CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES TO PROMOTE HAPPY AGEING IN LAMPANG, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Background: Many changes are taking place continuously as we age—be it physiological, physical, social, cultural and economic changes. These changes showed at the expenses of quality of life of older persons being negatively affected in certain extent.

Objective: To develop the concepts and approaches to promote happiness, a more culturally sensitive description of quality of life, in Thai older persons

Method: We followed the knowledge management process to exchange experiences focusing on aging and care of the older persons in Thailand, especially in the Province of Lampang. The participants included 20 older persons from senior citizen club and ten health professionals and lecturers who had experiences with aging and aged care. We organized the knowledge and conducted a literature review and then integrate the findings into these concepts.

RESULTS: Five concepts describe happy aging from Thai perspectives. These include 1) Karmic dependence origination, 2) Independence, 3) Dependence, 4) Interdependence, and 5) Transcendence. These concepts were translated into nine approaches to promote happy ageing as follows: 1) Healthy body and mind, 2) Ability to support family, 3) Merit making, 4) Transfer of wisdom, 5) Volunteering, 6) Saving, 7) Family success, respect and caring, 8) Contemporary living, and 9) Letting go. These concepts and approaches to happy aging were implemented at two senior citizen clubs and were used to guide community services and research in the area of aging and aged care.

Keywords: Older persons, Quality of life, Happy aging, Knowledge management

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Introduction

The proportion of older people is likely to increase globally due to advances in technology even in the field of medicine and public health. It is very much evident in Thailand where the ratio of older adults increases every year, which may lead the country into an aging society within the next following years (College of Population Studies Chulalongkorn University and the Thai Elderly Research and Development Foundation, 2012). In 2005, the proportion of the elderly population was as high as 10% of the total population. Thailand is said to become "Total aging society" four years from now when the elderly population raises up to 20% and in the next 7 years Thailand is expected to be “High totally aging society” when the population aged 60 and over accounts for 28 percent of the total population (Foundation for Thai Elderly Research and Development Institute, 2014). In addition, the birth rate in Thailand has drastically decreased which affected the structure of the society. Considering this fact, the resources of maintaining or catering to the needs of the elderly is declining. There are impacts on many aspects, physically, socially and economically. Therefore, there is the need for the development of ways to provide comfort and happiness for the elderly and to improve their quality of life as well.

Objective

To develop the concepts and approaches to promote happiness (a more culturally sensitive description of the quality of life, among Thai elderly)

Literature review

The construction of knowledge on systematically formulating methods in providing happiness for the elderly was based to the steps of management.

1) Knowledge Indicator

The vision of Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Nakhon Lampang, Thailand states that “As a higher education institute, BCNLP produces professionally nurses who respect and nourish human values leading to the building of happy aging society” The college offers teaching and learning activities that focus on health care for all ages. The College also has an Elderly Health Promotion Center where many elderly within the province of Lampang participates. In addition, the college also has specialists in the care of the elderly. Therefore, the knowledge about the concept and the way to create happiness in the elderly has been established.

2) Creating and seeking knowledge

Information was collected from various sources such as the background knowledge of the authors of the study and review of related researchers. Meanwhile, the sharing of knowledge was done through practical teaching to provide academic services to society, and exchange of learning among the elderly, between the elderly and professionals, and between the experts.

3) Knowledge management system

3.1 Synthesize data analysis – The system of information about how to think and create happiness in the elderly can be divided into five issues.

a. Karmic dependence origination – It is the core of Buddhist teaching, where the concept of the good and evil, and the role of karma are applied. Khunaporn (2011) defines karma as the act of intentional action. The law of karma is more or less dependent on the "intention."

b. Free-living independence – It refers to the ability of the elderly to participate independently on regular daily activities such as saving money or having money for personal expenses. This also includes the coping capacity of the elderly with the modern technologies such as using cell phones or access to the internet that will enable them to connect with the world and give them fulfillment. Taking into consideration that the elderly are the force in the
society. According to the World Health Organization the meaning of the power of the Aging (Active Aging) is being a disease-free elderly and having physical, mental, and social well-being. This changed the aging process into being able to work correctly, have the ability to do activities based on existing rights, and have the freedom in life (World Health Organization, 2002). Therefore, having an independent life consists of family and social participation with the result of having a healthy body, source of income, and keeping pace with the use of technology. As a result, the elderly gained self-fulfillment and dignity.

c. Interdependence – In Thai society, there are many elderly who have the knowledge, ability, and experience in various fields. They are considered as the nation’s brain. The elders impart their knowledge, skills, and experiences to benefit families, communities, society and the country. Also, compared to the people in the working age, the elderly choose to volunteer in social work for the benefit of others. Thus, they should be given the support and assistance to enable them exhibits their capabilities.

d. Dependency – The level of dependence of the elderly is in line with aging, as they age their body degenerates which make them vulnerable to illnesses. When elderly experience such decline in health such as poor eyesight they tend to depend on the closest people around them which are the family. As a reflection of Thai culture, it is right for family members to take care of each other. Furthermore, the elderly depend on their families regarding physical, emotional, and economic support.

e. Transcendence – As the physical capabilities of the elderly change along with aging, they cease to participate to activities which they cannot physically handle. These changes are acceptable to the elderly for they see it reasonable to avoid disturbing the family and the society. These events may create new activities for the elderly that provides relaxation such as entering the temple and listening to Dharma. Such activities do not tie the elderly to any responsibility which reduces the chance of sickness and increases the happiness of the elderly.

3.2 Bring knowledge to others – Impart the essence of how to create happiness for the elderly emphasizing on the five issues with 200 audiences from the elderly health center of Boromarajonani College of Nursing, Lampang.

4) Processing and modifying knowledge – Improvement of the written language and completion.

4.1 Collect data from the elderly and data analysis.

4.2 Summary of knowledge and concepts about how to create happiness in the elderly:

a. Physical and Mental Health Physical health means being healthy, active, free from disease, and able to take care of themselves (Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, 2013) Mental health means being happy, cheerful, compassionate, not nagging, not stingy, and can live with the society. There are families and friends who take care of each other, lead to satisfaction and dignity which is good enough to have peace and accept death.

b. Help children in all aspects When entering the elderly stage people should not be idle without doing any activities. The elderly should do activities that benefit their children, such as counseling, guidance on the occupation that the elderly had done before. Elderly stay home to help with housework when the children were at work.

c. Always provide Happy elderly must be a selfless senior by giving or sharing to others in the form of gift or donation. It must come from their initiative which gives them the feeling of happiness.

d. Continue to work on wisdom The elderly are knowledgeable and experienced; wisdom is accumulated over time which can be transmitted to the next generations. The learning can be preserved over time with the continuous impartment. Later generations will see the value of the elderly as they apply those teachings into their lives. As a result, the elderly have better
health and quality of life because the elderly participate in activities that benefit others. It also makes the elderly proud of themselves as they are seen valuable in the community.

e. As a volunteer for the community  Old age is gaining experience through many aspects such as being ready for financial position and work responsibility (Yodpet, 2009). The role of family and society declined and so it is time to work for the public’s benefit instead of the benefit of oneself. When engaged in work for others the elderly does not feel lonely due to the network of friends. In Thailand there are 3,236 expert senior volunteers in 9 agriculture areas, education, social development, local community, medical and public health, political resource and environment, legal management and business administration, science and technology arts, and culture and religion (Wiwatwanich & Ketpichawattana, 2010).

f. Interested in savings  In 1987, Thailand established the Voluntary Retirement Savings Fund for the elderly to have a stable income with a start-up fund. Then in 1998 they presented the long-term savings instruments in the old age social security fund, which is the basic saving for minimum income insurance for employees. The savings aims to promote voluntary savings in the form of single-source savings of low-income people. In fact, savings are very important for the elderly to have financial collateral such as savings from early life or early retirement. It creates a happy life since there is money to spend for care and spend for family and social activities.

g. Families  Family members such as children of the elderly, including relatives of the elderly provide respect and care for the elderly as gratitude to the elderly. As reflected in Thai culture wherein the elderly are valued like in the older days, there is an award for the best elderly in various fields. Family also cares for the elderly either sick or healthy. The elderly are encouraged to live and to be proud of themselves.

h. Must be modern and contemporary  Nowadays, the world has changed dramatically having a variety of cultures and the world is connected by technology to provide information (Quality of life research unit, 2013). Modern technology includes computers, televisions and telephones which should be used by the elders and make it a part of everyday life. For example, using Facebook, sending e-mail. Technology provides physical, mental and other supports. It provides them the opportunity to have friends and contacts with them by Internet. This also connects them to their families and relatives. It also stimulates and empowers the elderly to have the ability to think, learn, read and understand things and helps to prevent and slow down dementia. It is evident that technology and electronic media can improve the quality of life for the elderly. Therefore, as the elderly impart knowledge on their past experiences they learn about the modern world with the younger generations in return.

i. The elderly are at ease with a happy heart  As mentioned, the elderly go through phases of changes along with aging, the elderly have accepted these changes by recognizing them, So they will not get stressed. The elderly are at ease because the elderly have religion as a foundation, having faith in the doctrine of religion such as the use of the Trinity: Vulnerable (Inconsistent, Unstable, Changing); Suffering (The condition is not tolerated. Generally refers to the body); and Soulless (Not ego, not self).

5) Public Relations  – Disseminating information on how to create happiness in the elderly, such as educating the elderly in the community and publishing on the college’s website.

6) Synthesis of concepts, concepts, and methods of enhancing happiness in the elderly  – The results of literature review and knowledge management on the concept and method of enhancing happiness in the elderly are provided by the Handbook on Concepts and Methods of Promotion in the Elderly.

Method

Data were collected by using in-depth interview, and non-participant observation. The in-depth interviews included the meaning of happiness, and all interviews were recorded. The authors collected the data from April 2016 to March 2017, as follows:
1) The researcher informed the elderly of the purpose of the interview, make an appointment, to set date and place of the interview to fit the with convenience time.

2) Built relationships by familiarization before conducting the interview. The researcher visited thrice. The first was for the general inquiries than the other two were the interview.

3) Checked the reliability of the information.
   a. Checked the accuracy and reliability of data by selecting elderly who are aware of the date, time and place. Data collection was done twice.
   b. Authentication and verification by at least two authors to collect information. Recorded all interviews and stored it in the computer systematically.
   c. Reliability of data was based on the knowledge and experience of the author’s team in caring for elderly. In addition, there was a preparation time allotted for the author’s team.
   d. Data saturation - The data was stored in two different time intervals, so the data remains constant.

Result and Conclusion

The results were analyzed systematically. First, the tapes from the in-depth interview were organized. Second, the information from the tape was transcribed which is then matched with the observation. Third, non-issue related messages were cut odd to provide the specific issues. Fourth, the interview content was decode out of the conversation with consideration of the five key points and match them to the nine issues. Finally, consider each subsection, information was provided to explain each issue. The knowledge management and literary review resulted to the Model of the happiness index in elderly.

Table 1: Model of happiness index in elderly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Concept</th>
<th>Happiness Index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dependence origination</td>
<td>a. 1. Have to give to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Independence</td>
<td>b. 2. Healthy body and mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 3. Have savings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d. 4. Can use advanced technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Interdependence</td>
<td>e. 5. Older people can help families and relatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f. 6. Use wisdom to benefit others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>g. 7. Volunteer spirit for community</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Dependence</td>
<td>h. 8. Families and relatives are respected and caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Transcendence</td>
<td>i. 9. There is acceptable release</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Elderly in Thai society can create happiness by themselves through thinking and act on their own. The family, the elderly, and the community relied on one another. It is said that the elderly will be happy when they were able to use their potential in participating in activities. This is in line with the Active Ageing concept of the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2002). Dr. Puttichai Jatapanakul, a specialist in Thai elderly medicine, has defined Active Ageing, it is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance the quality of life as people age. It applies to both individuals and population groups. (Chiapanakul, 2001).
Recommendation

1) Everyone should be prepared before entering the elderly age in terms of self-care, good physical and mental health, savings, and so on.

2) Family members should build good relationships within the family, to love and respect each other.

3) Older people who have been involved in family or social activities felt valued. Therefore, the elderly should be encouraged to participate in activities.

4) The elderly are knowledgeable, capable and experienced. Thus, the elderly should be encouraged to impart knowledge to the present and future generations.

5) The elderly experiences changes due to age especially physically. The elderly must be provided with support and care from the family and other relevant institutions.

Reference


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