

Quality of Life and Challenges Faced by the Elderly in Bangkok

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Abstract—The quality of life of the elderly in Bangkok is shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including health status, social support, economic security, and access to services. Key challenges include the prevalence of chronic diseases and mobility limitations, alongside disparities in affordable healthcare access despite relatively better urban infrastructure. Economic insecurity is widespread due to limited pensions and informal income sources, compounded by rising living costs and insufficient social welfare coverage. Social isolation arises from changing family dynamics and urbanization, though community programs provide partial relief. Urban infrastructure often lacks elderly-friendly features, affecting mobility and living conditions. Psychological well-being is threatened by mental health issues linked to isolation and financial stress, with limited access to mental health services. Cultural respect for elders persists but faces challenges from modernization, while government policies aim to enhance elderly welfare though implementation gaps remain. A comprehensive approach addressing health, social inclusion, economic stability, and urban infrastructure is essential to improve the quality of life for Bangkok's elderly population.

Keywords— Quality Life Health.

I. INTRODUCTION

The statement "The primary problem facing elderly people in Bangkok is poverty" aligns only partially, but not entirely, with the complexity identified in the selected article, "Quality of Life and Challenges Facing Elderly People in Bangkok." (Sawangnate, Et al 2022) According to this article, poverty, manifested as economic insecurity due to limited pensions, reliance on informal income, and rising living costs, is a significant challenge for older adults. (Western, Bloome, Sosnaud, & Tach, 2012) However, it is only one of the many interconnected factors that impact quality of life. (Ong-Artborirak, & Seangpraw, 2019)

The selected article highlights that these economic challenges are coupled with other significant issues such as health problems and inequalities in access to age-appropriate and affordable healthcare, even with improved urban infrastructure; social isolation resulting from urban expansion and changing family structures; inadequate urban infrastructure for the elderly impacting mobility and living conditions; mental

health concerns due to mental health issues linked to social isolation and financial stress; cultural and policy factors where modernization challenges traditional respect for the elderly; and gaps in the implementation of government welfare programs. (Srisaknok, Et al 2025) Therefore, while poverty is a major problem, it is part of a broader and multifaceted context that encompasses health, social support, mental well-being, and environmental factors. Addressing poverty alone, without considering these other dimensions, will not comprehensively improve the quality of life of older adults in Bangkok. (Hongthong, & Somrongthong, 2015).

II. THAILAND ENTERS A FULLY AGED SOCIETY

Thailand has officially become a fully Aged Society (aged society), with the proportion of elderly people (aged 60 and above) reaching 20.70% of the total population in 2024. As of 2026, Thailand remains in this status and is on the path to becoming a super-aged society in the early 2030s. By definition, an "aged society" is one in which the proportion of elderly people, or those aged 60 and above, continues to rise, while the birth rate and working-age population decrease. (Tangchonlatip, Et al 2019) Neighboring countries are already facing this issue. For example, Singapore has a proportion of older adults similar to that of Thailand and is recognized as an aged society; South Korea has already become a fully aged society; and Japan has the highest proportion of older adults in the world and is considered a super-aged society. Our country is also rapidly transitioning into an aged society, with more than 10% of the population aged 65 years and over—over 7 million people. It is projected that by 2021, the proportion of the elderly will rise to 20–30 percent, meaning that out of every 100 people, there will be 30 elderly individuals. This inevitably raises health concerns and increases the risk of chronic diseases. (Phumplab, 2023)

However, most people still believe that coping with this situation simply means managing elderly healthcare; therefore, solutions often focus solely on limited groups, such as paying social allowances or providing various welfare schemes, without connecting them to preparations during the working years. Therefore, we must pay more attention to the issue of an aging society in our country, including its impact on the nation's overall economy..

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III. CHARACTERISTICS OF AN AGING SOCIETY

According to the United Nations World Population Ageing data, the dependent population, unable to generate income to support themselves—namely, children and the elderly—already exceeds the working-age population. This can be categorized into two types: an aging society, where the percentage of the total population in the same area is 10% or more if they are aged 60 and above, or 7% or more if they are aged 65 and above; and a fully aged society, where the percentage of the total population in the same area is 20% or more if they are aged 60 and above, or 14% or more if they are aged 65 and above. This highlights the urgent need for Thais to be aware of this situation, as Thai society is projected to enter an aging society in 2025, which is less than 10 years from now. Based on various statistics, Thailand must urgently prepare to address the following challenges. Thai people are living longer: Currently, the average life expectancy is approximately 75 years, but by 2025, it is projected to be approximately 85 years. A longer life expectancy means that more money needs to be saved. The cost of living is rising: With inflation of approximately 4% over the past 10 years, a plate of rice currently costs 40 baht, but in 20 years, it could reach 90 baht. Everything is doubling in price, said Mr. Inflation makes things more expensive and reduces the value of money in the future. Healthcare costs are only increasing: by 5-8% annually, significantly impacting senior savings. On average, seniors spend over 30,000 baht per hospital visit, which is significantly more than younger individuals (approximately 10,000 baht higher). The population structure is changing: modern families are increasingly having only one child, resulting in a smaller working-age population. This slows down national development and economic growth. Retirement savings will no longer be sufficient: This is perhaps the most concerning problem. Consider this simple example: if you are 40 years old and need 240,000 baht per year for retirement, the current value of money. To retire at age 60 or in 20 years, the amount of money needed will increase from 240,000 baht to 530,000 baht due to 4% inflation. To have enough money to last until the end of life at age 80 or in another 20 years, a minimum of 10 million baht may be required. The proportion of elderly people is increasing rapidly: Thailand is now the third fastest-growing country in the world for the elderly population and the second fastest in ASEAN after Singapore. In less than 15 years, Thailand will have surpassed Singapore. Common diseases among older adults are emerging. According to data from the National Statistical Office in 2011, one Thai person dies from cancer every 4 min, one Thai person dies from heart disease every 6 min, and one Thai person dies from a stroke every 6 min. Furthermore, people over 90 years old have a 30% chance of developing Alzheimer's disease, with the chance of developing Alzheimer's disease in women being twice as high as in men. (Guides, 2018)

IV. THE CURRENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES FOR AN AGING POPULATION.

The overall problem is that a large portion of the Thai population is aging but lacks sufficient funds for retirement and later life. (Johnson-Fleming, 2023) The economy is stagnant, and labor shortages will worsen over time. It is estimated that families with only elderly members will spend approximately 30% less than normal, significantly reducing their future purchasing power. Investing in Thailand will become more difficult, which is one reason why outward FDI from large Thai companies has been steadily increasing, particularly in ASEAN countries, peaking at approximately 200 billion Baht in 2016. However, amidst the despair, there is still some hope if Thailand seriously begins to address these issues in both the production and social aspects.

Impacts on Production When the population structure changes with a higher proportion of elderly people, while the working-age population remains the same or decreases, it will have a direct impact. This may lead to higher wages or a labor shortage. Therefore, efforts to address labor shortages are being made to replace human labor with machinery or technology or to import more foreign labor. On the investment and savings side, the elderly or retired population has less or no income, resulting in reduced savings. Meanwhile, the working-age population has increased burdens, leading to higher spending and thus reducing savings and investment. The government needs to increase spending on welfare services and healthcare for older adults, further reducing national investment and savings. On the productivity or national income side, a higher proportion of elderly people leads to a lower Gross National Product (GNP), lower per capita income, and a decline in the quality of productivity. On the fiscal side, increased government expenditure requires increased spending on public health, medical services, and social services for the elderly, as well as increased funding for welfare and assistance for impoverished elderly. Income tax revenue will also decrease due to the higher proportion of elderly people without income generation.

Impacts on Society The increasing proportion of elderly people means that the working-age population must work longer and bear a greater burden of caring for the elderly. Sometimes, retirement can lead to a lack of warmth or even abandonment among older adults. Mental health issues, such as loneliness, lack of self-esteem, and feeling like a burden to their children and grandchildren, can also contribute to this. This can lead to feelings of resentment and depression among employees. Therefore, increased care and attention are required during retirement. Physical health problems can also make life difficult for older adults. Without proper savings planning for old age, it is essential to establish savings or investment plans to generate income and provide financial security during the later years. Currently, most jobs in Thailand are physically demanding, posing a problem for older adults due to their declining health and inability to perform strenuous work. If Thailand shifts its focus to service-based jobs instead of factory or agricultural work, it could allow elderly individuals to re-enter the workforce and address retirement challenges. For example, SE-ED Book has a project to employ elderly

people in its bookstores. Furthermore, clarifying regulations and policies regarding foreign labor could encourage more foreign workers to come to Thailand. Thailand's public debt is considered relatively low. It is typically around 42% of GDP, and if government debt is excluded, it drops to just 31% of GDP, making it one of the countries with the lowest debt levels in Asia. This is contingent on the government's ability to significantly stimulate the economy through continued public investment in infrastructure development and improvement nationwide. The challenges facing the elderly in Bangkok are heavily focused on poverty, insufficient income to support themselves in a high-cost urban environment, and health decline. In particular, there are issues of a lack of caregivers (homebound/bedridden elderly), urban diseases (hypertension and diabetes), and neglect or living alone in unsupportive environments.

The main problems faced by elderly people in Bangkok can be categorized into several areas.

Economic and income aspects: Insufficient income from welfare benefits, lack of savings, and debt burden result in a lower quality of life than in rural areas. The lack of regular income after retirement is also a concern. Health and physical aspects: Common diseases include hypertension, diabetes, abnormal blood lipid levels, osteoarthritis, and osteoporosis. Individualized problems included dementia, insomnia, hearing loss, and urinary incontinence. Accessing public health services is difficult, especially for patients with mental illnesses. Social and housing aspects: An increasing number of elderly people live alone, neglect, and have mental health issues. Unsuitable environments include housing lacking ramps or handrails, which increases the risk of falls, and unsafe and inaccessible transportation in the city. Categorizing the problems of the elderly: Social isolation (Tupanich, Chaiyalap, & Chaiyalap, 2019)

This demographic shift towards an aging society directly impacts social conditions, the working-age population structure, and household economic status, as well as increasing the demand for social welfare and essential public health services. An aging society would not pose problems for society if the elderly were prepared economically, socially, and in terms of their physical and mental health. However, the reality is that most elderly people lack this preparedness and often experience physical and mental decline, health problems, a lack of income, and decreased self-reliance. This necessitates the government to prepare and spend large amounts of budget, especially on healthcare and pensions, to ensure a good quality of life for the elderly. As the number of elderly people continues to increase, social welfare expenditures are also rising.

Conversely, the number of working-age people is decreasing, thus impacting social conditions and national development. Furthermore, many elderly people face hardships due to physical decline and health problems, as well as a lack of social participation and care from those around them. Therefore, it is necessary to identify appropriate solutions and preventive measures to avoid the worsening problems of an aging society. Currently, one concept being applied to promote the physical, mental, and social readiness

of the elderly, enhance their self-worth and self-reliance, and lead to happiness and well-being in old age, is the concept of active aging. This concept, initiated by the World Health Organization, aims to improve the quality of life of the elderly by providing opportunities for healthcare, social participation, and secure, valuable social security. This concept serves as both a goal and guideline for developing and solving the problems of an aging society.-----

The concept of empowered aging has been widely accepted as a conceptual framework and practice in various countries, including Thailand, where it has been adapted for practical application and ongoing research to develop solutions to the issues of an aging society. This article aims to review and present the concept of empowered aging within the Thai context, covering topics such as the international model of empowered aging, academia and policy initiatives concerning empowered aging in Thailand, the relationship between empowered aging and similar terms, and finally, approaches to studying empowered aging for the benefit of academics, students, and interested individuals in the field.

V. THAILAND'S POLICY INITIATIVES REGARDING

The empowerment of the elderly are multifaceted, focusing on creating a society that supports and promotes a good quality of life for senior citizens in all aspects of life. This includes promoting health and well-being, encouraging employment and social participation, and improving laws and policies related to the care and rights of the elderly. These efforts reflect a commitment to creating an age-friendly society that meets the needs of older adults. A literature review reveals that Thailand began prioritizing the elderly as early as 1982, when the Cabinet declared April 13th of each year as "National Senior Citizens Day," with activities organized since then. In the same year, the first National Senior Citizens Plan (1982-2001) was initiated to reflect the aspirations regarding the rights of senior citizens. Furthermore, in accordance with the United Nations Principles on Aging in 1999, Thailand declared the Thai Declaration on Aging to obligate its senior citizens to have a good quality of life and receive protection and safeguarding of their rights (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2015). Subsequently, to ensure continuity, the Second National Elderly Plan (2002-2021) was developed, with the goal of "the elderly as the cornerstone of society." This policy emphasizes the importance of the elderly and all those involved, preparing all citizens who will inevitably enter old age to become high-quality senior citizens. (Christensen, 1993)

VI. BENEFITS OF KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge gained from this study is the result of a literature review on active aging, which encompasses the concepts of healthy and productive aging. However, active aging can also be considered a part of successful aging. Active aging was initiated by the World Health Organization (WHO), which emphasizes social, economic, and physical and mental health factors. In Thai academia and social services, active aging generally follows the WHO framework, focusing on

physical and mental health, which links older adults to social activities and work. Furthermore, research on active aging can apply this concept to various disciplines and issues; it is not limited or monopolized as a concept or methodology in any single field.

VII. CONCLUSION

Retirement goals are crucial, especially in today's aging society. However, many people overlook this issue, focusing on the present rather than the future. Therefore, considering current data showing that the population aged 65 and over, currently around 9%, is projected to increase to 25% of the total population by 2040, and that two-thirds of elderly Thais currently have no savings, with only 5% having savings exceeding 1 million baht, and given the limited welfare system for the elderly in Thailand, preparing for an aging society requires collaboration between the public and private sectors at the individual, community, and national levels. Specifically, this should include raising awareness of the importance of preparing for an aging society, promoting savings and retirement planning, fostering community collaboration, organizing health and wellness education for the elderly, supporting social and psychological adaptation, and providing training on investment and savings for the elderly. With proper management and development, overcoming this crisis should not be too difficult, because if Thais are determined, they are capable of achieving anything

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