



## Enhancing Emotional Strength of Professional Nurses: Buddhist Principles and Model

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### Abstract

This article is part of mixed-method research that aims to examine the emotional strength of professional nurses, propose Buddhist principles and models for enhancing the emotional strength of professional nurses, and develop a Buddhist model for enhancing the emotional strength of professional nurses. The population Group No.1 was a control group consisting of 50 professional nurses from Samrong Medical Hospital and Samut Sakhon Hospital. While Group No.2 refers to an experimental group consisting of 18 professional nurses from Samut Sakhon Hospital who voluntarily enrolled in the classroom “Joyful Nursing Classroom” whereas the Buddhist principle of the 4 *Bhāvanās* was mainly applied in the classroom. The 6 professional nursing specialists, Buddhist experts, and social experts were also interviewed for content analysis. The results showed that emotional intelligence in Buddhism relies on the concepts and methods of balance, which include the Middle Path, Right Understanding (*Sammādiṭṭhi*), and Right Thought (*Sammāsaṅkappa*), to allow a person to be aware and understand his or her own emotions. For a nurse to perform at the professional standard level, emotional intelligence also requires mindfulness and awareness. A Buddhist model for strengthening the emotional intelligence of nursing professionals was developed from the concept of the Fourfold Development (*bhāvanā*) and applied in a workshop design. The model and the workshop format were evaluated by experts and then used with two nursing populations. The model demonstrated 4 ways to strengthen emotional intelligence among the nursing professionals: 1) self-reflection, 2) development of emotional strength and positive thinking, 3) increase of mental power through meditation, and 4) learning of “caring & sharing” concept and letting go, which was central to the model. The workshops resulted in a positive change in the mood and emotions of the nursing professionals, especially in terms of behaviors, communication, and reasoning.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Intelligence, Buddhist Model, Nursing Professionals*

### 1. Introduction

A professional nurse is a very important occupation in today's society as a way of helping people who are sick both physically and mentally. The Buddha also gave importance to this matter. This can be seen from the Buddhist teachings on the care and cleanliness of sick monks. In the story of Pūtigattatissa Thera “Tissa Thera who had a rotten body” in Citta Vaggo, an elder who was left unattended suffering from the disease of pustules growing all over the rotten body with lymph and blood. Without disgust, the Teacher himself ministered to him by bathing, rubbing the body, washing, drying, and helping to don robes for him, etc. (Norman, 1906). with a boundless compassionate heart. The Buddha also allowed the treatment of diseases with various medicines, such as the five medicines (*bhesajja*), namely: ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, and molasses. “Those medicines which may be partaken of by ill monks” (Horner, 1971). In the concept of treating such diseases, the Buddha focused on mental management due to the fact that the mind is important as shown in the Dhammapada “*Manopubbaṅ gamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā*” (Hinuber, & Norman, 1994). Mental phenomena are preceded by the mind, have the mind as their leader, and are made by the mind. (Norman, 1997). It should be noted that the term “*dhammā*” in this particular context refers to the four *nāmakhandhas* as evidenced in *Paramatthajotikā* “*Tesu imasmihāne nissattanijjīvadhammo adhippeto. So atthato tayo arūpino khandhā “vedanākkhandho saññākkhandho saṅkhārakkhandhoti. Ete hi, mano*

*pubbaṅgamo etesanti manopubbagamā nāma.*” which can be translated as “The phenomenal of non-sentient beings (*nissatta*) or inanimate (*nijīva*), the Buddha had already meant here. The *nissatta* or *nijīva* means the three immaterial aggregates, namely: - aggregate of feeling, aggregate of perception, and aggregate of mental formation. Those three *arūpakhandhas* are called having the mind (*viññāa*) as the leader.” (Norman, 1906). Buddhism gives importance to the mind “The world is led by the mind; thought is of all things foremost.” Considering this message, the concept of mind in Buddhism is like Kant’s transcendental idealism which is ready to connect with the mind of a qualified human being (Sigambhirayana, 2013). Human feelings and emotions to have a manner of expressing frustration, stress, and pressure on the mind will be followed by anxiety, anger, lamentation, regret, heartache, and resentment. The symptoms of mental disorders are more or less severe and vary from event to event, individual adherence, and the severity of the problem (Suwansaeng, 2001). These are the maintenance of the material and immaterial. That is to say, it is the management of the five aggregates. These ways of treating patients are life support and palliative feature that characterizes the work and importance of professional nurses in today’s world. Buddhism is an indistinguishable part of Thai society. The concepts, way of life, culture, traditions, and practices of Buddhism have become the cornerstones of development relevant to people of all levels (Abhakaro et al., 2013).

Professional nurses are important people in supporting the lives of patients and relatives. Therefore, the cornerstone of solid nursing emotions is to create satisfaction in the people around you as well as to communicate and exchange information, news, facts, opinions, feelings, and attitudes from one person to another or that group (Senadisai, & Arpanantikul, 2009).

The global society is changing rapidly and becoming more complex with more communication seamlessly with other countries. This situation caused most people to change their behaviors negatively from someone with good manners to someone who has an aggressive temper towards others. It can be seen that those situations reveal their negative behaviors and selves through the expression of unstable inner emotions. Therefore, the emotional strengthening of professional nurses is the heart of the patient screening process, patient discrimination, the care during the waiting period for the treating physician, etc. Therefore, the emotional strength of professional nurses is crucial because the solution to suffering is rooted in the human mind. It is consistent with the concept of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University to have an educational plan and a policy to create awareness. The objective is to enable all professions to develop their minds and learn Buddhism integrated with modern science. In addition, this research is consistent with the 8<sup>th</sup> research policy and strategy (2555-2559 B.E.), which has formulated research strategies that are in line with national development guidelines based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. The focus is in line with the changing context and the economic, social, and environmental risks.

From this phenomenon, the Researcher needed to find a Buddhist model that combines with modern science to strengthen the emotional strength of the nursing profession to develop the mind and to learn Buddhism integrated with modern science to add value, and to prepare for future growth. It also contributes to economic, social, and public benefits both at the community and national levels, together with elevating the emotional intelligence knowledge to support the stepping into the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). In this regard, the nursing profession was selected as one of seven occupations that developed particularly desirable characteristics. It takes both the science and the art of personal health care to create a qualified nurse who is smart and emotionally stable. The key issue of “Professional nurse” reflects a career that has a heavy workload. One nurse has to take care of more than 462 patients, which does not meet the world standard of 300 patients per nurse. When nurses are in shortage, the workload is therefore heavier. As a result, the average number of nurses' turnover rate has steadily increased by approximately 4% per year (Thai PBS World, 2016).

The heavy workload is due to the nature of the nurse's work that has to work continuously with rotation operational stress. From the literature reviewed, nurses are among the population at risk of health-threatening factors which has an impact on the mood, irritability, discomfort, discouragement, physical exhaustion, feeling a loss of confidence as well as increased stress levels from caring for patients under a tight economic environment (Cousineau, McDowell, Hotz, & Hébert, 2003) which is considered to have an impact on the health care of the nurses themselves are affected by stress. The most important thing in a nursing career is that nursing caregivers have to accept the patient's emotions stored in the mind; causing stress due to the practice of nurses is one of the major problems incorporating health policy into the public health system

(Pikó, 1999). The main aim of the study thus was to develop a model for strengthening the emotional intelligence of professional nurses with the mixed research method.

## 2. Objectives

This study was conducted to understand enhancing the emotional strength of professional nurses with the Buddhist principles and Model. The objectives of this study are listed as follows.

- 1) To examine the emotional strength of professional nurses
- 2) To propose Buddhist principles and models for enhancing the emotional strength of professional nurses
- 3) To develop a Buddhist model for enhancing the emotional strength of professional nurses

## 3. Materials and Methods

The materials implemented in this research consist of the following:

**Population Group No.1 (Contest Group):** 50 Professional nurses

- Emotional assessment form
- questionnaires
- observed by the Researcher

**Population Group No.2 (Experimental Group):** 18 nurses (Joyful Nursing Classroom)

- Emotional assessment form
- Pre-test and Post-test questionnaires

After reviewing such research tools by experts, the Researcher applied them to two population groups and then used the results tested from those two population groups to analyze for opinions. The facts that emerged, yield theories to design a Buddhist model. After that is the process of creating a Buddhist model. It was proposed to the qualified persons consisting of 3 professional nursing experts and 3 Buddhist experts to give their opinions along with additional interviews for the development of the emotional strengthening model of professional nurses. This is in order to be complete and able to answer research questions, namely principles, and Buddhist models. for the emotional strengthening of professional nurses.

The mixed research method was implemented in this research. The scope of the research is defined in two areas as follows:

**1) Scope of Content:** Study on the theory of emotional strength, the theory of mental development according to the 4 *Bhāvanās* principles (*kāya-bhāvanā*, *sīla-bhāvanā*, *citta-bhāvanā*, and *paññā-bhāvanā*), study the nature of work, problems in the performance of duties and standards of professional nurses, as well as study the Buddhist principles of emotional strengthening, and Dhamma principles for enhancing mindfulness (*sati*), morality (*sīla*), and meditation (*samādhi*).

**2) Scope of Population:** After studying the content, therefore, the information is brought into the process of emotional strengthening of professional nurses. defining quality research methods, field research, research design, and defining the population boundaries of the two hospitals according to academic principles including nurses who have worked for more than 3 years (Rosenstein, 2008). To make the research more complete, the Researcher created a research tool for in-depth interviews by interviewing 3 professional nursing specialists, 3 Buddhist experts, and behavioral science specialists. This is to explore different opinions and perspectives such as attitudes, behaviors, communication, tolerance, and desirable characteristics of emotionally strong professional nurses.

The population shown in the research was divided into 2 groups to see similarities or differences.

**1) Population Group No.1** has set the criteria for selecting the population groups of 50 professional nurses in total. They are 25 nurses from Samrong Medical Hospital which is a private hospital located in Samut Prakan Province; and 25 nurses from Samut Sakhon Hospital, Samut Sakhon Province. All the nurses are on duty on a daily basis. This is to know the emotional strength of professional nurses. The research tools used were an emotional assessment form, a questionnaire, and observation by the researcher.

**2) The Population Group No.2** consisted of 18 professional nurses who voluntarily enrolled in the classroom “Joyful Nursing Classroom” of Samut Sakhon Hospital. In this group, the Researcher has mainly applied the Buddhist principle of the 4 *Bhāvanās* Buddhist principles in the classroom as well.

#### 4. Results

The research studying “Enhancing Emotional Strength of Professional Nurses: Buddhist Principles and Model” aims to examine the emotional strength of professional nurses, propose Buddhist principles and models for enhancing the emotional strength of professional nurses, and develop a Buddhist model for enhancing emotional strength of professional nurses. By applying the research conceptual framework and the data used as research tools, the findings of the data analysis may be presented in 6 sections, respectively, as follows:

- 1) Basic information of the population and the sample of Group No.1 consisting of 50 people.
- 2) The results of the opinion analysis from the assessment of emotional strengthening of professional nurses of the population and the sample of the Group No.1 of 50 people, divided into 2 hospitals: - (1) Samrong Medical Hospital, Samut Prakan Province, and (2) Samut Sakhon Hospital, Samut Sakhon Province.
- 3) Basic information of the population and the sample of Group No.2 of 18 people are professional nurses who voluntarily joined the classroom “Joyful Nursing Classroom” Buddhist principle of the 4 *Bhāvanās*, Samut Sakhon Hospital. The purpose of using tools is to find and develop a Buddhist model for the emotional strengthening of professional nurses according to the 3<sup>rd</sup> objective.
- 4) Synthesis of opinions and recommendations from in-depth interviews with the experts which is the population and the third group of samples, consisting of 6 professional nursing specialists, Buddhist experts, and social experts. This is to ensure that the principles and the method of the Buddhist model are perfect and can be practical, able to meet the heavy workload of professional nurses, able to solve real-world problems, as well as the nurse's ability to cope with the rapid changes in social conditions appropriately and effectively.
- 5) Develop a model for the emotional strengthening of professional nurses.
- 6) Show an overview of model development in the emotional strengthening of professional nurses.

However, when analyzing the results of the emotional strengthening assessment of professional nurses, the population and the samples of Group No.1 and sample Group No.2. It can be shown in the following table.

**Table 1** Ability to Enhance the Emotional Strength of Professional Nurses

Ability to Enhance the Emotional Strength of Professional Nurses	Samrong Medical Hospital		Samut Sakhon Hospital	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
1. Emotional stability	2.70	0.26	2.78	0.26
2. Encouragement	2.51	0.30	2.68	0.34
3. Problem management	2.83	0.90	2.84	0.42
Total	2.68	0.48	2.76	0.26

From the table, it was found that in the assessment of emotional strengthening of professional nurses, in the group of professional nurses from Samrong Medical Hospital, there were opinions about the ability to build emotional strength in all three aspects, which were quite true according to the mean score of 2.68 and S.D. at 0.48. And the opinions on each aspect were at the quite a realistic level as follows:

Emotional Stability aspect, the mean value is at 2.70 level, and the S.D. value is at 0.26 level.

Encouragement aspect, the mean value is at 2.51 level, and the S.D. value is at 0.30 level.

Problem Management aspect, the mean value is at 2.83 level, and the S.D. value is at 0.90 level.

In terms of professional nurses from Samut Sakhon Hospital, there were opinions about the ability to build emotional strength in all three aspects, which were quite true according to the mean of 2.76 and S.D. 0.26, and the opinions on each aspect were at the quite a realistic level as follows:

Emotional Stability aspect, the mean value is at 2.78 level, and the S.D. value is at 0.26 level.

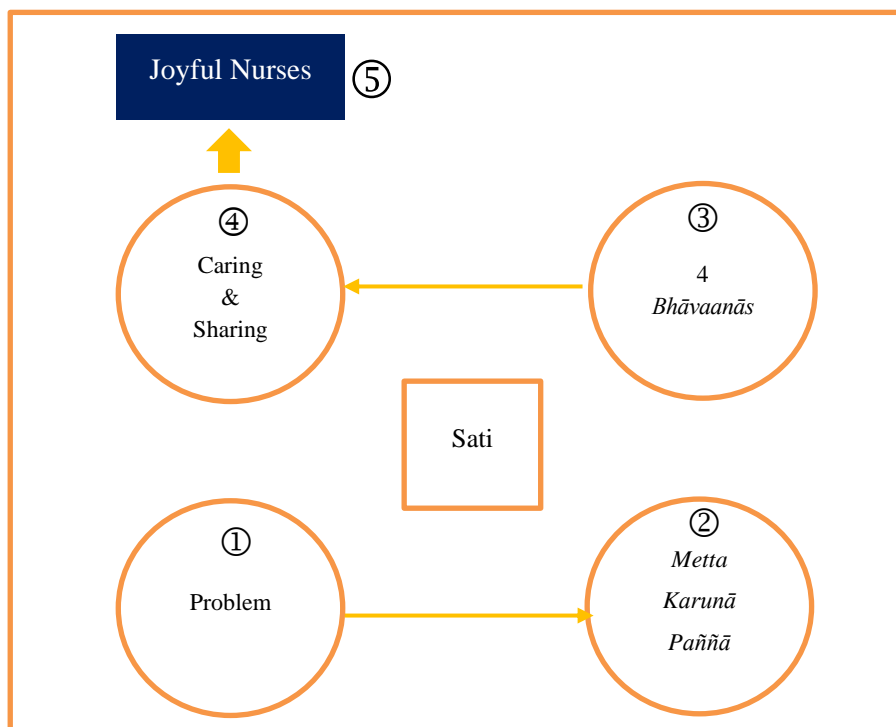
Encouragement aspect, the mean value is at 2.68 level, and the S.D. value is at 0.34 level.

Problem Management aspect, the mean value is at 2.84 level, and the S.D. value is at 0.42 level.

In summary, the results of the assessment of emotional strengthening of professional nurses of the sample population of Group No.1 It was found that the professional nurses of Samut Sakhon Hospital had overall assessment results in all three aspects. The professional nurses who were in the sample group had

more emotional strength than the professional nurses of Samrong Medical Hospital. The relevant factors that can be used to support the assessment results are factors of working age of professional nurses at Samut Sakhon Hospital which accounted for 32 percent. In addition, the greater workload factor due to being a government hospital also resulted in high tolerance, which significantly had a positive impact on the emotional reinforcement of professional nurses.

The Researcher describes the Buddhist model: Emotional strengthening of professional nurses as follows.



**Figure 1** Enhancing Emotional Strength of Professional Nurses: Buddhist Principles and Model

**Buddhist Model Development: Emotional Strengthening of Professional Nurses:** The professional nursing specialists and Buddhist experts and experts in society each gave their opinions to consider choosing a Buddhist model starting with the problem are to solve problems with the Four Noble Truths, consisting of the Noble Truth of sufferings (*dukkha-ariyasacca*), the Noble Truth of causes of sufferings (*dukkha-samudaya-ariyasacca*), the Noble Truth of the cessation of sufferings (*dukkha-nirodha-ariyasacca*), and the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of sufferings (*dukkha-nirodhagāminī-paṭipadā-ariyasacca*). It is a solution to the problem based on the principle of reasoning according to the guideline, from the arisen problem to the right contextual solution, respectively. When a problem occurs, (1) the first thing to do is to intellectually determine the real problem, (2) and then to determine the cause of the problem to solve the problem to the point sustainably and permanently, (3) knowing the state of the extinguishing of the problem, and, (4) implementing the right approach of solving the problem as skillfully means.

In solving this problem according to the Four Noble Truths, it is necessary to do it in parallel with the use of the threefold Dhamma named: - Loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karunā*), which are associated with wisdom (*paññā*). This is a dhamma series that is a special qualification for medical personnel, especially nurses. Moreover, the Buddhist 4 *Bhāvanās*, *kāya-bhāvanā* for instance, can be used as a ground doctrine for holistic development from physiological to wisdom level of development, including the Care & Share activities, which lead to a systematic process of strengthening professional nurses. The most important thing that nurses need to carry with them at all times is mindfulness (*sati*), which is placed in the center of the model. It shows its importance as the center of mindfulness of the physical body, behaviors, mental

activities, and intelligence of professional nurses. In conclusion, this Model is to support professional standard behavioral characteristics such as smiling nurses, attentive to service, and sweet talks.

## 5. Discussion

A Joyful Nursing Classroom can create a Buddhist model to enhance the emotional strength of professional nurses appropriately. It can help reduce emotional vulnerability and effectively strengthen the emotion of nurses as in the Buddhist Model proposed.

In addition, it was found that the Buddhist model for emotional strengthening supports professional nurses to acquire principles and methods of emotional strengthening in 4 ways: - 1) looking and appreciating the value of oneself, 2) developing emotional strengths, enhancing positive thinking, and increasing mental immunity, 3) increasing mental strength by continually practicing the Fourfold Development, and 4) Caring and sharing and awareness of letting go.

The Buddhist Model is a tool and key to strengthening professional nurses. The result of the nursing society is a change in a better direction in terms of behavior, communication, reasoning, and emotional intelligence ability while performing duties amid workloads and problems surrounded. The outcomes encourage professional nurses to be happy in the performance of their duties, have a good personality, smile, and eloquently speak which is a good result for patients and their relatives. Therefore, the Buddhist Model for emotional reinforcement of professional nurses will be principles and methods that are scientific processes to help promote the development of human integrity and the ability to connect the nursing society. It is a culture of happiness in performing duties.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion to the findings of this study, it is shown: Firstly, emotional strength in Buddhism uses the principles and methods of equilibrium, namely: the middle path in a nursing way. Understanding one's own emotions and feelings are magical energy to perform nursing techniques according to professional nursing standards. Secondly, Buddhist principles and model for emotional strengthening of professional nurses bring the dhamma principle on the Fourfold Development and the Threefold Training to the design of the classroom to apply to field area data. The results of the statistical data and interviews of the randomly asked class participants found that the Buddhist model for emotional strengthening of professional nurses is appropriate and can help reduce emotional weakness and can significantly strengthen emotions. Thirdly, the fully developed Model can be used as a tool for the emotional strengthening of professional nurses with the same principles and standard methods in the nursing profession. It helps in driving the mind that affects the expression to show good behavior professional nurse with dhamma as the main pillar to the Model.

However, these three suggestions have been made: Firstly, the suggestion to the Nursing Council of Thailand: present a Buddhist model for the emotional strengthening of professional nurses as a tool to heal the mind of professional nurses. In addition, nurses also have the opportunity to create merit in Buddhist activities that have a continuation of dharma practice in order to have unity between nursing and Buddhism for the utmost benefit of the public health system. Secondly, the suggestion to personnel development participants: Regarding the competency of registered nurses, the term "good behavior" refers to the creation of an identity that expresses the personality, confidence, faith, abilities, attitudes, and charm of professional nurses' service. These will help enhance the efficiency of professional nurses to be called a career of merit. This has stimulated a large number of social and vocational needs. Thirdly, suggestion on personnel development policy: The learning process culture in integrating Buddhism with modern sciences should be well established. The philosophy of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University is "Providing Buddhist Studies, integration with modern science, for mental and social development," that is to say, science teaches people to be smart, while religion trains people to be good. But if a person has both science and religion, there will be cooperation in the management of education. Society will eventually have both smart people and good people." In the end, for the suggestion for further research in the future, the researcher believes that this issue should be further explored in detail. "Buddhist Model to Increase the Efficiency of Personnel in Public Health System" and "Buddhist Model to Reduce Causes of Ruin (*Apāyamukha*) of Personnel in the Organization."

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