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WATHINEE BOONCHALAKSI : FAMILY SIZE AND ELDERLY CARE.

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Thailand has been one of the most successful countries at reducing fertility levels in a short period of time. The average number of children in a family declined from six in the mid-1960s to two in the mid-1990s. This has created concern about whether the decline in family size will affect family-based support and care for the elderly.

The main objectives of this research are (1) to investigate the patterns of care for the elderly in terms of financial support, instrumental support, and emotional support; (2) to study the relationship between family size and elderly care in the three kinds of support mentioned above and; (3) to examine the effects of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of children and elderly on the care provided to the elderly.

The main hypothesis of the study was that the family size will have an effect on elderly care. Children from a small family are more likely to provide support to their elderly parents than are children from a large family, even other factors such as characteristics of the children themselves and characteristics of the elderly and property they own are controlled.

The 1995 Survey of the Welfare of the Elderly in Thailand was used in the study. The unit of analysis is children aged 15 -59 whose father or mother was aged 60-79. The sample covered 20,067 adult children. Detailed analysis was undertaken of the relationship between family size and elderly care and factors relating to characteristics of children and the elderly. Initial analysis used cross-tabulations and chi-square test. Based on the results of cross-tabulations, logistic regression and multinomial logic regression were utilized.

The research results are presented in the three areas, namely, the financial support, instrumental support, and the emotional support provided to the elderly. The results of bivariate analysis and multivariate analysis reveal that the number of siblings of children significantly affected the likelihood of financial support, instrumental support, and emotional support provided to elderly parents. Adult children from small families were more likely to provide support to their elderly parents and share the same house as their elderly parents compared to those from large families. This is consistent with the hypothesis where it was stated there would be a difference between adult children from different family size in terms of support to their elderly parents. The results of the study also indicate that it is the characteristics of adult children that have the strongest impact on whether a child will provide support to their elderly parents. A major policy implication of the results is that a small family size should be continuously promoted because a small number of children will raise the probability that a child will provide support to their parents and a smaller number of children will increase the chance of a child living with their elderly parents.