

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN SUPPORTING THE ELDERLY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

by

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The number and proportion of the elderly in Thailand have increased rapidly with socio-economic transitions, challenging the traditional supportive role of the family.

The present study describes the nature, extent and the determinants of support the elderly get from and give to the family, the caregivers' needs and ways stakeholders can help optimize the family's role in both short and long terms.

A cross-sectional study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative component involved in-depth validated interview of 14 experts. Quantitative data came from surveys of 638 elderly and 694 caregivers in the metropolis (235 elderly, 262 caregivers), municipal areas (200 elderly, 200 caregivers) and rural areas (203 elderly, 232 caregivers) in Phetchaburi province based on the sampling frame of the National Statistics Office of Thailand. A multi-stage sampling identified study villages and population blocks while a systematic random sampling

helped select the elderly and caregivers. The interviews were done by trained personnel using valid and reliable questionnaires. Factor analysis helped generate dependent variables reflecting the multiple dimensions of support. Appropriate analyses were carried out to describe the nature and extent of support and the two-stage least square method (2SLS) was performed to demonstrate the predictors of dependent variables.

More than 97% of the elderly in all study areas reported getting support from the family in five categories: money, materials, daily care, care during illness and periodic visit. Most supports were a combination of many categories. The majority of the elderly in all study areas (more than 75%) reported giving support to the family in the same five categories and in combination.

Two-stage least square analysis of a full empirical model involving 21 possible predictors of support received by the elderly showed that about 16%-37% of the variation of the dependent variable was significantly explained by the equation. The two-stage least square equations were all significant for specific study areas. Health status of the elderly was a common predictor of support given to the elderly in all study areas. Unique significant factors in specific study areas included: Municipal - 1) household income, 2) relationship between the elderly and caregivers, and 3) whether the elderly and caregivers lived in the same household; Rural

- 1) size of household of the elderly, 2) number of children under six in the household of the elderly, and 3) the perception of the elderly towards the support they got from the family; Metropolis - 1) household income, 2) respect for the elderly, 3) migration of family members, 4) sex and education of the elderly, 5) adequacy of income, and 6) the perception of the elderly towards the level of support they received from the family.

Predictors of support given by the elderly were similarly analyzed using all 21 independent variables. The 2SLS equation was significant and all 21 variables explained about 41% of the dependent variable. The 2SLS equations were all significant for specific study areas. Factors significantly associated with such support were: 1) the relationship between the elderly and caregivers and 2) the perception of the elderly towards the support they gave to the family. Unique significant factors were: Rural - 1) age of the elderly and 2) their perception towards the support they gave to the family; Metropolis - 1) the proportion of household members in non-agricultural job, 2) sex 3) age, and 4) the perception of the elderly about the support they gave to the family.

Further analysis was done to find models with fewer independent variables, i.e., the compact model. Fewer variables were selected from the full model using the stepwise regression and then the 2SLS analysis was conducted by the standard methods. All equations were significant. Despite fewer independent variables, the

equations could explain the variation of the dependent variables similar to the full model.

The caregivers desired to obtain assistance to:
1) reduce financial burden, 2) reduce the burden of caring and 3) provide education and recreation to the elderly.

Most experts believed that the promotion of family support for the elderly must involve many institutions: family, community, the private sector, the government and the elderly themselves. The role of each institution can vary according to circumstances.