

Thesis Title Beliefs Concerning Malaria and Bednet Usage
 Behavior in a Karen Hilltribe Community

Name Thawat Boonyamanee

Degree Master of Arts (Medical and Health Social
 Science)

Thesis Supervisory Committee

 Oratai Ruayajin, B.A., M.A., M.P.H., Dr.P.H.
 Suphot Dendoung, B.A., M.A., Ph.D.
 Chusak Prasittisuk, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D.

Date of Graduation 19 January B.E.2536 (1993)

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this thesis were to study beliefs concerning malaria, and attitudes, behavior and factors affecting bednet usage. The sample consisted of people in a Karen community, Mae Ramard District, Tak Province, who were divided into two groups, those having no bednets and those having bednets. Both groups were later provided with insecticide-impregnated bednets. The data were collected through applied anthropological methods, namely household census and mapping, group interviews, indepth interviews, and observation, for a period of three consecutive months.

Results indicated that both sample groups had similar beliefs concerning malaria although the majority of these beliefs were incorrect in comparison to scientific knowledge (causation, transmission, perceived susceptibility, and malaria prevention).

Attitudes toward bednets: Both sample groups generally had positive perceptions of bednets (e.g. improved sleeping, prevention of insect and mosquito bites). The groups preferred to use white cotton bednets rather than nylon bednets, perceiving them to be more suitable for children and the ill, more durable for long-term use, and superior for insect protection. However, some subjects still perceived bednet usage as uncomfortable.

Attitudes regarding insecticide-impregnated bednets: Both groups generally perceived impregnated bednets to have superior insect and mosquito prevention qualities in comparison to normal bednets. Subjects perceived impregnated bednets as safe to use. However, some subjects perceived the two net types as equal in mosquito prevention properties, and likely to cause illness in children.

Behavior in bednet usage of the group having bednets: They regularly used bednets during sleeping hours 09.00 P.M. - 05.00 A.M. in the rainy and winter seasons, except when temporarily outside the bednets while engaging in certain activities such as cigarette and opium smoking, hunting, and sleeping, etc. Subjects in the bednets group were observed sleeping with either their whole body or part-body outside the bednet, thus placing them at greater malaria risk. In addition, when subjects engaged in outdoor activities away from their homes (e.g., hunting, growing rice and corn), they were approximately evenly divided in terms of bednet usage. Those factors found to affect the bednet usage behavior of this group included demographic and socio-economic variables, beliefs concerning malaria, perceived benefits and barriers, attitudes toward using bednets, number of bednets per household, and community ecology.

Regarding behaviors associated with the insecticide-impregnated bednet usage of both groups, it was found that their behaviors were similar. Those factors found to affect insecticide-impregnated bednet usage in both groups included demographic and socio-economic variables, beliefs concerning malaria, perceived benefits and barriers, attitude toward impregnated bednets, number of bednets per household, community ecology, and political, medical and public health institutions.

Recommendations for malaria control:

1) Emphasize community education in order to correct knowledge concerning malaria causation, transmission, and prevention. Educational measures should involve heads of community, heads of household and spouses.

2) To promote bednet usage during all sleeping hours for all household members.

3) To coordinate with other government ministries in the development of community infrastructure.

4) Provide education in agricultural methods in order to increase future income and standard of living.