

What's Happening to the Social Support for the Elder People in Thailand?

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In the present, Thais can live much longer. Phenomenon of population aging in Thailand can be seen from the increase of life expectancy at birth, from less than 60 years in 1970s to about 73 years in 2011 (IPSR, 2011). According to the 1960 census, there were about 1.2 million people aged 60 years and over (NSO, 1962), which accounted for 4.7 percent of the total population of 26 million of Thailand. The number of people aged 60 and over in the Thailand reached 8.5 million in 2010, which was 13 percent of the total population of 65.9 million (NSO, 2011).

This situation is accompanied by changes in family household structure and living arrangements. Thai family size has declined from 5.6 in 1960 to 3.6 person in 2010 (National Statistics Office, 2010). The number of Thai elderly living in skipped generation households has been increasing. The socio-economic factor is one of the main factors that lead to the migration of Thai people at labor age group and the change of household structure.

In Thailand, the case of children living outside of their households has become a common due to the consequence of migration (NSO, 2005). The grandparents living with their grandchildren only are found significantly in some households as we called skipped generation households (Park, 2005).

According to Thai norms, elderly should be looked after by their family and relatives (Chayowan, Knodel, & Siriboon, 1990). Support for elders is an important social tradition in Thailand that concerns the living arrangements with others people in the family (Knodel, Amornsirisomboon, & Khiewyoo, 1994). If elderly receive more support, they seem to have a better life. A study by Suthichai and others (2001) found that the support of elders is the most important condition no matter whether those considerations come from the elder's expectation such as support in the case of illness, and financial difficulties.

Nowadays, the role of grandparents is being redefined. In contrast, the elderly persons may act as supporters. They give their support in terms of objects like clothes and food for their children and grandchildren especially money (Wongsit & Siriboon, 1998). Furthermore, elderly women who live alone tend to suffer from most of the conditions of living (Prachumchana, 2001). In some households in rural areas, the elderly live only with

grandchildren. Increasingly, grandparents, rather than playing peripheral roles in the lives of their grandchildren, are becoming responsible for raising them.

According to the change of household structure and the pattern of social support for the elder people in Thailand, this study aims to investigate the situation of social supports for elderly person in Thailand.

Data and Methods

Data used in this study are secondary for the 2011 Surveys of Elderly in Thailand which was conducted by National Statistics Office. This survey is based on a population of elderly 50 years of age and over. The representative sample of population in this study is aged 60 and over, the number of elderly covered in this survey is 8,266,304.

Types of supports focused on this paper include four supports as follows:

1. Monetary Support is the support that elderly receive from or give to their child(ren) during the past 12 months.

2. Material Support in forms of food, Clothes/grocery that elderly receive from their child(ren) during the past 12 months.

3. Care taking support is covers to the meaning of elderly takes care of grandchildren aged less than 10 years during the past 12 months.

4. Psychological Support is the support by make a visit, telephone/ mobile phone/ and email that elderly contact to or receive from their child(ren) during the past 12 months.

Results

The characteristics of elder persons

The percentage of female elderly aged 60 years or over was higher than male (55.9 and 44.1 percent respectively). Those aged 60-69 years was higher (57.8 percent) followed by 32.0 percent of aged 70-79 years and 10.2 percent of aged 80 or over. Most of them were married followed by widowed/divorced/separated, and single status (64.7, 31.5, and 3.8 percent respectively). Most of the elderly in Thailand in 2002 lived in rural area (66.5 percent) more than urban area (33.5 percent).

Monetary Support

Almost three fourths of elderly (73%) received money from their child(ren) who lived outside household. The average of remittance from their child(ren) was less than 10,000 baht in the past 12 months. Similarly, two thirds or more elderly gave money to their child(ren) who lived in household (68%) and children living outside household (86%). (See table 1)

Table 1: The percentage of elderly who received money from children and gave money to their children

Received/ gave money	Elderly received money from children		Elderly gave money to children	
	children living in household	children living outside household	children living in household	children living outside household
Yes	48.0	27.0	68.1	86.1
No	52.0	73.0	31.9	13.9

It was found that place of residence does not have effect for the monetary support among the elderly whose children living in the same household (51% vs. 52%). However there is different situation among those elderly whose children were living outside household (65% vs. 76%) (See table 2)

Table 2: Percentage of elderly who received money from children classified by place of residence

Received money from children	children living in household		children living outside household	
	urban	Rural	rural	Urban
Received	48.9	47.6	35.3	23.7
Not received	51.1	52.4	64.7	76.3

Interestingly, the child(ren) who lived in urban area were more likely to receive money from their parents than the child(ren) who live in rural area. (See table 3)

Table 3: Percentage of elderly who gave money to children classified by area

gave money to children	children living in household		children living outside household	
	Urban	Rural	Rural	Urban
Received	65.7	69.4	83.6	87.1
Not received	34.3	30.6	16.4	12.9

Material Support

When focus on the material support, one third of elderly who had child(ren) living outside household were more likely to receive foods and grocery support once a year from their children. While elderly who lived in urban area tend to receive material support more than elderly who lived in rural area. (see table 4)

Table 4: The percentage of elderly receiving material support

Frequency of receiving material support	Food		Clothes	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
not received	26.1	20.1	22	16.1
received everyday	11.1	12.7	0.9	0.7
received weekly	12.9	12.5	1.9	1.1
received monthly	23.3	20.5	14.9	10.9
received at least once a year	25.5	33.3	59.2	70.2
Unknown	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0

Care taking support

It should be noted that there are more skipped generation pattern in rural area than urban area. It was found that 17 percent of elderly in rural area often took care of their grandchildren aged less than 10 years.

Table 5: The percentage of care taking for elderly by place of residence

Frequency of Care taking	Urban	Rural	Total
Never	77.0	66.9	70.4
Sometimes	9.6	14.5	12.8
Regularly	11.8	17.3	15.4
Unknown	1.7	1.2	1.4

Psychological Support

The psychological support includes visiting, calling, and sending email from the children. It was found that one third of elderly and their children visited each other only once in a year especially those elderly who lived in urban area. However, children still had other social network to contact their parent. More than one third of elderly were more likely to contact with their children by mobile phone often (everyday/ weekly/ monthly). It might be the reason why the children did not send money back to their parent. However, there were just few elder persons who contacted their grandchildren by email.

Table 6: The percentage of elderly with psychological support

Frequency of support	Urban			Rural		
	Visit	mobile phone	Email	Visit	mobile phone	Email
never contacted	5.8	11.1	95.5	5.5	14.8	97.5
everyday	16.4	25.2	0.8	19.8	19.4	0.3
weekly	16.3	31.8	1.2	12.5	28.7	0.3
monthly	28	27	0.5	21.4	31.2	0.2
at least once a year	32.6	4	0.2	40.1	5	0.2
Unknown	0.9	0.9	1.7	0.8	0.8	1.5

Summary and Discussion

Family support is still a norm of Thailand but the pattern of social support has changed. Elderly can act as both “givers” and “receivers.”

In the role of care giver, elderly who live with grandchildren have responsibility for them including economic, household and personal care because their child(ren) move somewhere for working. This situation leads to elderly replace by parents in family to take care of grandchildren.

In the role of receivers, the child(ren) still support to their parents even though they do not live in the same household in terms of monetary support, material support, care taking support and psychological support.

The result shows that there are no different between the percentage of elderly receiving remittance from their child(ren) and place of residence. Then, the child(ren) should consider the benefit from migration.

In addition, elderly who live alone or live with grandchildren in household should be took care. Thus, the government should develop policy for elderly in form of welfare such as healthcare welfare, social welfare, and housing welfare.

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