



## CHAPTER XI

### DISCUSSION

The health problems among the hill tribes has been divided into 4 major groups ; opium dependence, maternal and child health problems, malnutrition and diseases of the upper respiratory tract and gastrointestinal systems. To solve these health problems, the Ministry of Public Health has adopted the primary health care model to develop health services delivery in the hill tribes communities. In some areas, there are the community health workers providing health services for them. Their activities include the basic curative service, maternal and child health care services and family planning service. However, the health problems still persist and need appropriate solutions. The information on pattern of health services utilization and the associated factors can be useful in the development of health care delivery system.

This study emphasized the utilization of curative as well as maternal and child health services, including family planning service. Because of the difficulty of reaching the remote Karen hill tribes village which were scattering over the mountain range, we could not do the theoretical probability sampling. Therefore, Mae Kha Poo village was selected and used as the case illustration for the purpose of this study in order to see whether the villagers utilized the government health services or not. The study village had a community health worker providing health services. The result

of this study showed that the utilization of curative service was relatively high whereas the utilization of maternal and child health services was very low.

In the treatment of illnesses, most of the villagers believed that modern medicine was better than the traditional treatment. They also accepted the curative service from the community health worker, so it was no doubt that there were a high percentage of utilization of community health workers. A few of villagers still practiced the traditional treatment such as herbal medicine and spirit rite. Nevertheless, this practice among them did not show any harmful effects. The spirit rite could be the psychological treatment and some of the herbal medicine have been shown to have the effective active ingredients (Chulalongkorn University, Institute of Health Research, 1984). From the analysis of the associated factors, the perceived severity of illnesses was statistically significant. It is conceivable that people will go to see the doctors if they perceive that their symptoms are severe. The types or symptoms of illnesses were statistically significant for fever or headache. However, in case of the illnesses from either respiratory tract or gastrointestinal systems, no statistical significance was found. During the period of follow up of cases of diarrhoea and upper respiratory tract illness, only one case who was also the opium addicts, was found to use opium as medicine for treating the upper respiratory system illness but he eventually turned to use multiple treatments because the opium was not effective. Although many studies and the statistical reports have shown that the medical opium use is one of the causes of opium

addiction among the hill tribes, we believe that the use of opium as medicine is unlikely to be a major causes of opium addictions in the future.

The previous study showed that opium had been use in diarrhoea (Suwanwela and Dharmrong-At, 1982). It is probable that some of villagers in this study might also use opium as medicine for diarrhoea. The method of interview for opium use alone may not be optimal for gaining valid information on opium use. What people said about the non utilization of opium as medicine might not be true. People are usually reluctant to tell the truth since the use of opium is illegal. It is suggested that the validity of the interview about opium use should be checked by using multiple methods such as participant observation, asking about opium use from household members and urine testing. However, the urine test may show the positive result even though people have not use opium as medicine. The phenomenon of environmental contamination has been documented (Suwanwela et al., 1980b). Opium seeds have been used to make the candy. Some drugs such as Camphorated opium tincture, and Brown mixture have opium as active ingredients. Therefore, unconcious consumption of opium might occurs from taking these drugs or opium seed candy.

The index of minimum basic health needs of 1991 has been set up in the VI National Economic and Social Development Plan (1987-1991) and is used as the indicator for evaluate needs of the Thai people. For the maternal and child health care, the percentage of utilization of government services was very poor, compared to the

minimum basic health needs as shown in Table 52. Most of the married women in reproductive age did not understand the necessity of these services and some did not know that these services were available. The result suggested that a major cause of low utilization related to local socio-cultural factors and values. Therefore, efforts have to be urgently targeted towards health education and empowerment. The primary health care workers should play an important role in these efforts.

**Table 52** Comparison the minimum basic health needs  
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indicators of 1991 with the result this study.

	Target	Result
1. Coverage of the child immunization	90 %	65.3 %
2. The utilization of contraceptive services	75 %	47.8 %
3. The receipt of antenatal care	70 %	6.3 %
4. The receipt of delivery services	70 %	21.1 %
5. The receipt of postnatal care	70 %	14.7 %

\* The indicators for minimum basic health needs had been set up by the coordination of the Office of National Socioeconomic Development Committee, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education.

No factor was found to be associated with the utilization of antenatal care service. This may be due to the very low number of utilization leading to insufficient statistical power. If the rate of utilization was higher, we might see a significant associated factor.

The income and the mass media exposure by radio were shown to be significantly associated with the utilization of qualified health personnel for delivery. The result suggests that the development of health education targeted towards the economically

deprived population through mass media should be explored to improve the utilization of this services.

For the postnatal care service, only those who were delivered by government approved personnel were significantly associated with the utilization of this service. It means that if they were delivered by government approved health personnel, they would seek postnatal check ups.

For the immunization of children, education, the travelling difficulty and occupation were shown the significantly associated with child immunization. Most mothers did not see the necessity of the immunization, therefore they should receive the health education. Most of the villagers were agriculturist. Most also worked as labourers to earn extra income. They might not have time to go to the health station which were some distance from their hamlets. The result suggests that if it is possible, the community health worker should rather go to each of the hamlet to immunize the children than waiting for them to come to the health station.

For the vaccination against tetanus, the education of mothers was significantly associated with service utilization. Most mothers did not see the necessity of the vaccination and did not see the need. The result suggested that health education should be considered. Although the tetanus cases never occurred in the village yet, but the childbirth practices was risk of tetanus. Effort should be considered on increasing the utilization of government approved health personnel for delivery, vaccination against tetanus and training the right practice to traditional birth

attendant.

The majority of women were married young and were pregnant shortly after marriage. This could result in a high fertility rate. The average number of children of the married women was more than 2 children. The Ministry of Public health had encourage each family to have no more than 2 children. the result of this study indicated that much more effort is needed to bring family planning services to the people to achieve the desirable target set by the Ministry of Public Health.

For the family planning services, the utilization of contraceptive service was also lower than the target of minimum basic health needs. Ideal number of children and number of pregnancies were significantly associated with the utilization of contraception. Other studies described that the need for labour forces and lack of health knowledge had an effect on the utilization (Tasanapradit, Pernparn, and Poshayachinda, 1986). Among the hill tribes, most of them are agriculturist, therefore labour force is needed. Everybody in the household has duties. Children can contribute in the household work and take care the younger one. When they grow up, they can go to work in the farm and the household will get more yield of crops compared to the small family (Suwanwela et al., 1980b, 1980c). This make them want high a ideal number of children. The ideal number of children has an impact on the number of pregnancies. The women who have lower number of pregnancies tend not to use the contraceptive method until they have reached the desired number of children. Although, most of them were poor, they were not concerned that they had to spend more until the children

grew up to be able to help them to earn their livings. The economic loss from having more children could make them poorer than before. If the family planning is to be successful, the villagers should be aware of this economic problem. Therefore, the primary health care worker should have a role to explain the benefit of using the family planning service.

From this study, although we have found some significant associated factors, they have low predicting power of utilization behavior. The small proportion variance can be explained : only 21.5 percent of the utilization of contraception, 10.8 percent of the utilization of government approved health personnel for delivery, 8.7 percent of the utilization of postnatal care, 18.0 percent of the utilization of child immunization services, 10.1 percent of the utilization of tetanus vaccination for pregnant women and 12.0 percent of the utilization of curative services. There should be more factors affecting utilization. These other factors might be revealed through other methods of data collection such as participant observation, informant interview and delphi technique. These methods are peculiar to social scientists.

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## CONCLUSION

The pattern of health services utilization found in this study was similar to previous studies in the remote Karen villages. The availability of health care services related to the high utilization of curative service. The use of other more traditional alternatives was reduced. The study showed that the perceived severity of illness and some type of illness (headache and fever) associated with the utilization. Nevertheless, the utilization of maternal and child health services was still very low. No factor was found to be associated with the utilization of antenatal care. Income and the mass media exposure by radio were shown to influence the use of government approved health personnel for delivery. Education of the head of the household, travelling difficulty and occupation were associated with child immunization. The education of the women influenced vaccination against tetanus. Ideal number of children and number of pregnancies related to the use of contraception. Most of the mothers had poor understandings about the maternal and child health care and family planning services. The results suggest that there are need for health education for maternal and child health care as well as family planning. Women in reproductive age should have a chance to receive health information as much as possible, either through the radio, the village health information and education center or the primary health care workers. The provider of health services should use both the active and passive strategies for the immunization. If this can be done, we believe that the rate of health services utilization will increase.