

Chapter 2

Self-care, Health Promotion, and Independent Life

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Chapter 2

Self-care, Health Promotion, and Independent Life

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This chapter focuses on self-care, health promotion, and independent life of older people. The key concept is active and healthy ageing. We would like to raise awareness of this concept so that older and younger people can enjoy physical, mental, and social well-being as the population ages.

1. Active Ageing

Active ageing is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as ‘the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age’ (WHO, 2002). This approach is applicable to countries that are ageing rapidly, such as Thailand, to promote older people’s self-care and independent living. The concept of active ageing is mentioned in Article 12 of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002: ‘[T]he empowerment of older persons and the promotion of their full participation are essential elements for active ageing’ (United Nations, 2002).

The Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute recommended policies to promote active ageing in (1) the living environment, (2) living with dignity, and (3) health (Prasartkul et.al., 2017), adhering to the concept and rationale of the WHO for active ageing.

- 1) Living environment
 - a) Living arrangements should be modified to enhance the quality of life of older people.
 - b) Standards of living arrangements should be established to promote ageing in place.
 - c) A system to support family members who take care of older people is required.
 - d) Local administrative and community-based organisations are encouraged to participate in creating and monitoring a care-providing mechanism for older people.
- 2) Living with dignity
 - a) Older people have the right to live in security and dignity.
 - b) A monitoring system to detect changes in older people on time and accurately needs to be developed.
 - c) An information system should be created to protect older people from potential threats.
 - d) The role of older people’s groups and clubs should be promoted and strengthened.

3) Health

- a) A seamless transport system should be established to improve access to healthcare services.
- b) Effective geriatric services outside the hospital, especially through home care and community-based care, are needed.
- c) Increasing awareness of appropriate drug use of older people is encouraged to minimise drug side effects.
- d) Enhancing health promotion and disease prevention is highly important, especially to prevent and control diabetes mellitus, hypertension, falls, and mental health issues.
- e) Greater support for the following is required to promote physical and social activities: 1) a transport system for access to age-friendly places, including parks and green areas; 2) greater security for life and property; and 3) primary healthcare.
- f) The community-based health service system for older people should be strengthened.
- g) Physicians, nurses, and other health personnel are encouraged to be well versed in geriatric medicine, including rehabilitation.
- h) Health should be promoted amongst the younger generations so that they can reduce the risks of noncommunicable diseases and enjoy longer, healthy lives.

2. Best Practices in Self-care and Health Promotion to Achieve Independent Living

This section shows several best-practice models suitable for Thailand, which focus on promoting older people's self-care, health, and physical and financial independence. According to the Survey of Older Persons in Thailand 2017, 11% of older people (60 years old and above) live alone and 21% of older people live only with their spouses. These proportions are increasing year by year (Prasartkul et.al., 2019). As population ageing advances, promoting self-care, health, and physical and financial independence will become more important as older people will be less likely to depend on the support of their families and relatives.

1) Public Space for All: Lumpini Public Park

Barrier-free Lumpini Park is in the heart of Bangkok. All visitors, including older people and people with disabilities, can engage in physical activities and attend public events. Ramps allow wheelchair users to move around easily. The main paths are lined with benches at intervals for park users to sit, relax, and chat. People can bring their own chairs and bicycles. The park's easy access and free-use policy gives residents a sense of participation in and ownership of the park (Thepwongsirirat, 2010 [2553 BE]).

The Lumpini model was developed by the Central Group of Companies as part of their corporate social responsibility in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, and the Faculty of

Architecture of Chulalongkorn University. The non-profit Eleven Charities and the Lumpini Public Parks Office of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration created a meditation space in the park.

Lumpini Park is a model of a public–private partnership, which is key to developing living arrangements that will ensure quality of life of older people.

2) Best-practice Model to Ensure Income Security and Employment of Older People

This section highlights the mechanisms for the private sector to collaborate with public services, educational institutions, or non-profit organisations as part of corporate social responsibility, particularly related to population ageing.

a) Thammasat model: Employment of older people in the community and community enterprises

The model facilitates intergenerational learning, reinforces wisdom, strengthens community enterprises, provides older people with jobs without a retirement age, and gives older people access to new knowledge so they can adapt to a fast-changing world.

As a model to develop sustainable community businesses, it is an important mechanism for developing community enterprises and the community economy based on a cooperation network amongst an educational institute (Thammasat University), non-profit organisation Community Partnership Association, the Government Savings Bank, and other public and private partner networks.

Thammasat Business School students are indispensable to the model. They are encouraged to spend one semester (more than 4 months) in rural and urban communities. The students learn from and share ideas with community members on how to improve their quality of life. The project provides an excellent opportunity for students to think about how to apply what they learn to real-life problems. It is a win-win relationship between the students and the receiving communities. The students can learn about the real rural life and earn school credits, whilst the communities benefit from the students' business ideas.³

The project's objective is to raise community members' standard of living. Community participants are mostly older people. They work with the students to create products and engage in income-generating activities, which keep them active, productive, and stress-free. Older people learn how to make use of up-to-date technology such as social media from the students. The programme is expected to produce synergy between students' knowledge and older people's wisdom, furthering innovation and productivity and opening markets. The programme has generated work and income for communities and solidarity between older people and students.

³ For more details, see Udorn, Danthamrongkul, and Lorthanavanich (2018 [2561 BE]).

In Map Ta Phut district, Rayong Province, which has an industrial estate, the Government Savings Bank and the non-profit Community Partnership Association, founded by manufacturers in the district, are involved in the Thammasat model programmes. Monchai Raksujarit, manager of Community Partnership Association, said that the project generated a total income of THB25 million from community enterprises from 2015 to 2018.

A study on the income-generating potential of older people, targeting those who applied for loans from the Older Persons Fund in 2009, revealed that their potential could be optimised and projects' constraints overcome if older people added more value to their products. A way to add value is to connect to the modern marketing system using digital devices and social media (Soonthornchawakan, 2011 [2554 BE]). The Thammasat model is an example of how older people can overcome limits on income generation through community enterprises.

b) Jobs for older people in the public and private sectors

A report presented to the Department of Older Persons by the Thammasat University Research and Consultancy Institute and the Institute for Continuing Education and Human Resources recommended policies to promote the employment of older people: (1) reform employment laws and the social security policy, (2) restructure the employment system, and (3) foster cooperation in the labour market amongst the public and private sectors and non-profit or non-governmental organisations to create jobs for older people. These policies can be realised by allowing workers to move smoothly from formal employment to self-employment after retirement. Developing social enterprises is one of the most effective ways to expedite the employment of older people (Srisuchart, Tangtipongkul, and Aroonruengsawat, 2018 [2561 BE]).

Demographic change, particularly the decrease of the productive-age population, can constrain economic growth. The government should extend the retirement age as much as possible. Even those who are 60 years old or above should be encouraged to return to the workforce. Older workers should learn new skills and adapt to change. Re-skilling and reemployment of older people is estimated to mitigate the decline in economic growth by about 11%, whilst accepting 100,000 migrant workers per year is estimated to mitigate growth reduction by only 3.1%.

The private sector is key to creating jobs for older people. To establish a lifelong learning system to build the capacity of older people and younger generations, self-learning programmes should be developed. The government is encouraged to allot budget for them, whilst employers and workers are expected to contribute. The private sector should determine what human resources the future labour market needs and take the initiative in creating an age-friendly working environment (TDRI, 2019 [2562 BE]).

3) Re-learn and Re-skill: Schools for Older People

The 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017–2021) states that the changing demographic structure is a challenge as well as an opportunity, and improving the care system and creating a suitable environment for an ageing society are part strengthening and realising the potential of human capital (NESDB, n.d.).

Re-skilling of older people, particularly improvement of their digital literacy, is crucial if they are to adapt in the era of digital transformation. Re-skilling will help achieve the national goal of building active and healthy ageing societies (Keeratipongpaiboon, 2018).

The Thai Health Promotion Foundation published a report on schools and clubs for older people and shows good practices in Thailand. Schools for older people can help them achieve digital literacy and connectedness, which are indispensable for living with dignity. The report describes several schools for older people and suggests a model for a school. Schools for older people were launched to develop their capabilities through systematic knowledge exchange. Those who completed the courses had high intellectual competency and financial literacy. The study suggests that curricula be at least 96 hours and consist of what older people need to know (50%), should know (30%), and want to know (20%).

This study recommends that schools for older people be developed locally and considered a key component of social welfare in accordance with the Older Persons Act 2546 BE (2003). The study recommends coordinating ministries' operations and building the capacity of school personnel so they can transfer knowledge appropriately (Yodpet, Pattanasri and Ssakdaporn, 2017 [2560 BE]).

As of 2017, more than 64,000 older people were attending 1,163 schools established by the Department of Older Persons. The students learn self-care, financial planning, law, and information technology, or take vocational training (Prasartkul et al., 2019).

2) Elderly Quality of Life Development and Career Promotion Centres

The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security started establishing the centres in districts and sub-districts in 2014. The centres provide older people with activities that improve their physical, mental, and social health. Cooperation between sub-district health promotion hospitals and the centres is encouraged because their collaboration makes providing intermediate care and long-term care more effective and efficient (Whangmahaporn, 2019).

3) Social Enterprise Model Providing Home Care and Health Promotion Services

Buddy HomeCare was established in 2012 by the non-profit and non-governmental Foundation for Older Persons' Development, established in 1999 in Chiang Mai. Buddy HomeCare is a social enterprise with three missions: (a) train disadvantaged youths to care for older people; (b) provide older people with cost-effective and high-quality home care; and (c) develop a network of volunteer-based care services for disadvantaged older

people, charging affordable fees, and eventually empower them to live independently and support others in sustainable manner (Foundation For Older Persons' Development, n.d.).

As a social enterprise, Buddy HomeCare receives basic knowledge-sharing, financial, and technical support from, amongst others, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the Thai Social Enterprise Office, and the Faculty of Nursing of Chiang Mai University. Buddy HomeCare partners with HelpAge International, Mae Fah Luang Foundation, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, Social Enterprise Thailand, Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital, Opendream Co., Ltd etc.

With Chiang Mai University, the Foundation for Older Persons' Development organises care work training programmes for disadvantaged youths from hill tribes. The university and foundation train volunteer home helpers in Chiang Mai as part of the joint initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Republic of Korea to promote home care. Buddy HomeCare has trained 65 hill tribe youths as caregivers, fully sponsored, and provides volunteer-based home help services to 600 disadvantaged older people.

Buddy HomeCare has developed a mobile app into which clients, care workers, family caregivers, and volunteers can input data on daily health check-ups, such as blood pressure. If conditions requiring medical treatment are detected, the app sends alerts to nurses and other support team members. The app allows everyone involved in care to access clients' care plans (Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative, 2020).

Buddy HomeCare therefore benefits both hill tribe youths and older people in Chiang Mai.⁴

3. Recommendations

3.1. Policy Recommendations

- 1) Encourage the government and stakeholders to support modification of living arrangements of older people so they can live independently and perform daily chores by themselves. Modify transport and public spaces to make them age-friendly and promote outdoor activities of older people.
- 2) Provide older people with regular health check-ups, access to exercise spaces near their homes, places for social interaction, safe food, and access to assistance for daily life.
- 3) Create jobs for older people, without a retirement age. The Thammasat model is a good way to integrate university students' knowledge, such as information technology, and older people's experience and wisdom. The model has promoted community enterprises and can create jobs, including for older people.

⁴ The information in this section is from an interview with Sawang Kaewkantha, founder of Buddy HomeCare, conducted by a study member in March 2019.

- 4) Encourage the government and stakeholders to provide older people, regardless of their age, with easier access to knowledge and training on new technologies so they can adapt to the fast-changing world, particularly digitalisation. Schools for older people may cover a wide range of topics, such as information technology, investing, volunteering, and a healthy lifestyle.

3.2. Practice Recommendations

- 1) Locate primary healthcare facilities near older people's homes.
- 2) Develop a seamless healthcare and long-term care system to improve access to them.
- 3) Provide more day-care centres and home-care services so that older people can age in place with assistance in activities of daily living.

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