

3736835 NSNS/D : MAJOR : NURSING ; D.N.S.(NURSING SCIENCE)

KEY WORDS : LIFE STYLE / SELF-CARE / ELDERLY / RURAL.

KANITTHA NAKA : LIFE-STYLE AND SELF-CARE OF THE ELDERLY IN A THAI VILLAGE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND. THESIS ADVISORS : ARPHORN CHUAPRAPAISILP, Ph.D. SOMCHIT HANUCHARURNKUL, Ph.D. TASSANA BOONTONG, Ed.D. 227 p. ISBN 974-662-835-6

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to describe and explain the life-style and self-care of the elderly in a village in southern Thailand. Data were collected during an 18 month period from November 1996 through April 1998 through tape recorded in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, as well as participant observation. Data collection and analysis were done following the process described by Spradley.

The informants described the meaning of being elderly (khon-kae) as it is associated with their body, mind, and their roles. Four themes emerged: 1) to be old because of decreased (physical) power; 2) to be old because of becoming grandparents; 3) to be old because of changes in age, mind, and spirit; and 4) to be old because of physical changes. The informants also described the beginning of the aging process as early as 50 in women and closer to 60 in men.

Life-style and self-care of the elderly were related to their jobs, religious beliefs, family ties and broader society. Working elderly were most likely to go to bed early and wake up at 1-2 a.m. to work on the rubber farm. After finishing work around 2 p.m., the elderly would rest and have afternoon tea with their friends. Their life-style was harmonized between mind, body, and spirit which was also associated with their natural environment. Four themes of life-style were: 1) "Working (on rubber plantation) is life"; 2) "Having happy family"; 3) "Religion is a way of life"; and 4) "Living in a peaceful community". This life-style of the elderly was contrasted to the belief of the younger generation that working in the city was easier and more preferable.

Health was described as physical ability and fitness to work normally. Health was described as the ability to work and having no disease or having only mild sickness that had no effect on ability to work. Illness was described as weakness that decreased ability to work.

Self-care was described as the process and actions that made them healthy and allowed them to work and perform activities of daily living independently. Two types of self-care were described. Wellness self-care consisted of a) working and exercise, b) eating well as in "full and healthfully", c) adequate sleep as in "not more or less", d) mind cultivation as in "healthy mind make healthy body", and e) having physical check-ups. Illness self-care included the use of a) home remedies without seeing a doctor, b) western medicine as "we trust them", c) herbs as "a second choice", d) magic "when evil made illness", and e) acceptance as "the belief of Khamma".

This study illustrated that life-style and self-care of the elderly stayed in harmony in a natural balance and order. This life-style should be maintained and promoted by providing appropriate health education. An independent agricultural occupation should be emphasized because it gives happiness and togetherness to the lives of the elderly.