

Abstract

The objective of this research is to study the way of life, the problems and the needs of the elderly by means of formal and informal study and evaluation of the potentiality of the social support and social network. This is to determine trends of social welfare services for the elderly.

The research methodology consists of literature review of both Thai and English documentary, questionnaires and intensive interviews with elderly in six different areas of various scale of development ranging from a fully developed community to a developing one or a community with poverty. The interviews are carried out by having the elderly, the community's leaders and the family or the social support and social network of the elderly participate in a group conversation.

The findings indicate that the living status of the elderly varied in accordance with the characteristic of the community. For instance, in the fully-developed community, the elderly are found to be happy with decent living condition which is contrary to the elderly of the developing one. They tend to have a harsh life but they are very self-reliant. The main obstacles are health problems and poverty, However, the needs of the elderly from all types of community are similar - - the need for living peacefully, for having a harmonious life until the end of their lives and for medical care from the government service. Some of the elderly want their

younger generations to be successful in life. For the poverty group, they want clothing, food and a better life. Regarding the informal and formal potentiality of the social support network, the findings show that the former play a more important role than the latter. The strong potentiality depends on the socialization and values of the society. For instance, the community with high respect for the elderly would look after the elderly. The formal social support network, especially the leaders, view that the responsibility of caring for the elderly should be within the family.

Recommendations proposed by these researchers emphasis on the supportive of the family system to put more concern on the care-taking role. The Public Health Department should be able to remedy a common sickness, and finally we should encourage the community and the leaders to understand more about the elderly and to have early planning for elderly.