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Factors Related to Well-being of the Elderly in Rural Thailand

Niwat Songsin^{1*}, Prisna Pianjing², Kanokporn Somporn³, Anantachai Inthiraj⁴

¹⁻⁴Department of Community Public Health, College of Allied Health Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, 10300, Thailand

E-mail: ¹niwat.so@ssru.ac.th, ²prisna.pi@ssru.ac.th, ³kanokporn.so@ssru.ac.th, ⁴anantachai.in@ssru.ac.th

*Corresponding author

Abstract.

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive study aimed at examining factors associated with the well-being of older adults in Thai communities. The sample consisted of 403 older adults aged 60 years and above residing in Samut Songkhram Province, Thailand. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed with descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation coefficient. The results indicated that the overall well-being of older adults was high ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.68$). Correlation analysis of age, income, chronic diseases, and leisure time for engaging in activities with well-being showed that age was positively associated with well-being ($r = 0.430$, $p < 0.001$), income was positively associated with well-being ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), and leisure time for engaging in activities had a strong positive association with well-being ($r = 0.636$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, chronic diseases were not significantly related to the well-being of older adults at the 0.05 significance level. These findings suggest that social engagement, participation in leisure activities, and adequate income are key contributors to maintaining well-being among older adults.

Keywords: Well-being, Elderly, Rural Thailand.

1. Introduction

Currently, the phenomenon of aging societies has emerged in nearly every country worldwide. The proportion of the global population aged 60 years and older increased from 9.2% in 1990 to 11.7% in 2023, and it is projected to reach 21.1% by 2050. The number of older persons globally is expected to rise from 841 million in 2013 to approximately 2 billion by 2050. Of this total, about 469 million—representing 56% of the world's elderly population—will reside in Asia, including around 230 million in China and about 100 million in India. In Southeast Asia, the elderly population is estimated at approximately 55 million (National Statistical Office, 2024).

Thailand is transitioning into an aging society. The United Nations projects that the global population aged over 60 years will reach 1.2 billion in 2025 and 2 billion in 2050, accounting for 20% of the total global population. In Thailand, older adults represented 18.24% of the total population in 2020, with an annual growth rate of 3.6% (equivalent to about 400,000 people per year). According to national population projections, the proportion of elderly persons is expected to reach 20.66% of the total population by 2035 and 28.55% by 2055, reflecting a steady increase in the aging population (Department of Older Persons, 2021). At

the same time, the number of retirees continues to rise, leading to changes in lifestyle and patterns of free time use among older adults. Consequently, excessive free time without engagement in meaningful activities or participation in social interactions may negatively affect their health, particularly mental well-being, potentially resulting in feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression (Benjanirat et al., 2021). According to population statistics in Samut Songkhram Province, there are approximately 188,599 inhabitants, of whom 47,435 are elderly, accounting for 25.1% of the total population—a proportion considered relatively high (Samut Songkhram Provincial Statistical Office, 2024). As individuals enter old age, many daily responsibilities and roles gradually diminish, often resulting in spending more time at home. Occupational activities also change due to age-related physical decline, with many transitioning into retirement and adopting a more routine lifestyle at home. However, in families whose traditional livelihoods are deeply rooted in occupations such as fishing, coconut farming, or salt farming, older adults often continue engaging in these activities, albeit with reduced responsibilities. Consequently, many elderly persons remain partially active in work, though not as fully as before, as some face health problems that limit their ability to work for extended periods. Beyond physical decline from long-term labor, older adults may also experience psychological challenges associated with the abrupt social transition from the working-age population to old age.

Therefore, the researcher recognized the health problems faced by the elderly in Samut Songkhram Province, Thailand. Over time, the use of free time among older adults often becomes limited to repetitive daily activities, which may lead to feelings of boredom for some, while others may experience physical decline. These conditions can negatively affect emotional well-being and may ultimately result in depression, one of the most common mental health problems among the elderly. Various forms of leisure activities play a vital role in enhancing the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and cognitive well-being of older adults. Consequently, the researcher is interested in examining the factors associated with elderly well-being, as the findings will provide statistically valuable insights for developing, promoting, and rehabilitating the health of older adults, thereby better addressing the needs of an aging society.

1.2 Research Objective

To Study Factors Related to the Well-being of the Elderly in Rural Thailand

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered between August 2024 and February 2025. The study population consisted of 41,603 older adults aged 60 years and above residing in Samut Songkhram Province. The sample size was calculated using G*Power analysis with a significance level of 0.05 and a medium effect size, yielding a total of 403 participants.

Stratified random sampling with proportional allocation was employed, followed by simple random sampling to select two subdistricts from each district. Additional simple random sampling was then performed until the target sample size of 403 participants was reached. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) older adults aged 60 years or above; (2) residents of the community and local neighborhoods; (3) individuals with full cognitive and conscious

capacity; and (4) the ability to read, speak, and write in Thai. The exclusion criteria were: (1) inability to complete the questionnaire in full and (2) refusal to participate in the study.

The research instrument was a questionnaire divided into two parts as follows:

Part 1: The personal information questionnaire collected demographic data from participants, including gender, age, educational level, income, occupation, and leisure-time activities. This section consisted of six multiple-choice items.

Part 2: The well-being questionnaire for older adults comprised 38 items addressing six dimensions: leisure well-being, psychological and emotional well-being, cognitive well-being, social well-being, physical well-being, and spiritual well-being.

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Descriptive statistics—including frequency, percentage, median, arithmetic mean (M), and standard deviation (SD)—were used to summarize the general characteristics of the sample. The Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) was applied to examine factors associated with the well-being of older adults in rural Thailand. A significance level of 0.05 was used for all statistical tests.

3. Results

The findings revealed that, among the 403 older adults, the majority were female (83.6%). By age group, 25.3% were between 65 and 69 years old. Most participants (77.4%) reported having at least one chronic disease, 90.3% had an education level below a bachelor's degree, and 23.3% reported a monthly income of less than 5,000 baht. Additionally, the majority (42.9%) engaged in leisure activities five to seven days per week.

The analysis of overall well-being among the elderly across six dimensions revealed that leisure well-being was at a high level of agreement ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.68$). Psychological and emotional well-being was also at a high level of agreement ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.63$). Cognitive well-being was at a moderate level of agreement ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.68$). Social well-being was at a high level of agreement ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.83$). Physical well-being was at a high level of agreement ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.86$). Finally, spiritual well-being was at a high level of agreement ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.74$).

Table 1 Results of the correlation analysis of age, income, chronic disease, and leisure time for engaging in activities ($n = 403$).

Variables	Well-being of the Elderly	
	Pearson Correlation (<i>r</i>)	<i>p</i> -value
Age	0.430	0.001*
Income	0.319	0.012*
Chronic disease	0.008	0.597
Leisure time for engaging in activities	0.636	0.001*

* $p < 0.001$

Table 1 presents the correlations between age, income, chronic diseases, and leisure time for engaging in activities with the well-being of older adults. The analysis shows that age was positively associated with well-being ($r = 0.430$, $p < 0.001$), income was positively associated with well-being ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), and leisure time for engaging in activities

showed a strong positive association with well-being ($r = 0.636$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, chronic diseases were not significantly related to the well-being of older adults at the 0.05 significance level.

Discussion

The study found that the overall well-being of older adults was very high. This may be due to most older adults effectively adapting to age-related changes, performing daily activities independently, and receiving continuous support from their families, communities, and government agencies. Engagement in social networks and participation in various activities help older adults feel valued and connected to society, thereby enhancing life satisfaction and overall well-being. These findings align with those of Chetthini Mahawichian (2020), who examined factors related to well-being and quality of life affecting the happiness of older adults in Ban Khai District, Rayong Province, and reported very high levels of well-being. Similarly, Ronakorn Sengson (2020) found that, in his study on leisure-time behaviors and well-being of older adults in Nakhon Nayok Province, participants expressed the highest level of agreement regarding their overall well-being.

The factors found to be associated with the well-being of older adults include age, income, and leisure time for engaging in activities, all of which were positively correlated with well-being. Age was positively associated with well-being because older adults often have greater life experience, better adaptation to changes, the ability to accept age-related physical decline, and the capacity to choose appropriate ways of living. In addition, many older adults receive increased care and attention from their children and families, providing psychological stability and enhancing daily life satisfaction. These findings are consistent with those of Wiraporn Pothisiri and Nekehia T. Quashie (2018), “Preparations for Old Age and Well-Being in Later Life in Thailand: Gender Matters,” which reported that age was positively associated with all forms of well-being, including financial satisfaction, life satisfaction, and physical health.

Income was also positively associated with older adults’ well-being, as it is a key factor affecting life security. Older adults with sufficient income can adequately manage expenses related to food, healthcare, transportation, and social activities, which improves quality of life. Adequate income also reduces psychological stress and increases confidence in daily life. These findings align with those of Panchamapohn Rattanahon et al. (2021).

Furthermore, leisure time for engaging in activities was positively associated with well-being. This may be explained by the fact that older adults who participate in leisure activities—whether physical activities such as light exercise, walking, or gardening; social activities such as joining senior clubs or meeting friends; or mental activities such as reading, practicing meditation, or pursuing hobbies—experience improvements in physical, mental, and social well-being. These results are consistent with the study by B. K. Col et al. (2022), “The Effect of Leisure Activities on Successful Aging,” which found that participation in leisure activities significantly increased happiness and life satisfaction while reducing depression and stress.

4. Conclusion

The study found that older adults exhibited generally high well-being across six dimensions, with cognitive well-being at a moderate level. Age, income, and leisure time for engaging in activities were positively associated with overall well-being, while chronic diseases showed no significant relationship. These results highlight the importance of social engagement, leisure

activities, and sufficient income in promoting well-being. Future research could explore additional factors influencing well-being and test interventions to enhance cognitive and overall well-being. Programs and policies supporting active participation and financial security for older adults are recommended to maintain and improve their quality of life.

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