

SURVEY

Pichet vows to cut teen pregnancy

PRANGTHONG JITCHAROENKUL

Digital Economy and Society Minister Pichet Durongkaveroj is vowing a renewed push to get the rate of unplanned teen pregnancies down, after new National Statistical Office (NSO) figures confirmed Thailand's rate is one of the highest in Southeast Asia.

"State agencies must make the best use of the information to improve the well-being of Thai women and children, especially teen pregnancy reduction programmes," Mr Pichet, who oversees the NSO, said yesterday.

According to the findings, released yesterday, Thai women in the North and South had the highest teenage pregnancy rate. In the northern region, there were 72 adolescent mothers per 1,000 people, while there were 58 teen mums per 1,000 people in the South.

However, the survey also found young people aged 15 and 24 have heard about Aids, and almost half of them can correctly identify ways to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV. Various other areas of improvement included an increase in birth registration, better access to clean drinking water and sanitation, and primary school attendance, which all were recorded at above 95%. Yet the survey discovered one

in 10 children aged below five are stunted or too short for their ages. The rate is significantly greater among children whose mothers are illiterate.

The NSO carried out its fifth Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS5), a national survey on the well-being of children and women in the country, with technical and financial support from Unicef. The data was collected from about 28,000 households nationwide from November 2015 until March last year.

Naunapa Thanasak, acting director-general of the NSO, said mothers' literacy was strongly related to negative outcomes for their children in physical development, health and education. "About 24% of children whose mothers had no education were out of school, compared with just 0.4% of kids whose mothers had education," Ms Naunapa said, referring to the children aged between 12-17.

The rate was higher for non-Thai children, she added. Only 41% of children aged under five were found to have at least three children's books at home. The rate dropped further to 23% for children in remote areas. In both metropolitan and suburban areas, the lack of fathers' engagement in promoting learning for their children was a worry, she added.