

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The Thai National Children's Day slogan in 1973 was "Good children are the glory of the nation; if the children are intelligent, the country will be prosperous" (เด็กดีเป็นศรีแก่ชาติ เด็กฉลาด ชาติเจริญ). This indicates that children are considered the most valuable national resource, and a powerful force in the development and stability of the nation. In order to become adults with full potential, many factors are involved. According to Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow, "The development of an individual's characteristics results from the interaction that takes place between his inherited potential and his environment by which he is stimulated" (37-38).

The well-being of children has broadly been the topic of both research papers and seminars. In the U.S., a research paper on *Children Who Witness Domestic Violence* by Joy D. Osofsky, examines the effects of domestic violence on children raised in hostile and abusive homes (1-20). A colloquium on *The Science of Child Development: a New Lens for Public Health* was held in 2007 by the experts of Child Health and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health to discuss the lifelong impacts associated with early childhood adversities. *Stop Child Neglect*, a seminar held in Thailand in 2001 by The Child Development Center, discussed correlations between impoverished families living hand-to-mouth and degenerative behavior in Thai children (vcharkarn.com). Another seminar, *Broken Home Children*,

was held in 2003 at the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center to present an abstract of *Changsamran*, a novel which depicts destitute Thai children raised in broken homes. The dean of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram temple, Phrarajyarnvisith, who is referred to in the article, *Children Crisis Resulting from Adults*, claims that social ineptitudes found in Thai society are mostly the result of neglected children, and in order to solve the problem, it is necessary to start from the family institution (Komchadluek.net).

Aside from seminars, the plight of children has been brought to awareness through literature as well. Writers often portray children from broken families, focusing on the negative impacts of child neglect. The writings reveal the negative effects connected with childhood adversities after a child is abandoned in order to point out to the readers the difficulties of neglected children. Child characters in these writings represent young victims who are neglected in a broken family. There are many popular English and American novels which present these themes. *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens is a story of an orphan, Oliver, who was born in a workhouse and forced to overcome life's worst adversities such as hunger, misery, and loneliness. However, after meeting caring and good-natured people, he was then able to flourish and uncover the truth of his absent family. This was mentioned in the article "Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*: Literature that Changed the World" by Richard D. Morris, who also noted that this is a popular novel which nearly everyone who can read English has read. Another similar novel, *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, was commented on by Miles Donald in his introduction to *Huckleberry Finn* as the best of Mark Twain. The story reflects negative, and often times, abusive family relationships and the measures sought by children to escape violent and neglectful homes. The novel focuses on the adventures of two main young male

characters, Tom Sawyer, as a mischievous and thoughtless child living with his old aunt, and Huckleberry Finn, as a run away from a violent and alcoholic father.

It is not only western literature that is concerned with child issues. Many Thai writers have incorporated such themes into their works as well. The popular Thai novel, *Namphu* (น้ำพุ), by Suwannee Sukhonta, which was in the list of books recommended by the Let's Read Project and Sarakadee Press in the year 2004, deals with the degeneration of the author's son, Namphu, after his parents' divorce. Neglect by his parents causes Namphu to use drugs as a way to numb his pain, which unfortunately brings about an early death. The author narrates her son's true story in order to show the negative impacts on a child who, without parental guidance, turns to drugs. The book also aims to raise the awareness of child neglect and broken family problems to the attention of society. Another Thai novel that focuses on the plight of children is *Tongneurgao* (ทองเนื้อเก้า) by Botan. Praised by The Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards as an excellent novel in *The List of Excellent Books 1986*, the novel focuses on the life of Wanchalerm from birth into adulthood, and his life of hardships and unhealthy surroundings caused by his broken family and alcoholic mother. Wanchalerm represents a victim of the broken family institution and child neglect, which leads him to face early childhood difficulties that bring about negative consequences in his life.

The novel *Changsamran* (ช่างสำราญ) by Duanwad Pimwana was published in 2003 and was included in the list of 100 good books recommended by the Let's Read Project and Sarakadee Press in 2004. The novel won the S.E.A. Write Award in 2003. Unlike other novels, the story is narrated from the perspective of a boy, Kamphol Changsamran (กำพล ช่างสำราญ). Although coming from a broken family, Kamphol is able to deal with life's adversities in a positive way. Duanwad Pimwana

spoke at the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre at a seminar entitled “Broken Home Children as the Reflection of Thai Novel *Changsamran*.” She explained that the novel was inspired by her daily life experiences and the hardships she sees people face in her own community every single day. Her speech asserted that child neglect still exists in today’s society. Thus, the study of *Changsamran* can explore the real issues which actually occur in life, and not only in the imagination of the author.

As stated before, the plight of children has been brought to literature in order to depict the real problems of children with life adversities to the reader or the entire society. The literature gives people a detailed preview of human experiences and is associated with the truth. Thus, it is obvious that literature can be a great resource for the study of social issues regarding to child adaptation. In addition, regarding to children with hardships in life, in both true stories and in fiction, some of those children are able to grow up to be competent adults and thrive in spite of adversities such as broken families, poverty, and neglect. However, both fact and fiction identify that some children are not able to rise above their circumstances and succeed. It depends on individual resilience, which affects how they react to circumstances.

Although the various definitions of “resilience” vary, obvious similarities can be found. “Resilience” arguably refers to a process of successful adaptation and transformation in spite of risks and adversities promoted by a set of protective factors. These protective factors can be classified into three main groups which include: social support, internal or personal strengths such as perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills like coping and communication skills.

It can be said that resilience is the important key for the successful adaptation of children in spite of life adversities. It would, therefore, be interesting

and worthwhile to conduct a study on the novel *Changsamran*, and examine possible protective factors influencing Kamphol Changsamran's childhood that have helped him cope with hardships without parental support.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine how the protagonist, Kamphol Changsamran, in the novel *Changsamran* can cope with his life adversities without parental support.

1.3 Educational Advantage

The study of the protagonist, Kamphol Changsamran, in the novel *Changsamran* should be able to reveal key factors affecting resilience in Changsamran's childhood as a case study of children who deal with difficulties in life without parental support. Thus, the study will provide an understanding of some important factors that boost the process of adaptation and transformation in spite of risk and adversity to facilitate better development in children facing hardship in their lives.

1.4 Method and Scope of the Study

1.4.1 Study and classify factors affecting resilience in children to overcome hardship in life.

1.4.2 Review literature and previous studies related to key factors affecting resilience despite life adversities.

1.4.3 A novel, *Changsamran*, is used as a case study of resilient children who overcome hardships in life without familial and parental support.

1.4.4 The data for this qualitative study is thirty seven chapters from *Changsamran* which won the S.E.A. Write Award in 2003. *Changsamran* is selected as the source of data in this study since the story itself is based on true incidents which the author encounters in her everyday life.

1.4.5 In this study, the data is analyzed using content analysis based on the resilient literature of three protective factors, which are the theories of social supports by Cobb and Pender; the theories of perceived self-efficacy by Bandura; and the theories of problem-coping skills by Lazarus and Folkman, in order to demonstrate how the protagonist, Kamphol Changsamran, can cope with hardship in life and survive in society without parental or familial support.