

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion of the Study

This descriptive qualitative research was aimed at exploring the perception of the elderly regarding maintaining health by using Central Thai local wisdom. Naturalistic inquiry was used to understand and provide the description of perception of the elderly in this study.

Thirty nine informants participated in this study. Twenty participants were elderly who key informants and five of the elderly were traditional healers and ritual healers. The nineteen participants were general informants, people who had experiences related to maintaining elderly health with Central Thai local wisdom including family members, community leaders such as monks and municipal, healthcare providers, and village health volunteers. They were recruited by using purposively and snowball technique. Participant-observation began while the researcher was establishing rapport and trust with villagers and continued for two years of fieldwork during the period June 2013 to to May 2015. Multiple collecting methods were conducted after securing consent. The data was collected by the researcher using multiple collecting methods including participant observation, and in-depth interview until the data reached a saturation point. Data was analyzed by thematic analysis (Bruan & Clark, 2006). The findings were categorized into three themes; strengthen healthy mind and body following central traditional ways; self-devotion to gain merit; and recognize facing death according to Buddhist doctrine.

The demographic background of the informants, were identified as Buddhist. They applied the Buddhist doctrine as guide in their daily lives ever since there were young. The informants described how they strengthened their healthy mind and body following central Thai traditional ways. Which based on their practice of beliefs through

Buddhist doctrine. They viewed aging as being comprised of two parts, the mind and body. The informants believed that the mind is the most important part in aging, if the mind is in good condition, it could help lead the body to a state of well-being. Informants confirmed that to retain health as an elderly we should strengthen both mind and the body. Therefore they proposed strengthening the mind following the Buddhist doctrine and strengthening the body following the central Thai traditional ways including, the use of local herbs/or local foods, and by doing local exercise on a regular basis. Next, the informants how described self-devotion to gain merit was derived from volunteering for public benefit and gaining merit through donation. According to Buddhist teaching, offering or giving to benefit others according to their ability (knowledge, time, money, wisdom) is the practice to gain merit. This practice of devotion lead them to be healthy in later age. Finally the informants described recognizing and facing death according to Buddhist doctrine. This helped informants to sustain their mental and spiritual health while aging; they also gained an understanding about being born, death and dying.

In conclusion, lessons learned from the informant's experiences through data gathering are related to central Thai local wisdom about health, and helps maintain the health of the elderly. The informant's view of life through the Buddhist lens could guide them to view and perceive life in later age as natural. They described about being born, old, ill, and dying as natural. Buddhism as a doctrinal guide helped them understand life and accept that deterioration and changes in aging are impermanent. This also guided them to do merit and good deeds such as self-devotion to gain merit, which is based on the Buddhist concept of making good deed. They adjusted their lives by following the Buddhist teaching. This gives them a peaceful and strong mind which helps them to remain healthy in the stage of later age. In addition, adjusting their lifestyle by continuing to practice and to follow central Thai traditional ways of integrating knowledge within the present social context makes for a the simple way of life that could help lead to greater healthy in later age.

Implication of Nursing Practice and Making Healthcare Policies

Data derived from this study can be applied in nursing as follows:

1. Promoting the religion (Buddhist) belief and religion practice to maintain mental and spiritual health in later age. The findings indicate that following religious principles and applying them as doctrinal guide to adjust ones' lifestyle could be beneficial in maintaining health in later age. Practicing their belief following religions teachings help them to understand and accept that deterioration from aging is a natural part of life, and prepares them to face death and dying with peacefulness. This is useful for designing nursing interventions. Having this particular training and knowledge is beneficial to nurses so they can not only help to promote health among the elderly, but assist elderly persons facing death and dying.

2. Support and encourage people to learn and apply traditional ways to maintain a healthy mind and body with harmony in later age. The findings of this study provide knowledge about traditional ways of life such as using, local herbs / or local foods, and regular exercise. These are significant maintaining a healthy mind and body in later age. Traditional knowledge called "wisdom" happens in the elderly who learn from their life experiences. Thus, the knowledge of the study can be applied to nursing practice by helping the elderly to achieve health and by promoting the elderly to gain wisdom and maintain a healthy mind and body with harmony in later age.

3. Promoting the elderly to engage in social activities, especially self-devotion to gain merit. The research findings indicate that engaging in social activity helps to maintain holistic health among the elderly, especially growing the mind in later age. The research results pointed out the importance and the essence of self-devotion by offering the elder's wisdom, time, money, energy, as well as their mind in order to make others feel happy. This made the elder's feel happy and achieve self-actualization which is the ultimate goal of life. Thus, nurses can use this core program in health policy for growing the mind (spirit) in later age. This healthcare policy should address the concept of self-devotion, or volunteering, as an activity to gain health in later age. This ability of the elders and their cultural environment that gives support to the elders who carry on local wisdom or traditional knowledge by sharing their experience in public school and

any elderly clubs in the community. In addition, the nurse should give opportunities to the elderly according to their ability, and encourage them to engage in social activities. Example include, joining an activity at the temple regarding the traditional ceremony, joining religious groups or elderly clubs, as well as sharing their experiences about maintaining health.

4. Apply a program of strengthening the mind and body in later age to improve health using a holistic approach according to Buddhist doctrine and tradition. The research findings confirmed that mind and body health is crucial and should be maintained together. Encouraging the elderly people to use their local wisdom refers to making adjustments to lifestyle using Buddhist beliefs, culture beliefs, and traditional beliefs, when healthcare providers open their mind and listen and learn from them, health care provider can clearly understand one's beliefs, knowledge and behaviors, thus integrating local wisdom with conventional knowledge. The program for caring for the elderly with holistic aspects take into account the mind and body according to the client's culture. This might help the elderly to be in a good state of health in later age.

The Recommendation for the Future Research

The deep and rich details of the participants of Central Thai local wisdom in maintaining a health and sharing life experiences emerged, shading light on the experiences of the elderly in rural communities using local wisdom. Significant recommendations for future research are then proposed.

1. The health practice of central Thai local wisdom focuses on Buddhist doctrine and central Thai traditional ways. Future studies on issues relating to the effectiveness of central Thai local wisdom on health should include a longitudinal study in order to compare outcomes of preparations for maintaining elder's health with how the participants experienced well-being in old age. This would provide evidence of the effectiveness of Buddhist informed local wisdom or cultural lifestyle for the maintenance of health in old age.

2. Another study to investigate in the future is development model of elderly wisdom (traditional ways) in enhancing and maintaining health in the elderly.

3. Exploration into the perspectives of local wisdom as it relates to health of the elderly and other adults and religious groups.

4. Explore other factors influencing the preservation of health among the elderly, including preparing to face death peacefully in later age.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this research study has limited generalization due to the small sample sizes and to the fairly homogenous context of cohort specific participants based in a Buddhist village. Study finding were based upon data from only thirty-nine participants in a sub-district of 1,023 people. Furthermore, the research was conducted in only four settings including Kokko, Sakeayangmoo, Wat Bost, and MeaTaLum in the sub-district of Bang Pla Ma, Suphun Buri province due to the limited time and resources available for the researcher. Consequently, the study findings about maintaining elder's health and well-being might not represent the influence of the social cultural context in other provinces in Thailand.



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