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Preparing the Population for an Aging Society in Thailand



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Synonyms

[Aged society](#); [Aging society](#); [Elderly](#)

Definition

Due to the increasing trend of growing numbers of elderly citizens in Thailand and the problems arising from the elderly not being adequately prepared, the restructuring of the foundations of governmental schemes to equip “soon to be elderly” generations is very important.

Introduction

Thailand’s population structure has changed to that of an “aging society” since 2005 and is expected to become an “aged society” (i.e., an aging rate over 14%) by 2021. With an aging population at present of 13 million, or 20% of the total population, this situation is already leading to problems in terms of economic, health,

and social issues, so it is a challenge for the country to be prepared to cope with quality aging. Thailand, as most other medium-high developed countries around the world, must prepare in three areas: finances, health, and society. Financial preparation requires the creation of income guarantees, i.e., savings during the working years that are sufficient for living in retirement or old age. Proper health requires the need to create healthy behaviors that are appropriate for all ages, prepare individuals to accept change, and plan a valuable life based on self-reliance. The societal aspect includes family support and help from communities and society.

Royal Thai Government Response

The Royal Thai Government (RTG) has realized how important the effects of population aging are, and policies and measures have been formulated by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) since 2009. Guidelines on a strategic drive for integrating the elderly were designed by the NESDB and many other related parties in order to promote a proactive approach, with the main concepts being human resource and social protection development. Consequently, all Thai government sectors are, in practice, engaged in supporting this initiative, e.g., in providing personal training programs on financial literacy, developing welfare society in order to ensure security for all Thai

citizens when they get old, etc. In the NESDB Guidelines, the NESDB has proposed four points for an operational framework for supporting the elderly: (1) strengthening income security by promoting financial savings for people of all ages as well as promoting the potential of the elderly in terms of “social wisdom”; (2) developing a social welfare system so that it becomes extensive and sustainable, with cooperation between all sectors; (3) creating an appropriate living environment for the elderly; and (4) developing management mechanisms for the elderly at regional and local levels, as well as developing and connecting databases and knowledge bases to promote the potential of the elderly.

Quality Elderly (Active Aging)

Quality elderly are people who have the potential and ability to be productive while aging but, at the same time, bringing the concept of successful aging into consideration because the elderly need to face various situations in a holistic manner. Therefore, quality elderly are people who take care of themselves (self-care), can rely on themselves (self-reliance) to do what they want according to their potential, benefit others and society, are satisfied with life, and prepare for the changes that will come (Yotphet 1999).

The components of quality elderly are (1) having the potential and ability to be productive while aging; (2) providing self-care by creating security for themselves; (3) being self-reliant by maintaining a good quality of life in terms of physical, mental, social, and intellectual aspects in order to do what they desire; (4) being able to benefit others by engaging with society for as long as possible; and (5) being satisfied with the current life and preparing for coming changes.

Preparing for becoming elderly means planning one’s life with the objective of becoming ready to prevent crises during one’s latter years (Wattanawong 2004). Aging changes various aspects of life, and people should be prepared in advance to make life in old age happy. There are several aspects to this preparation: economic preparation by preparing for self-income,

evaluating income-expenditure, preparing to save money in reserve, preparation for illness, and completing a will. Health readiness should be considered by seeking knowledge about health education, eating foods that are nutrition-based, and regularly exercising. Housing should be renovated to suit the condition of the elderly. Social readiness consists of a vibrant social life in order to maintain optimism.

The Thai Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, also defines a quality elderly society as a society that has 10% or more of the population aged 60 years or older and where the elderly still maintain their creativity; are able to do what they desire according to their potential; benefit others and society; are satisfied in their present life; have good physical and mental health; are financially prepared, including housing; and participate in social activities.

A study on aging and preparation before entering old age (Kiattikunwong 2018) suggests that factors that influence the well-being of the elderly are age, education level, health status, income, marital status, education level, time spent in the community, knowledge of financial management, housing that is suitable for the elderly, and the rights of the elderly. In other words, people who are properly prepared in these aspects have been found to be happier with life after retirement. This confirms studies previously done (Akkharaseni 2006; Sodon 2009) which identified that preparation for old age should be more focused in the areas of education, housing, debt amount and savings, relationships with family members, and health.

Obstacles on Tackling the Aging Society Problem in Thailand

Many aging society countries have formulated elderly care policies in terms of welfare, medical services, medicine, and life security. In addition, to improve quality of life for the elderly, learning services and social preparation in terms of understanding, attitudes, and elderly treatment should be provided by the government at all levels in order to ensure that people will be able to adapt

and live happily while aging (Kantavong 2014). However, it was found that the majority of the Thai population (52.4%) lacks proper preparation for their lives after retirement, especially as regards well-being and financial aspects. To address this, government has to be more responsible for elderly care. Although the Thai central government has authorized local administrative organizations (LAOs) to take responsibility for elderly care and to appropriately accommodate them, neither the central government nor LAOs are able to respond to the needs of the elderly (Jitpimolmas 2016).

LAOs, therefore, have a responsibility to meet this urgent need to create a preparation process for the aging population, especially the working-age, pre-aging, and older people who have not yet planned for the future. These people need to have a good understanding of the requisite systematic preparation and concrete practices in terms of health and finance. To address this, issues regarding preparation of the population for the aging society and development of life quality for the elderly should be emphasized in municipal planning. This responsibility corresponds with the 2nd National Plan on the Elderly B.E. 2545–2564 (2002–2021), which states that family, along with the community, is the first unit to support the elderly to be able to live in the community with a high quality of life.

Based on the report of the situation of the Thai elderly that the National Elderly Committee (NSC) has conducted every year since the enactment of Elderly Act in 2003, there is a trend indicating that the elderly are facing a poorer quality of life for low-income elderly (Office of the Permanent Secretary et al. 2015). The empirical data suggests that the development of the quality of life for the elderly should be focusing on preparing the population to support the aging society as well as drive policy recommendations to support the aging society in accordance with policies and measures to support the aging by the government. This can be achieved by using cooperation between various sectors to enable the elderly to have good health and be able to live with dignity. The empirical data further suggests that the preparation of the population should be in

three dimensions: first, the health dimension, including addressing various risk factors such as alcohol and smoking, promoting physical activity, caring for the elderly with long-term dependence, and caring for the elderly with dementia; second, the social dimensions such as the development of potential and the expansion of elderly associations, promoting learning and developing appropriate courses for creating quality elderly who are energetic and able to take care of themselves; and finally, economic dimensions such as supporting academic work to drive the strategy of employing older people to create opportunities and extend the age of employment for older workers and working with the policy sector and local communities, which currently have prototype areas (e.g., Khon Kaen Municipality) for the development of the elderly care system by using the community as a base both in local communities and in over 300 urban communities (National Statistical Office Ministry of Information and Communication Technology 2014).

The Foundations on Preparing to Enter the Old Age

More than half of the Thai elderly are not prepared to become “quality elderly,” although most seniors see that preparing for the old age is important. It was found that even though Thailand has a high level of readiness in terms of housing and social aspects, health is at a moderate level. As for the economy, it was found that the preparation was low. Although currently only one fifth of Thai consists of the elderly, the pre-retirement population (40–59 years old), which accounts for nearly 50% of the total population, will slowly be joining the aging society over the next 20 years. Thus, to prepare for and cope with the problems of the aging society, which can involve high levels of expenses on the part of public budgets, proper preparation is needed for this segment of the population.

The increase in urbanization in Thailand causes changes in family structure; in other words, the interdependence level is lower. This change can greatly affect the quality of life

among the elderly in terms of livelihood management, health care, and finances. Therefore, preparation of the population for the aging society is important, because the more prepared the people are, the more satisfied they are with their lives. Conversely, a lack of preparation leads to low levels of life satisfaction.

According to many research results done by government, academia, and other agencies, the majority of elderly people were still not very satisfied with current preparation of the population for the aging society. The issue of health needs to be prioritized in terms of delivering it which will correspond to the public's needs. Furthermore, Thailand needs to provide other types of preparation for people, such as housing, methods for building good relationships, and management of leisure activities. Moreover, Thailand may need to consider placing additional importance on financial literacy, e.g., financial planning, savings, investment in both capital and money markets, and education on insurance in areas such as health insurance. The preparation should be provided based on age and conducted before old age arrives. In other words, preparation should start not later than the age of 40 because health and financial preparation cannot properly succeed and be effective if delayed for too long after this age. Additionally, there are several recommendations that should be helpful in laying solid foundations to cope with the inevitably aging society and aged society.

1. Most of the people of all ages agreed that preparation of the population for aging, particularly in terms of health issues, is very important because the elderly tend to face more health problems than those of other ages. They still experience the problem of access to health services, and they regard medical fees as expensive. This preparation should begin with those in the age range of 40–59 years.
2. Currently, there are a rising number of people who are generally satisfied with the preparation process for the aging society thanks to the various programs and activities arranged by the RTG and LAOs. Nevertheless, educating people to have more financial

knowledge, as regards savings, investment in both capital and money markets, and choosing or buying the right type of insurance, should be enhanced in order to improve people's satisfaction with the preparation process.

3. The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHC) is regarded as the main mechanism for improving the quality of life of the elderly. At the local government level, the Department of Social Development and Welfare is the key mechanism to implement programs and activities based on the needs of citizens, for preparation to enter retirement age, and other social welfare development programs based on national policies and MSDHC initiatives. Thus, a specific intermediary agency, founded specifically for the purpose of improving quality of life, especially in the elderly, should be established. This agency should have the following three important roles:

- (a) Serving as a liaison between the private and public sectors (based on the concept of a civil state), including being a facilitator and information center for the elderly.
- (b) Creating a database or “Big Data” of the elderly by collecting data through field surveys in order to acquire timely and accurate data, which will allow the administrative team to formulate appropriate policies to satisfy public needs, which is in line with Thailand's current Big Data policy.
- (c) Sharing timely and accurate information with the LAOs and community in order to expand public participation in promoting the preparation process for the aging society.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Advocacy Coalition Framework](#)
- ▶ [Evolution of Public Policy](#)
- ▶ [Limits of Public Policy](#)
- ▶ [Policy Change](#)
- ▶ [Policy Functions](#)
- ▶ [Public Policy Analysis](#)

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