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## **PRESERVATION AND SUPPORT FOR THE HEALTH CARE WISDOM OF THE ELDERLY IN NORTHEASTERN REGION OF THAILAND**

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### **Abstract**

*This research was a qualitative research. The purposes were to find the health care wisdom of the elderly in the northeastern region (Esan) of Thailand, and to develop the potential of teaching the wisdom of the elderly in the northeastern region of Thailand. The study area was Ban Pho Community, Mahasarakham Province. One hundred twenty persons of the informant group were the elderly with wisdom, students, teachers and persons from the general public in the community. Data collection employed participatory observation method, in-depth interview, group discussion and synthesis. Analysis and interpretation of data employed inductive and interdisciplinary methods. The duration of research was one year. The result revealed that most of the elderly people had at least 1-2 health care wisdoms, such as wisdom in Herbal Plants and Vegetables for health care, local cuisine and confectionery from vegetable and natural ingredients and without toxics and chemicals, making local confectionery, traditional massage, bamboo wickerwork, playing folk music. The researchers developed the elderly in teaching skills, use the Buddhist principle and led the elderly to transfer knowledge to their descendants at elementary schools and the community. After one academic year, the students began to see the*

*value of the elderly different from the past, that they thought "old people are not worth much, they are just waiting to die," as well as have a better understanding about the value of folk wisdom than in the past that they were interested about only technologies and modern things, but now they have intention to preserve the wisdom and making it sustainable for the community.*

### **Keywords**

Preservation, Support, Health Care Wisdom, Elderly

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## **1. Introduction**

The United Nations has estimated that the period from the year 2001 to 2100 will be the century of the elderly. That means people aged 60 and over will make up more than 10 percent of the total world population, and the number will increase gradually. This has been a challenging issue, socially and economically, that each country must have plans to deal with it. For Thailand, the National Statistical Office has concluded that Thailand has entered an aging society since 2005, having older persons at 10.4 percent of the whole population, and it has been estimated that the country will be an aged society during 2024-2025. If we look back to the definition of the elderly we will see that the United Nations has defined the elderly as male and female over 60 years of age, and entering ageing society is divided into 3 levels (Sukhothaithamathirat University, 2015) being ageing society, being aged society, and being super-aged society. It is generally known that most of the elderly have health problems resulting from at least 1 or 2 chronic diseases. The diseases mostly found were involved with blood vessels such as hypertension, diabetes and dyslipidemia. Diabetes particularly can cause other diseases as complications such as dyslipidemia and hypertension. Diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness; renal failures, chronic wound, cerebral thrombosis and coronary thrombosis, and result in dependency which makes people in general feel that older persons are burden of the society.

On the other hand, the elderly are brain treasure of the society. The elderly are valuable human resource because each of them has accumulated wisdom throughout his or her life through experiments, selections, accumulations of lessons and experiences for a long period of time. Older persons are full of seniority and qualifications that can benefit the community and society and can be counted as important national "social capital." If only they can maintain good

health and do their duty continuously, they can become a social force. This can also take place in Mahasarakham a province in Esan region Of Thailand, where there are a lot of older persons with various kinds of wisdom, and one of which is health care wisdom that descendants should continue and preserve. However, there are differences in ideas of the elderly and children and youths and there are age gaps. These make it difficult for them to understand each other. Moreover, children and youths of new generations rarely recognize the value of the elderly. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct this research aiming at building relationship and developing potential of the older persons as well as transferring knowledge to children and youths in the society as to help them continue and preserve good things.

## **2. The Proposes of Research**

1. To find the health care wisdom of the elderly in Esan.
2. To develop potential in transferring wisdom of the elderly in Esan.

## **3. Scopes of Research**

### **3.1 Scope of Research Area**

The research setting was Ban Pho Community, Mahasarakham Province. The criteria for selection were:

- 1.1 It is where the elderly with accumulated health care wisdom live;
- 1.2 It is where the elderly with health care wisdom have good health and enough potential to be a teacher and transfer the knowledge to children and youths;
- 1.3 It is where the school and the community are willing to join the project.

### **3.2 Scope of Content**

The research content is the health care wisdom of the elderly of Esan to be searched for and the potential of transferring the health care wisdom of the elderly of Esan in Mahasarakham Province to be developed.

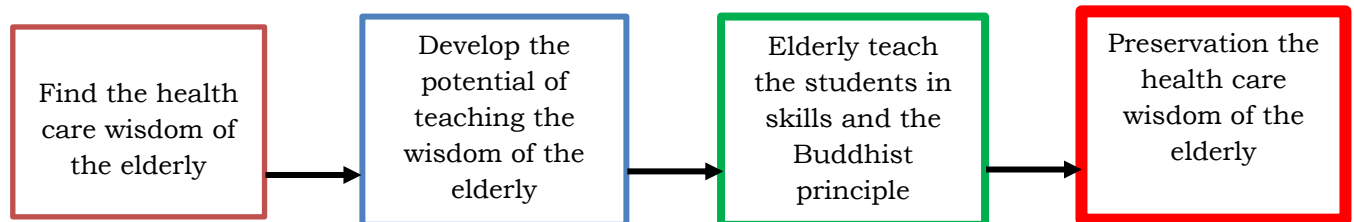
### **3.3 Scope of Key informants**

The informants consisted of 120 elderly purposively sampled by the researcher, of whom 15 were the elderly with the wisdom, 90 were students, 5 were teachers and another 10 were from the general public of the community.

### **3.4. Scope of Time**

The research started in October 2013 and ended in September 2014. The duration was one year.

#### **4. Research Frame Work**



#### **5. Methodology**

The research was qualitative, having the research process as follows:

1. Review Literature: Review related academic documents and researches.
2. Field survey and baseline data collection such as the general condition of the community, number of older persons with health care wisdom.
3. Set the period of time for data collection, key informants, instruments and equipment for data collection.
4. Search for 10 older persons with the health care wisdom and are ready to transfer the knowledge to descendants.
5. Train the elderly in the skill of transferring the knowledge, teaching techniques and how to use various media.
6. Coordinate with the administrator and homeroom teachers of the primary school in the community in order to find a proper subject in which the elderly can transfer the bodies of knowledge to their descendants in school, and also coordinate with community leaders in order to seek opportunity for the elderly to teach the health care wisdom in the community.
7. The elderly conduct teaching in the school and community, beginning from building relationship to reduce the age gap between the students and the older persons. Then the elderly teach the students in the session of vocational skill every week and teach in the community throughout the semester.

8. Use the Buddhist principles of the Four Devine States with the elderly so as for them to know how to deal with children and youths properly in teaching. Teaching is carried out in the vocational skill class every week, two hours each week, throughout the semester.

9. Use and emphasize the Buddhist principle of gratitude to teach the students how to treat the elderly.

10. While teaching is going on, data are collected through participatory observation, in-depth interview and group discussion by the informants in each group.

11. Analyze, synthesize and interpret the data through inductive and interdisciplinary methods.

## **6. Results of the Research**

The study revealed that most of the elderly had accumulated at least 1-2 types of the wisdom which were herbal plants and vegetables, local cuisine, making local confectionery with ingredients from vegetables and other natural raw materials free of toxics or chemicals, traditional massage to relax muscles and tendons, making bamboo wickerwork, playing folk music to promote good mental health.

### **6.1 Herbal Plants and Vegetables**

Usually the elderly in Esan like to eat local vegetables which are herbs. They are both food and medicine. Eating herbal plants and vegetables has long been a way of life and has been a culture inherited from the past. The herbal plants and vegetables are available around the house. Some vegetables grow naturally on the fence while others are grown on the household grounds. There are also herbal plants in the community forest. Children and youths of the new generation do not often like to eat local vegetables, but they like to eat and value fast food with a foreign brand name. Therefore, the researcher decided to encourage the elderly with wisdom to transfer their knowledge of herbal plants and vegetables and their usefulness to students in the community.

### **6.2 Local Cuisine**

When the students had learned about the value and usefulness of the herbal plants and vegetables, the researcher asked the elderly with the wisdom of cooking Esan local dishes to cook some local dishes with recipes from local organic vegetables such as soft-boiled vegetables, preserved fish mixed with herbs, curry, seasoned bamboo shoot, etc.

### **6.3 Making Local Confectionery**

Khaomao is a local Esan confectionery that can be eaten any time for leisure. It is sweet, soft and sticky and easy to eat. It is full of valuable nutrients. So, it is a favorite confectionery for both children and adults. The process of making Khaomao begins by soaking 3-month old rice grains in water for 3 days. Early in the fourth day the grains are popped in an earthen pot heated with charcoal, a little amount at each time. Popping takes 4 – 5 minutes. The reason for using an earthen pot and charcoal is that these two things give constant heat and every rice grain is evenly cooked and the rice smells better than using any other kinds of pot and heat. Then the grains are put into a mortar for pounding to crack the chaffs. When the chaffs are well cracked, the grains are put on a bamboo winnowing tray and are winnowed or shaken to get rid of the chaffs or dirt. The rice is then put into a container to be flavored with toddy palm sugar, salt, coconut milk and well-boiled screw pine leaf broth. To flavor, dissolve the in the broth and add the rice and mix with it. Add the coconut milk to get greasiness and scented smell. Add a little amount of salt to reduce sweetness. Mix all the ingredients a little longer to let the rice seeds absorb the flavored liquid and thus become softened and full of scented smell, sweetness and greasiness. And if the Khaomao is mixed with grated coconut, it will be even tastier. Khaomao has made Mahasarakham famous and a street downtown is given the name Khaomao Street where Songkran festival takes place every year.

#### **6.4 Traditional Massage**

Most of Esan people are farmers. They work on the farm, rice paddy or garden. They use their labor to carry things, plough the land, dig the ground, and cut the firewood. Using so much of physical strength brings about pains in the muscle and tendons. Thus, Esan people rely on their folk wisdom of massage to relieve pains in the muscles and tendons and to prevent disability that may follow. The researcher realized the usefulness of traditional massage, so the researcher managed to have the elderly teach and transfer the knowledge to the students and managed to have the students practice in order that they would use the knowledge for themselves and their folks.

#### **6.5 Bamboo Wickerwork**

Because the way of life of Esan people is farming a lot of things that they use in their daily life are made of natural material such as bamboo. In doing so, the bamboo wood is split into thin, long and narrow pieces and the bamboo pieces are woven in various forms of wickerwork such as the sticky rice container, sheath, fan, rice winnowing tray, and so on. This production gives things from natural raw materials that are free of toxics and chemicals, cheap

and economical, and it helps people to exercise the small muscles of fingers and hand. Making wickerwork is suitable to be used with children and youths in their health care. Thus, the researcher managed to have the older persons having the said wisdom teach the students with hands-on experience and make the wickerwork for their own use.

## **6.6 Playing Folk Music**

Esan has many musical instruments. The favorite one that has existed since the ancient time is Khaen. It is made of bamboo. Bamboo sticks of different lengths are put together in a certain way. When the Khaen is blown, it produces various musical notes. Khaen is an old culture that has a root so deep in the blood of Esan people that it can be said that the music from the Khaen is a heavenly sound or the sound that brings happiness to Esan people. Whenever they hear the sound of Khaen, Esan people become lively and active. Whenever they hear the sound of Khaen, hands and feet of Esan people move and dance to it. Thus, the researcher managed to have the older persons teach the students at school and the students learn to play Khaen in class. The teachers and students enjoyed the class.

The Khaen provides music therapy. Music therapy is the science of using music to change, develop and maintain the well-being of the physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects, as stated by Buckwalter. Et. al. (1985) that music affects changes in human being, physically and mentally. It decreases anxiety and fear. It increases the power of movement. It creates the motive of mindfulness, thought, emotion, and good mind. Esan people have folk tales inherited from generation to generation. Most of them are tales for moral teaching. They teach people to be grateful to persons who did good things for them. They teach people to have gratitude for their ancestors. The tales called Nam Tao Pung and Poo Sungkasa Ya Sungkasee can be good examples. The researcher realized the importance of this local wisdom, so the researcher managed to have the older persons tell the folk tales to the students and give them the morals as well as teach them how to look after their own health.

## **7. Conclusion**

The search for health care wisdom of the elderly in Mahasarakham Province enabled the researcher to help the elderly with health care wisdom to keep their accumulated knowledge from disappearing from the community, and it enabled the researcher to develop the potential of transferring the knowledge from the older persons to their descendants in the school and the community. The research took 2 semesters. The data were collected through participatory

observation, in-depth interview, and group discussion. The results of the study revealed that the Four Devine States comprising loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity that were parts of teaching helped the elderly to be happy with what they did. An older person, deeply touched, told how he felt: “I have had only grade 2 education and I almost can’t write, but I have been given an opportunity to teach the students in school. I’m so happy and thrilled.” Another older person said, “Usually I stay home and rarely go out. No one cares about the knowledge that I have and I think it will die with me. But when I have the opportunity to teach, I feel that what I have accumulated throughout my life will not be lost. I’m so glad.” Most of the students who participated in the project told that they felt differently toward the older persons, compared to their previous feelings. They began to see the value of the older persons different from the past. Previously they saw that “the older persons have turned old and will be old forever, no values, except waiting to die,” then their attitude changed. They also realized more of the value of folk wisdom. They used to admire only technology and modernity. Now they were ready to preserve and continue the folk wisdom and keep it from disappearing from the community. A girl said, “I have never thought that older persons have so many good things hidden inside them. I never wanted to talk and ask my grandparents about anything, because I misunderstood. I thought that they were old and might not know much. Now it’s opposite.” And a boy said, “I didn’t pay any attention to my grandparents. I thought that they were old, only waited to die. They had no more use. But after I had mingled with many who came to teach us, now I have learned that they are old but only physically. Their brains still remember so many good and useful matters. If we don’t take this opportunity to learn from them, good things will disappear from our community.” Moreover, the students were grateful to the older persons and appreciated their kindness of coming to teach. This is consistent with Phra Bhraramakhunaporn (P.A. Payuto) who explains that gratefulness can be divided into two parts. One part is gratefulness a person has for another person who did good things for him or supported him personally. The other part is gratefulness a person has for another person who has done good things for the society. The teachers and the people in the community were happy with the activities of the project and were delighted to provide conveniences in future projects. It can be concluded that the research project has elevated the value of the elderly and has helped preserve health care wisdom of the elderly, and has helped transfer the wisdom to children and youth, aiming at enhancing social sustainability in the future



## 8. Suggestion

1. Organizations in the government and private sectors should support the elderly who have wisdom to have their place in the society and have opportunities to transfer their knowledge to children and youths and show their potentials continuously.
2. Children and youths should be promoted to realize the value of the elderly.
3. Organizations in the government and private sectors should allocate budget annually to arrange for the elderly who have the wisdom to transfer their knowledge to children and youths in school and the community or other places in order to prevent the wisdom from disappearing from the community.

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