communication (Path 2).

### **2) Socio-demographic Characteristic of Parents**

Moreover, the parent's background namely age, parent's education, marital status, working status and their occupations also have a direct influence on the level of parent-youth connectedness and parent-youth general and sexual communication and independently influence on youth sexual attitudes and behaviors (Path 3 and 4).

### **3) Parent-youth connectedness and Parent-youth communication**

This model postulates that there are two parent-youth interaction factors that directly will influence sexual behavior and attitudes of youth. According to TTI, proposed links between social attachment and behaviors, this model also suggests that the level of parent-youth connectedness and parent-youth communication will have a direct effect on the outcome variables (sexual behavior and attitude) (Path 5 and 6). Additionally, the model suggests that there is an interaction between parent-youth connectedness, parent-youth communication that has influence on the level of sexual behaviors and attitudes of youth (Path 7).

The parent-youth interaction items were asked both in the quantitative and qualitative research method. Especially, qualitative research is appropriate to answer certain kinds of questions such as the social values regarding sexuality, the role of parents in protection of their children from premarital sexual behavior namely parent-youth connectedness, parent-youth communication and perceived parental expectation regarding towards sexuality.

#### **4) Perceived parent-youth expectation regarding sexuality**

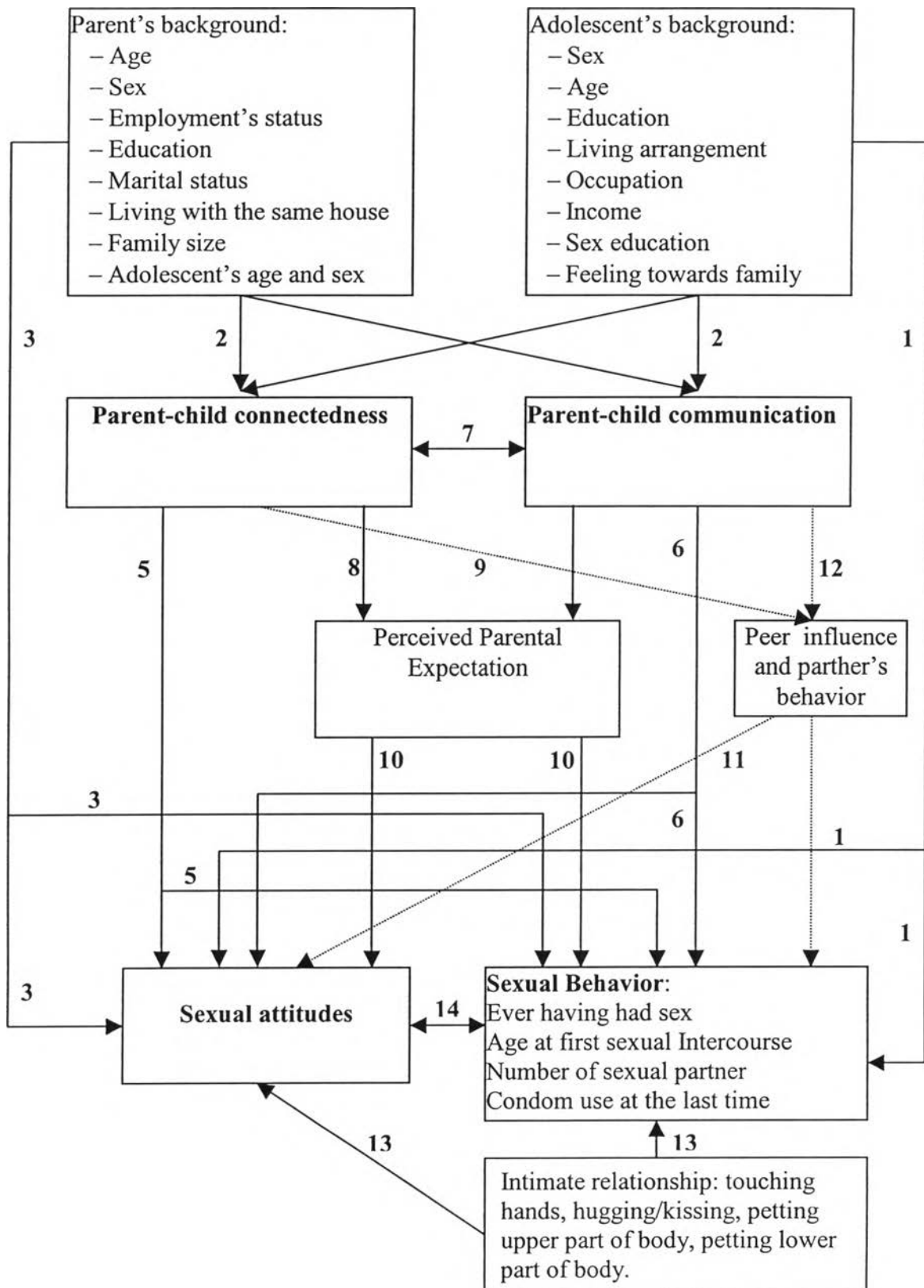
Based on the TTI, suggested relations between perception on parental expectation and sexual behavior and attitudes, this model proposes that youth's perceived parental expectation towards sexuality will have a direct effect on the sexual behavior and attitudes (Path 10). Given the key role of parental expectation regarding sex, this model included two parent-youth interaction, namely the level of parent-youth connectedness and level of parent-youth communication about general and sexual issues are hypothesized to have a direct effect on youth's perceived parental expectation regarding sexuality (Path 8 and 9).

#### **5) Peer influence and Partner's Undesirable Behaviors**

Furthermore, this model also suggested the attitudinal variables such as peer influence and partner's behavior have an independent influence on youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors (Path 11). The level of parent-youth connectedness and communication was mediated by the level of peer influence (Path 12).

#### **6) Intimate relationship**

The model also included the intimate relationship which has a direct effect on the Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors (Path 13).



**Figure 5:** Conceptual Framework of this Study “The influence of parent-child interaction on sexual behaviors and attitudes of youths in the Vientiane Capital City, Lao PDR” (modified from Sieving et al., 2000)

### 3.7 Operational Definition

1. **Sexual Behavior** – is referred to heterosexual sex and included ever had sex, age at first sexual behavior, number of sexual partner and condom use at the last time.
2. **Sexual attitudes** – is the belief, opinion and intentions to act regarding premarital sexual activity and condom use and various aspects of sexual relationships. The sexual attitude is categorized into 2 groups such as positive or liberal attitudes and negative or conservative attitudes towards sexuality.
3. **Parent-child Connectedness** - is defined, as perception of subjects regarding closeness to mother/father, perceived caring by mother and/or father, satisfaction with relationship between mother and/or father and children, feeling loved and wanted by mother/father.
4. **Parent-youth general communication-** is denoted as perception of youth on the communication with parents in their daily life and their feeling while communicating with parents.
5. **Parent-child communication about sexual issues-** is defined as perception of subjects on the frequency of talking with their child about sex, the consequences of having sex, including pregnancy, STDs, HIV/AIDS.
6. **Perceived parental expectations** - is defined as the perception of subjects on parental disapproval of sex. This measure is based on the youth's report.
7. **Peer Influence** is referred to someone in their own age trying to persuade youth to dating involving sex.

### 3.8 Hypotheses

#### 1. Hypothesis 1

There is a relationship between socio-demographic background of respondent (age, attending school, education, employment's status, sufficient income, living arrangement, feeling towards family, main source of sex education) and youth sexual attitudes and behaviors.

## **2. Hypothesis 2**

There is a relationship between the family structural variables (parent's marital status, parents' education, employment's status of mothers, parent's living with the same house with youth, family size) and youth sexual attitudes and behaviors.

## **3. Hypothesis 3**

There is a negative relationship between parent-youth connectedness and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

## **4. Hypothesis 4**

There is a negative relationship between parent-youth communication about general issues and sexual topics and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

## **5. Hypothesis 5**

There is a negative relationship between perceived parental expectation regarding sexual activity and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

## **6. Hypothesis 6**

There is a relationship between intimate relationships, partner's behavior and peer influence and youth sexual attitudes and behaviors.

## **7. Hypothesis 7**

There is a relationship between socio-demographic factors, intimate relationship and peer influence, parent-youth connectedness, parent-youth communication and perceived parental expectation regarding sexuality, intimate relationship, partner's behavior and peer influence and youth's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

### **3.9 Summary**

Based on the review of existing theories, this study adopted the Theory of Triadic Influence including the three stream influences and Ecology Model. The main elements of the conceptual framework were emphasized. In addition, hypotheses were formulated according to the conceptual framework.