

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Background and rationale

It is widely known nowadays that drastic changes in population structures of the elderly have occurred in Asia and Pacific region, especially in Thailand where the number of the elderly has rapidly increased. The number of the elderly in Thailand (age 60 years old or more) rose from 1.21 million people in 1960 to 4.02 million in 1990 and it is expected to soar to 10.78 million by 2020. These changes have driven Thailand into a phase called "Population Aging" which refers to the increasing ratio of the elderly against other populations. In 1960, the ratio of the elderly was 4.6 percent of the populations and increased to 7.36 percent in 1990. It is anticipated to double up to 15.28 percent by the year 2020.

According to the data from the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, from 1990-2002 the number of the elderly in Krabi province remained steady if considering the elderly figures at the provincial and district levels; 7.61 percent in 2003 for the whole province and 7.06 percent for Muang district.

Tambon Krabi-noi, based on the data from its Local Health Service Center, demonstrated a trend of continually increasing ratio of the elderly and it was higher than the aforementioned ratio of Krabi province; increasing from 8.64 percent in 1999 to 9.8 percent in 2003.

Due to rapid developments in Krabi province and the fact that tourism promotion has been included in its provincial development plan, all of which result in changes affecting lifestyles of people in communities. Urbanization, quickly expanding to rural areas, especially in outskirts of Muang district; such as, Tambon Krabi-noi, has caused several changes in terms of the culture of consumption, exercise and types of occupations. For instance, people have more interest to leave home to work outside, less time to look after their family and higher degrees of materialism.

Chronic illnesses are a consequence of these changes. According to a survey on the elderly in Thailand by the National Statistics Office in 2002, 33.6 percent of the elderly in Krabi province perceived themselves as unhealthy, 31 percent as healthy, and 29.7 percent as quite healthy. Only 2.6 percent of the elderly responded they were very healthy. The first five illnesses or symptoms mostly diagnosed in the elderly residing in Krabi province were; (1) body pain or backache - - 57.6 percent, (2) insomnia - - 39.1 percent, (3) dizziness - - 35.8 percent, (4) optical diseases - - 31.6 percent and (5) rheumatism - - 30.9 percent.

Obviously, the majority of the elderly in Krabi province have suffered from chronic illnesses and symptoms, and this is in line with health problems identified at the national level. The elderly health issue is becoming a big problem and it can cause several social disadvantages due to their functional disability and turning them to dependency phase in the end.

The National Health Development Plan of the 9th National Economic and Social Development Plan indicated crucial strategic purposes aiming to develop active health systems for health promotion and establish a foundation for health protection of population, especially disadvantaged groups. Major role and responsibilities of public

health in community are to promote healthiness among populations, which is in accordance to policies of the National Health Development Plan, in particular of disadvantaged groups in society; such as, the disable, chronic patients who mostly are the elderly. Consequently, this study is conducted to explore the disability of the elderly living in Tambon Krabi-noi, Muang district, Krabi province in order to learn about current trends of illnesses of the elderly in Tambon Krabi-noi and also their disabilities.

With results from this study, more appropriate care will be provided for the elderly suffering from disabilities and for those who are still healthy or have slight illnesses, proper care will be improved to slow down the pace, to the minimum, to enter the dependency phase. In addition, this study will seek more information to guide implementations of health promotion among the elderly. The results of this study will be used to improve the elderly services for health service providers and finally it will be a model of implementation for the elderly in other areas. Moreover, it will serve as the information for the society and communities to learn and realize their own responsibilities towards the elderly.

2. Research questions

1. What is the prevalence rate of the functional disability and degree of its severity among the elderly in Tambon Krabi-noi, Muang district, Krabi province?
2. What is the relationship between the disabilities and socio-economic factors of the elderly in Tambon Krabi-noi, Muang district, Krabi province?

3. Objectives of this research

General objectives

To assess the functional disability of the elderly concerning the prevalence rate and a degree of severity among the elderly in Tambon Krabi-noi, Muang district, Krabi province.

Specific objectives

To investigate effects of socio-economic factors towards the disability of the elderly in Tambon Krabi-noi, Muang district, Krabi province.

4. Hypothesis

Socio-economic factors are related to the dependency phase of the elderly.

5. Conceptual framework

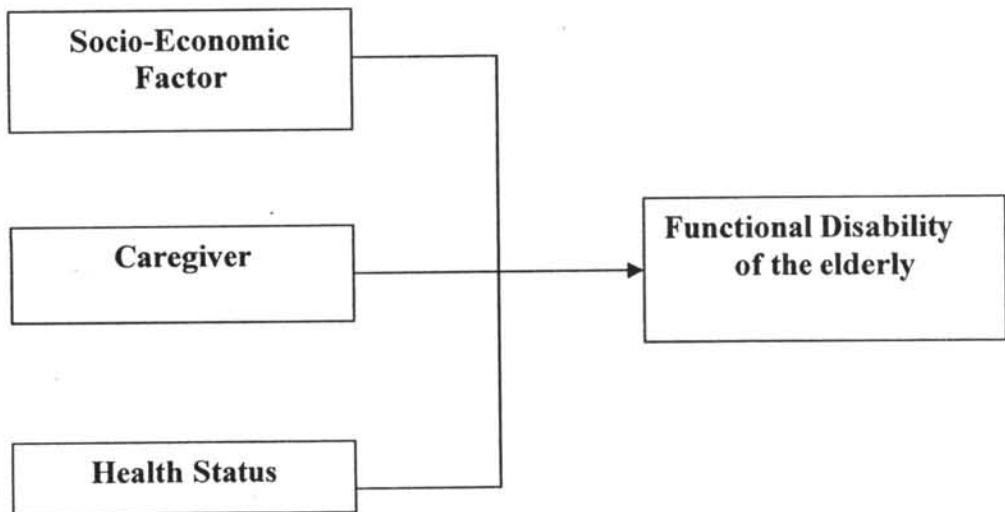


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

6. Expected benefits and applications

1. Results of this study could be used as data for health service providers to design and develop appropriate services for the elderly.
2. Current services could be adapted, based on the results, to be compliance with HCA standard.
3. The results could be served as data for health service system development.
4. The results could be used as data for planning to improve the elderly health problems which tend to increase steadily.
5. The results could raise awareness of families and the government and urge for more responsibilities from the government sector to look after the elderly.
6. The results could be a model in operating appropriate health services for the elderly and complying with Thai health service systems which in the future will focus on holistic and active service approaches.