

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG THE ELDERLY IN  
KHON KEAN PROVINCE, THAILAND

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Program in Public Health

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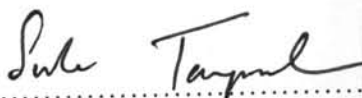
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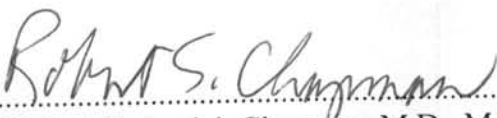
  
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**Objectives:** The general objective of this project is to develop the plan to strengthen social support among elderly people in Khon Kean Province through evaluation. The specific objectives are 1).to assess the elderly characteristics in four areas; socio demographic characteristics, social network, social integration, and personal health characteristics, 2).to assess the level of perceived social support and factors among elderly people,3).to determine the data about the elderly people, their social network and community organizations, in terms of activities, needs, in addressing social support among the elderly, and 4).to develop the plan, that combines quantitative and qualitative information for the development of intervention, to strengthen social support among elderly people.

**Methods:** This study used an exploratory and cross-sectional descriptive design with both quantitative and qualitative methods, to elicit evidence to inform the community empowerment process. The study group was composed 756 elders who 60 years old or greater, living in eight villages in Khon Kaen Province, Thailand. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the information and perceived social support was measured by PRQ85. In addition, the in -depth interview were used for assess the elderly and their social network in activities, needs, in addressing social support among the elderly. The data were analyzed using the independent sample t test, ANOVA and multiple linear regressions: with only  $p < 0.05$  being considered as statistically significant while content analysis were applied for qualitative data analysis.

**Results:** The response rate was 97.08%. This study found high level of social support perceived among elderly. According to the PRQ85, the highest dimension of social support perceived among the elderly was the opportunity for nurturing dimension while the lowest dimension was the one is an integral part of group. Results from multiple regressions indicate that educational level, number of elderly close friend, knowing community staff, working status, elderly club membership and joining community party were statistically significant related to perceived social support. In addition, qualitative data confirm that the family is the major support among Thai elderly. Social support among the elderly and their families is an obligation, thus social support occurs in terms of caring for parents and supports all kinds of family activities. The neighborhood has become the important social support source when there are care givers working or living apart. Most of the day time the elderly spend with their friends, thus friends' support influences health behavior, attitude and information. Community leaders and community staff (both community health staff and sub-district administrative organization staff) social support provision were top down activities and cultural activities such as home visits and social activities. Even through in all areas of the study, elderly clubs were held, the activities were monthly meetings by the community health staff with few elders joining the club. Some of the elderly did not join because of their health problems, family duties and some activities not being appropriate for them which some elders refused to do. This study also found that there were no integrated community programs initiated for elderly health and social support. All activities that were running in the community were policy implementations and this study also found that all staff needs elderly care and social support training.

**Conclusions:** Based on the findings, empowerment process using community forum and AIC were used as the first round among the representative elderly and stakeholders. Empowering Community Initiatives for Strengthening Social Support among the Elderly through Evaluation: A Project for Elderly Participation and Involvement in the Elderly Club were initiated. It is acknowledged that an extensive study with the project implementation and evaluation, wide time span and multidisciplinary research study team are crucial to establish more valid intervention.

Field of the study: Public Health

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xvii
ABBREVIATIONS .....	xix
<b>CHAPTER I. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Why the older population .....	2
1.2.1 The number of older people is increasing rapidly and this growth has consequences .....	2
1.2.2 Ageing and Changins.....	4
1.2.3 Cost of Care .....	7
1.2.4 Global Ageing Policies.....	8
1.3 Social Support and Elderly Health .....	9
1.4 Thai Elderly Social Support .....	12
1.5 Current Intervention Programs .....	12
1.6 Thai Elderly Policies .....	15
1.7 Problems of the Thai Elderly.....	17
1.8 Possible Interventions.....	22
1.9 Purpose of Study.....	23
1.10 Study Approach.....	24

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

	Page
1.11 Expected Outcome.....	24
<b>CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1 Definition of term “elderly” .....	25
2.1.1 Classification of the elderly person .....	26
2.2 Social Support Definitions.....	29
2.3 A Concept Model Link Social Support to Health.....	31
2.3.1 Stress Buffering Model.....	33
2.3.2 Main Effect Model.....	34
2.4 Factors Related Social Support.....	37
2.4.1 Socio Demographic Factors.....	37
2.4.2 Social Network .....	40
2.4.3 Social Integration.....	50
2.4.4 Personal Health Characteristics .....	53
2.5 Social Support Measurement.....	54
2.5.1 The Personal Resource Questionnaire (PRQ 85) .....	55
2.6 Thai Elderly People .....	56
2.6.1 Thai Elderly Socio Demographic Characteristics .....	56
2.6.2 Thai Elders’ Health.....	58
2.6.3 Thai Elderly Social Support .....	60
2.7 Why does this study emphasize the strengthening of social support among the elders? .....	66

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

	Page
2.8 Empowering Community: Approach for Strengthening Social Support	
among the Elders .....	67
2.8.1 Community empowerment definitions .....	67
2.8.2 Why does this study emphasize on community empowerment? .....	68
2.8.3 Community empowering approach .....	69
2.8.4 Community empowerment based intervention.....	70
2.8.5 Empowerment strategies Strengthening social support among the elders.....	76
2.8.6 Empowering evaluation.....	78
<b>CHAPTER III RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES, OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>85</b>
3.1 Research Questions.....	85
3.2 Study Objectives.....	86
3.2.1 General objective.....	86
3.2.2 Specific objectives.....	86
3.3 Operational definitions .....	86
3.4 Conceptual Frame Work.....	91
<b>CHAPTER IV RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>93</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	93
4.2 Research Design .....	93
4.3 Study Community and Study Population .....	95
4.3.1 Quantitative Methods .....	95

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

	Page
4.3.2 Qualitative Methods .....	101
4.4 Data Collection Procedure.....	105
4.4.1 Quantitative methods; face-to-face interview with structured questionnaire.....	105
4.4.2 Qualitative methods; in-depth interview and in-depth interview guidelines.....	112
4.5 Quality Control of Instrument .....	114
4.5.1 Questionnaire standardization .....	114
4.5.2 Content validity and reliability of the questionnaire .....	116
4.5.3 Triangulation .....	117
4.6 Variables.....	118
4.7 Data Analysis.....	119
4.7.1 Transcribe the entire interview .....	119
4.7.2 Analyze the quantitative and qualitative data.....	121
4.8 Ethical Considerations.....	126
4.9 Empowering Community Initiatives for Strengthening Social Support among the Elderly through Evaluation Process.....	127
<b>CHAPTER V RESULTS.....</b>	<b>131</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	131
5.2 Elderly Characteristic (Socio Demographic Characteristics, Social Network, Social Integration, and Personal Health Characteristics) .....	132
5.2.1 Socio demographic characteristics .....	132



## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

	Page
5.2.2 Social network characteristics .....	135
5.2.3 Social integration characteristics .....	144
5.3 Elderly Perceived Social Support .....	158
5.3.1 Personal resources available .....	159
5.3.2 Social support needs in last six months .....	162
5.3.3 Level of perceived social support .....	163
5.4 Social Support Determinants .....	171
5.4.1 Bivariate analysis – factors influencing perceived social support .....	171
5.4.2 Multi-variate analysis; Perceived social support determinants comparing by the elderly gender and age group .....	189
5.5 Elderly and their Social Networks Perspectives, needs in Addressing Social Support for the Elderly .....	202
5.5.1 Respondents' socio demographic characteristics .....	202
5.5.2 The elderly perspective on social support .....	204
5.5.3 Elderly social network perspectives on social support for the elderly ..	209
5.5.4 Social support needs .....	215
5.5.5 Conclusion of In Depth Interview .....	220
5.6 Implication of the study in terms of planning .....	221
5.6.1 Implication of quantitative methodology in terms of planning .....	221
5.6.2 Implication of qualitative methodology in terms of planning .....	225

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)

	Page
<b>CHAPTER VI</b>	
<b>DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	239
6.1 Introduction .....	239
6.2 Discussion of Findings .....	239
6.2.1 Characteristics of the elderly .....	240
6.2.2 Perceived social support level .....	255
6.2.3 Perceived social support determinants .....	258
6.2.4 The elderly and elderly social network perspectives: needs and problems in addressing social support for the elderly .....	266
6.2.5 Social support needs/problems .....	270
6.3 Conclusion .....	274
6.3.1 Elderly characteristics .....	274
6.3.2 Elderly perceived social support .....	277
6.3.3 Perceived social support determinants .....	278
6.3.4 Elderly and their social networks perspectives, needs in addressing social support for the elderly .....	279
6.3.5 The strategy that combines quantitative and qualitative information in the development of intervention to strengthen social support among the elderly .....	280
6.4 Recommendation .....	282
6.4.1 Recommendation for policy makers .....	282
6.4.2 Recommendation fro stakeholder .....	283

**TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)**

	Page
6.4.3 Recommendation for further study.....	285
6.5 Study Limitations .....	287
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	288
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	306
Appendix A.....	307
Appendix B.....	319
Appendix C.....	330
Appendix D.....	331
Appendix E.....	332
Appendix F .....	334
<b>CURRICULUM VIRAE</b> .....	337

## LIST OF TABLE

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.1 Life expectancy at birth, Thailand 1965-2001.....	4
4.1 Distribution of the elderly in the sample villages.....	100
4.2 Framework of the study.....	125
5.1 Distribution of the elderly gender comparing by age group.....	132
5.2 Distributions of the elderly mean age comparing by gender.....	133
5.3 Distributions of the elderly mean education level comparing by gender and age group.....	134
5.4 Distributions of the elderly monthly income comparing by gender and age group.....	135
5.5 Distribution of the elderly family size comparing by gender and age group .....	136
5.6 Distribution of the elderly family caregiver comparing by gender and age group.....	137
5.7 Distribution of friend of elderly comparing by elderly gender and age group .....	139
5.8 Distributions of the elderly friend characteristics by the elderly gender and age group (multiple answers).....	140
5.9 Distributions of type and frequency of contact of the elderly and their close friend .....	141
5.10 Distribution of the elderly knowing community health staffs comparing by gender and age group.....	142

## LIST OF TABLE (Cont.)

Table	Page
5.11 Distribution of the elderly knowing SDAO Staff comparing by gender and age group.....	143
5.12 Distribution of the elderly marital status by gender and age group.....	144
5.13 Distribution of the elderly type of living arrangement comparing by gender and age group.....	146
5.14 Distribution of the elderly working status comparing by gender and age group .....	147
5.15 Distribution of the elderly club member comparing by gender and age group .....	148
5.16 Distribution of the health volunteer club member comparing by gender and age group.....	149
5.17 Distribution of the community school committee comparing by gender and age group.....	150
5.18 Distribution of the community temple committee comparing by gender, and age group.....	151
5.19 Distribution of the house wife club member comparing by gender and age group .....	152
5.20 Distribution of the elderly visit with children comparing by gender and age group .....	153
5.21 Distribution of the elderly visit with friend comparing by gender and age group.....	154

## LIST OF TABLE (Cont.)

Table	Page
5.22 Distribution of the Religious Activities of elderly committee comparing by gender and age group.....	155
5.23 Distribution of the community activities of elderly committee comparing by gender and age group.....	156
5.24 Distribution of elderly perceived health status comparing by gender and age group .....	157
5.25 Distribution of elderly current chronic diseases comparing by gender and age group .....	157
5.26 Distribution of elderly stress score comparing by gender and age group .....	158
5.27 Distribution of number and personal resources available .....	161
5.28 Distribution of social support needs in last six months.....	162
5.29 Distribution of social support items mean score comparing by gender and age group .....	165
5.30 Distribution social support dimensions mean score of respondents comparing by gender and age group.....	170
5.31 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by socio demographic selected factors.....	172
5.32 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by socio demographic selected factors according gender .....	173
5.33 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by socio demographic selected factors according age group .	174

## LIST OF TABLE (Cont.)

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
5.34 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by social network selected factors.....	175
5.35 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by social network selected factors according gender .....	176
5.36 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by social network selected factors according age group .....	177
5.37 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by social integration selected factors .....	179
5.38 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by social integration selected factors according gender.....	181
5.39 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by social integration selected factors according age group ....	183
5.40 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by personal health characteristics selected factors .....	184
5.41 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by personal health characteristics selected factors according gender .....	185
5.42 Distribution of frequencies, mean and standard deviations on perceived social support by personal health characteristics selected factors according Age group .....	186
5.43 Distribution of variable influencing perceived social support comparing by elderly gender and age group.....	188

## LIST OF TABLE (Cont.)

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
5.44 Multiple regressions for correlation of perceived social support among the sample elderly.....	190
5.45 Multiple regressions for correlation of perceived social support among the elderly according to male elderly .....	192
5.46 Multiple regressions for correlation of perceived social support among the elderly according to female elderly .....	194
5.47 Multiple regressions for correlation of perceived social support among the elderly according to young elderly .....	196
5.48 Multiple regressions for correlation of perceived social support among the elderly according to old-old elderly.....	198
5.49 Distribution of perceived social support determinants comparing by elderly gender and age group.....	201
5.50 Summary of the in depth interview findings .....	221
5.51 Framework for community empowering to strengthening social support among the elderly .....	229
5.52 Activities and indicators of the project plan .....	236



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Total, Child and Aged Dependency Ratios per 100 populations, Thailand, 1950-2050.....	3
2. Relationships between Age and Physical Capacity Showing the Effect of a Threshold of Dependent Living.....	5
3. A Concept Model of How Social Network Impact Health.....	32
4. Pathways through with Social Support Influences Responses to Stressful Life Events.....	34
5. Pathways through which Social Relationship can have direct (main) Effects on Psychological and Physical Health.....	36
6. Social Network Measurements with the Convoy Circle Diagram .....	42
7. Community Empowerment Approach.....	70
8. Pyramid of Change to Create Empowerment .....	73
9. Decision Making Level .....	76
10. Process of Empowerment Evaluation.....	82
11. Study Approach .....	84
12. Conceptual Framework of Research.....	92
13. Map of Khon Kaen Province, Thailand .....	97
14. Sampling Frame of the Study .....	99
15. Plan of Process for Selecting Sample Units .....	104
16. Data Collection Process of the Study .....	118
17. Empowering Community Initiatives for Strengthening Social Support among the Elderly through Evaluation Process .....	130

**LIST OF FIGURES (Cont.)**

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
18. Bar Chart of the Elderly Social Support Needs in Last Six Months .....	163

**ABBREVIATION**

AIDS	Acquired Immunization Deficiency Syndrome
DFLE	Disabilities Free Life Expectancy
GO	Government Organization
KKPHO	Khon Kaen Provincial Health Office
NGO	Non Government Organization
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
QOL	Quality of Life
SDAO	Sub District Administrative Organization
WHO	World Health Organization