

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

1. Mental Health and Self-Esteem

Global Mental Health Situation

Approximately 450 million people worldwide were suffering from mental disorders in 2002 (WHO, 2002). WHO estimates one in four people suffer from a mental disorder at some point in their life (WHO, 2002). At the current rate, depression will be the second leading cause of DALYs (Disability Adjusted Life Years) worldwide by 2020 (WHO, 2002). Clearly, the magnitude of the problem is such that it affects every individual, either directly or indirectly.

Mental Health Situation in Thailand

Mental health related problems in Thailand constitute a large portion of the population's burden of disease. Suicide, drug dependence, alcohol dependence, depression and anxiety disorders are all mental health related problems that can be found in the top twenty disease contributors to DALYs in Thailand in 1999 (MoPH, n.d.). Additionally, a study conducted in Bangkok in 2001, looked at the lifetime prevalence of mental health in 2,948 participants aged 15-60 years old. Several mental disorders that may be correlated with self-esteem were recorded: major depressive mood (19.9%), alcohol abuse (18.4%), drug and substance abuse (11.2%), anxiety disorders (10.2%), and

suicidal thoughts (7.1%)(Thavichachart, Intoh, Thavichachart, Meksupa, Tangwonge, Sughondhabirrom, & Worakul, 2001).

Problems Associated with Low, Unstable, and Contingent Self-Esteem

Psychologist and prominent self-esteem expert Nathaniel Branden:

" I cannot think of a single psychological problem- from anxiety to depression, to under-achievement at school or at work, to fear of intimacy, happiness or success, to alcohol or drug abuse, to spouse battering or child molestation, to co-dependency and sexual disorders, to passivity and chronic aimlessness, to suicide and crimes of violence- that is not traceable, at least in part, to the problem of deficient self-esteem." (Branden, 1994, p. XV)

Why is self-esteem important? Although information on mental health is available, no information on self-esteem in adults has been collected in Thailand. However, some studies throughout the globe have cited self-esteem as a major indicator of good mental health (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002; Fox, 1999). Low self-image and self-esteem have been linked to a number of negative psychological and behavioral conditions (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002; Emler, 2001). Psychologically, low self-esteem has been shown to cause or contribute to many types of depression, anxiety, neurosis, and other mental health problems (Marmot, 2003; Branden, 1994). Additionally, high levels of self-esteem are thought to help individuals to better deal with life's difficulties (Donnellan, 2003).

On the one hand, some experts believe that low self-esteem is not a risk factor for violence, delinquency, or substance abuse (Donnellan, 2003).

However, other research has linked self-esteem with certain behavioral patterns. Low self-esteem has been linked to alcohol and drug abuse, assault and molestation, eating disorders, and suicidal tendencies among others (Steffenhagen & Burns, 1987; Fox, 1999). One study even goes as far as to correlate self-esteem with occurrence of injury (Clow & Hucklebridge, 2001).

Not only has low self-esteem been shown to negatively impact the individual, but it has also been linked to community and social problems. Low self-esteem in a community has been linked with poverty, unemployment, and decreased work productivity (MoPH, n.d.; WHO, 2002). In the US, the state of California has even gone as far as investing large amounts of money into various public projects in an attempt to raise the self-esteem of its residents (Emler, 2001). The state government has set self-esteem as a priority for its public health policy, viewing it as the root of many social ills.

Possible problems can also arise when an individual's self-esteem is dominated by a single contingent or component. This can be compared to the old adage, "don't put all your eggs in one basket." Basing your self-esteem heavily in one component or sub-component may ultimately lead to a debilitating obsession. Someone who bases their self-esteem around academic success may find him or herself spending endless hours studying, while never being quite satisfied with the results. Contingency can lead to depression or other disorders, ie. Bulimia for those who place excessive value on bodily appearance or obsessive weightlifting and steroid use for those who heavily weight their self-esteem in the sub-component of physical strength.

Not only is the level of an individual's self-esteem important, but also the stability of that self-esteem. Poorly developed or heavily contingent self-esteem may be rather unstable. People who have a relatively unstable self-esteem are susceptible to the same problems as those with chronic low self-esteem. However, the extent of this survey is focused only on self-esteem level and only minimally on contingency, as far as it can be observed within physical self-esteem.

2. Exercise and Other Determinants of Self-Esteem

Exercise as a Determinant for Self-Esteem

Exercise has been proven to reduce the risks of coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, colon cancer and diabetes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). It can increase energy levels and improve muscle and bone strength among other benefits. The positive effects of physical exercise on physical health have been well documented, however, it has only been in the last twenty or thirty years that researchers have looked at the relationship between physical exercise and mental health, and more specifically self-esteem. Some recent studies, however, seem to show a significant correlation between regular exercise and improved physical self-esteem levels (Sonstroem 1984, as cited in Fox & Corbin 1989; Fontaine, 2000; Alfermann & Stoll, 2000). Other studies have gone as far as suggesting the optimal dose (ie. intensity, duration, frequency) and type of exercise for improving self-esteem. These studies state that low to moderate levels of aerobic exercise are more

effective at improving physical and global self-esteem and mood than more demanding anaerobic exercise (Moses , Steptoe & Matthews, 1989 and Sexton, Maere & Dahl, 1989, as cited in Scully, Kremer, Meade, Graham & Dudgeon, 1998).

Exercise in Thailand

Although specific statistics are not available on the exercise status in active Thai adults, the department of mental health in 2002 states that 29.6% (17 million people) of the population over six years old are regularly involved in sports and exercise (MoPH, n.d.). Unfortunately they fail to comprehensively define regular exercise. However, if these numbers are accepted, it can be assumed that children and adolescents are involved in these activities at a higher rate than those older adults. Therefore as one looks at the adult population, it is likely that the percentage of regular exercisers is significantly lower than 30%.

Exercise classes and fitness centers are becoming increasingly popular in both urban and rural Thailand. Fitness centers and group exercise classes can be seen in any number of shopping malls and on street sidewalks throughout Bangkok.

Other Determinants of Self-Esteem

Research points to many factors that influence a person's self-image and subsequently their self-esteem. These can be classified into two main areas, environment and biology.

Two of the most important environmental factors may be the individual's parents and the individual's experience (Isaranurug, Rojanapran, Wong-arsa & Chansatitporn, 1999; Emler, 2001). Parenting style and attention given to children affect the self-esteem levels of those children. Additionally, successes and failures in education, occupations, and social interactions also act to formulate and reinforce self-image and self-esteem (Emler, 2001; WHO, 2002; Stakes, 1999). The social and cultural environments also play key roles in influencing the importance that an individual places on any aspect of the self (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002; Stakes, 1999). The cultural standards or perceived cultural standards are internalized by each individual, in-turn creating a social comparison by which the individual evaluates his or her own self-image in relation to what the society presents as desirable.

In the realm of biology, genetics as far as physical competencies, appearance, mental stability etc., also plays an important factor in self-esteem level and stability (Donnellan, 2003).

Negative Risk Factors

Today's environment is filled with adversity. Rapid and constant change in Thailand's society and family structure and function have led to an environment in which mental illness can easily develop and spread quickly throughout the population (MoPH, n.d.).

Benefits of the modern world are many, however, there are also inherently negative aspects. Roles and responsibilities get confused in times of rapid change. In the modern cosmopolitan world, there is increasing emphasis

on success in both one's academics and occupation. Differences between an individual's perception of what is culturally and socially acceptable and what they are capable of may cause a negative effect on self-image and self-esteem.

Marketing and the media have been steadily increasing their influence over the population (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002). Everywhere you look companies are aiming to gain the consumer's attention. Magazines, TV commercials, billboards and other venues of marketing grab the eye of the consumer with beautiful models. Additionally, beauty products make claims to help transform the average person into billboard beauties. In Bangkok, slimming centers, dermatology clinics, laser surgery businesses, anti-aging clinics, day spas, and hair stylists can seemingly be found in every shopping center and on every commercial street corner. Plastic surgery hospitals are abundant and affordable for more than just the rich few. Over-the-counter steroids and synthetic muscle proteins can be purchased in almost any nutrition store. Today the body is seen as a symbol of health, success, and wealth, and as something that can be manipulated (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002; MoPH, n.d.). Although these products and services were once geared mostly for upper-class women, today they are just as much directed towards all social classes, male or female. These products and services, along with the unrealistic body ideals spread throughout cosmopolitan society can have negative effects on self-esteem, specifically physical self-esteem.

Then there is also the unstoppable force of age, which plays a role in one's physical self-esteem. Throughout one's life, changes in the body's structure and function impact physical self-esteem. Pregnancy, weight

changes, injuries, disease and other bodily changes that accompany aging can affect one's perception and evaluation of self (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002). As people get older they lose control over their physical abilities, their appearance changes. Loss of physical abilities and an aging appearance can negatively impact an individual's self-image and therefore their self-esteem (Bristol Hospital, 2002).

In relation to gender, most studies, when controlling for confounding variables, conclude that men generally have higher levels of global self-esteem than women (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002).

3. Thai Health Policy

Public Mental Health Policy in Thailand

The department of mental health exists under the Ministry of Public Health and it is mainly concerned with technical development, dissemination of technology, prevention of mental illness, and providing services, treatment, and rehabilitation (MoPH, n.d.). Mental health policy in Thailand was initially implemented in 1995 (WHO, 2001). The department of mental health had a budget of 1.55 billion Thai Baht in 2003, 3.7% of the total Health budget (MoPH, n.d.). The department of mental health's focus on promotion and prevention is targeted at four main sectors: health care, education, the work place, and the community (MoPH, n.d.). These areas are addressed through a variety of different tools, including mental health tests, educational materials, counseling, social activities among others.

Internationally, the Ministry of Public Health is sending personnel abroad for trainings and seminars, as well as bringing in experts and specialists from other countries to consult and give seminars (MoPH, n.d.). Unfortunately, however, the department of mental health has yet to conduct research into self-esteem in adults and has only just begun exploring self-esteem development in Thai children and adolescents.

“Healthy Thailand”

A new government policy created in 2004 coined “Healthy Thailand”, has chosen eight health objectives for Thailand’s population. Two of these eight objectives include increased exercise participation and improved mental health. This research sets out to examine the relationship between two of these important government initiatives, regular exercise and self-esteem.

4. Research Importance

Although it is recognized that self-esteem may carry a different importance in Asia as compared to the west, undoubtedly an individual’s perception about him or herself is still important to his or her mental well being.

Results of this study can aid academics by furthering the knowledge of exercise psychology in Asia, more specifically Thailand. Therapists and their patients may also benefit from the knowledge gained on global and physical self-esteem in Thai adults. Additionally, health promotion officials will be able to begin understanding factors affecting exercise, global and physical self-esteem

and the relationship between them in certain adult populations. This information may then be useful in developing public health promotion activities.

5. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between regular exercise and global and physical self-esteem and its factors, in administrative staff under 60 years of age from the Faculty of Engineering at Chulalongkorn University. This study aims to develop preliminary information on exercise and self-esteem in Thailand, in order to create a knowledge base for academia and the public health institution.