

Factors Influencing Life Happiness among Elderly Female in Rayong Province, Thailand

Sutham Nanthamongkolchai PhD*, Chutigai Tuntichavanit Msc**,
Chokchai Munsawaengsub MD*, Phitaya Charupoonphol MD*

* Department of Family Health, Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand

** Nhonmgoung Health Center, Wangchan, Rayong, Thailand

Objective: To study the factors influencing life happiness of elderly female in Rayong province, Thailand.

Material and Method: A cross-sectional survey research was conducted among 233 elderly female aged between 60-80 years using multi-stage random sampling. The data were collected from June 6th to July 31st 2008 by interviewing questionnaires. Data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient and Stepwise multiple regression analysis.

Results: About half (50.2%) of the elderly female had moderate level of life happiness, followed by low level (27.1%) and high level (22.7%). The factors which significantly influenced the life happiness of the elderly female were self-esteem, social support, and family relationships ($p < 0.05$). In addition, self-esteem, social support, and family relationships could significantly predict life happiness of the elderly female by 91.4%. Self-esteem had the highest predictive power of life happiness among elderly female.

Conclusion: The important factors influencing life happiness of elderly female were self-esteem, social support, and family relationships. To promote life happiness of elderly female, responsible organizations should establish activities that enhance the elderly female's self-esteem, provide sufficient social support, and promote good family relationships.

Keywords: Happiness, Female elderly, Self-esteem, Social support, Family relationship

J Med Assoc Thai 2009; 92 (Suppl 7): S8-12

Full text. e-Journal: <http://www.mat.or.th/journal>

The proportion of the elderly in the world will increase from 10.0% in the year 2000 to 14.2 %, and 21.0% in the year 2025 and 2050⁽¹⁾. It is estimated that there will be more elderly female than male. In Thailand, data from the 2007 National survey of older persons by the National Statistics Office⁽²⁾ found that the proportion of the elderly increased from 6.8% in 1994 to 9.4% in 2003 to 10.7% in 2007 with more female than male because of female has longer life expectancy. When look closely to the elder age, there are many changes not only the natural degeneration that brought to health problems and diseases, but also the social changes that lead to many problems of the elderly and finally decrease their life happiness.

Happiness is very important and needed by all in society especially the elderly. Life happiness

Correspondence to: Nanthamongkolchai S, Department of Family Health, Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, Bangkok 10400, Thailand.

results from internal and external factors such as self-esteem, satisfaction with self performance, satisfaction with the environment, sufficiency of income, and living in a healthy family^(3,4). The data of elderly life happiness in Chainat province, Thailand by Gray RS et al⁽⁵⁾ found that the elderly had happiness level slightly higher than the mean (5.6 on a scale of 10). Feeling of poverty when compared to their neighbors and the perceived social environment were related to life happiness of the elderly. The study of Assantachai P and Marranetra N⁽⁶⁾ stated that 39.6 % of elderly club members in Thailand had a low quality of life. In addition, the study of elderly self-esteem in Nakhon Sawan province by Nanthamongkolchai S et al⁽⁷⁾ showed that 19.3% of the elderly had low self-esteem. Influencing factors were social support, social activity participation, personality, and family activity participation.

According to Rayong province statistic, the increasing populations of elderly are noted. In 1999,

there were 49,729 elderly or 9.99% of all population in the province. But in 2006 the number of the elderly increased to 58,537 or 10.33% of total population with higher proportion of female than male⁽⁸⁾. In addition, Rayong province is rather advanced in economy and industry, which may have an influence on family life and life happiness in elderly female. So the researcher was interested to study life happiness and influencing factors of elderly female in Rayong province. The results could be used as information for creating programs to promote and provide suitable services for enhancing the happiness of elderly female.

Material and Method

The present study was a cross-sectional survey. Data were collected by interview questionnaire from June 6th to July 3rd 2008. The samples were 233 elderly females aged between 60-80 years who were willing to participate in the study and did not have any severe illnesses. The samples were selected using multi-stage sampling from 4 districts of Rayong Province; Wang Chan District, Klaeng District, Khao Chamao District and Baan Khai District.

The instrument in the study was an interview questionnaire developed by the researchers that consisted of 8 parts. Part I was demographic characteristics; age, marital status, education level, monthly income, family type, and health status. Part II was comprised of 16 questions used to determine the personality using Eysenck's concept⁽⁹⁾. Part III evaluated self-esteem of the elderly with 21 questions adapted from Coopersmith's concept of self-esteem⁽¹⁰⁾. Part IV was comprised of 15 questions to determine the family relationship using Friedman⁽¹¹⁾, and Morrow and Wilson's concepts⁽¹²⁾. Part V had 15 questions to evaluate social supports using a combination of concepts proposed by Cobb S⁽¹³⁾ and Schaefer C et al⁽¹⁴⁾. Part VI utilized 8 questions to determine participation in social activities based on concept of Lemon BW et al⁽¹⁵⁾. Part VII evaluated participants' perception of their social environment using 8 questions adapted from the measurement of social environment by Gray RS et al⁽¹⁶⁾. Part VIII utilized 21 questions to measure life happiness of the participants. Questions were based on concepts of happiness constructed by Diener E⁽¹⁷⁾, Argyle M et al⁽⁴⁾, and Neugarten BL et al⁽¹⁸⁾.

The interview questionnaire was examined by three experts for content validity. Reliability was accomplished with a pretest by pilot study among thirty-five elderly people with similar characteristics to those of the study population. The results were analyzed for

reliability by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability values of the questionnaire were as follows: personality = 0.72, self-esteem = 0.90, family relationship = 0.92, social support = 0.94, participation in social activities = 0.84, perception about social environment = 0.83, and life happiness of elderly = 0.90.

Data were analyzed by frequency, percentage. In addition, mean, and standard deviation were used for general characteristics of samples and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to test for factors that were related to life happiness of elderly female. Stepwise multiple regressions were used to determine factors that predict life happiness. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee for Human Research, Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, Bangkok Thailand: Ref. No. MUPH2008-050.

Results

General characteristics of the elderly female found that nearly two thirds of the sample (61.4%) were aged between 60-69 years with a mean age of 68.8 years. Most participants (96.1%) completed elementary school or lower. About half (50.2%) were married, 75.5% lived in a family with sufficient income, 64.4% lived with extended family, and 48.5% were healthy. About 57.5% of the participants had chronic diseases, 52.8% were extrovert personality, and 47.6% assessed themselves as having a moderate level of self-esteem. About 40.3% of the elderly had a moderate level of family relationships. In addition, 42.9% of the participants had a moderate level of social support while 42.5% participated in social activities. About half of the elderly (56.2%) perceived themselves to live in a moderately social environment (Table 1).

Life happiness of the elderly female was assessed by the questionnaire and classified the score into three levels. Half of the elderly female (50.3%) had moderate life happiness followed by low level 27.0%, and high level 22.7% (Table 2).

From table 3, factors related to the life happiness of the elderly female were personality, self-esteem, family relationship, social support, participation in social activities, and perception of social environment ($p < 0.05$). Factors which influenced and could predict the life happiness of the elderly were analyzed by stepwise multiple regression and found that self-esteem, social support, and family relationship could predict 91.4% of the life happiness of the elderly female. The factor with highest influence the life

happiness of the elderly was self-esteem (Beta = 0.477) followed by social support, and family relationship with Beta of 0.381 and 0.124 respectively (Table 4).

Therefore, the life happiness of the elderly female = $4.706 + 0.477 \text{ self-esteem} + 0.381 \text{ social support} + 0.014 \text{ family relationship}$.

Table 1. Number and percentage of elderly female classified by general characteristics (n = 233)

Characteristic	n	%
Age groups		
60-69	143	61.4
70-80	90	38.6
Mean = 68.6 SD = 5.72	Min = 60	Max = 80
Education level		
Elementary or lower	244	96.1
Higher than elementary	9	3.9
Marital status		
Married	117	50.2
Single	5	2.1
Widow/Divorced/Separated	111	47.7
Monthly income		
Sufficient	176	75.5
Insufficient	57	24.5
Family type		
Nuclear family	83	35.6
Extended family	150	64.4
Health condition		
Good	113	48.5
Fair	92	39.5
Poor	28	12.0
Chronic disease/Condition		
Yes	134	57.5
No	99	42.5
Personality		
Introvert (16-47)	110	47.2
Extrovert(48-80)	123	52.8
Self-esteem		
Low level (20-59)	57	24.5
Moderate level (60-79)	111	47.6
High level (80-100)	65	27.9
Family relationship		
Low level (15-44)	75	32.2
Moderate level (45-59)	94	40.3
High level (60-75)	64	27.5
Social support		
Low level (15-44)	70	30.0
Moderate level (45-59)	100	42.9
High level (60-75)	63	27.1
Participation in social activities		
Low level (8-23)	79	33.9
Moderate level (24-31)	99	42.5
High level (32-40)	23.6	23.6
Perception of social environment		
Low level (8-23)	26	11.2
Moderate level (24-31)	131	56.2
High level (32-40)	76	32.6

Discussion

The results showed that half of the elderly female (50.3%) had a moderate level of life happiness and 22.7% had a high level of life happiness. Therefore most of them had either a moderate or high level of life happiness. This can be explained that most elderly female were considered as young old age (60-69 years),

Table 2. Life happiness of the elderly female in Rayong Province (n = 233)

Level of life happiness	Number	Percentage
Low level (21-62)	63	27.0
Medium level (63-83)	117	50.3
High level (84-105)	53	22.7

Table 3. Correlation coefficient between personal factors, family factors and social factors, and life happiness of elderly female (n = 233)

Variables	Life happiness	
	Coefficient correlation (r)	p-value
Age	-0.008	0.899
Personality	0.422	<0.001
Self-esteem	0.938	<0.001
Family relationship	0.920	<0.001
Social support	0.928	<0.001
Participation in social activities	0.867	<0.001
Perception of social environment	0.524	<0.001

Table 4. Stepwise multiple regression analysis between predictors and life happiness of elderly female (n = 233)

Variables	Stepwise multiple regression			
	B	Beta	t	p-value
Self-esteem	0.494	0.477	8.408	<0.001
Social support	0.468	0.381	7.093	<0.001
Family relationship	0.157	0.124	1.981	0.049

$B_0 = 4.706, R^2 = 0.914, \text{Adj } R^2 = 0.913$

they had sufficient income and lived with extended family. Moreover they were generally in good health, and more than half of them were extrovert personality. This result of the present study was the same as Gray RS et al⁽⁵⁾ who found that mean happiness was slightly above a feeling of neutrality, and the feeling of poverty compared to the neighbors was related to the happiness of the elderly.

The result showed that there were 3 factors influencing and predicting life happiness of elderly female in Rayong province. These were self-esteem, social support, and family relationship. These factors could predict life happiness of elderly female in Rayong province at 91.4%. Self-esteem had the strongest influence on life happiness of elderly female in Rayong province. It seems that elderly female; recognize their self-value and potential are open minded, understand their current situation, behave properly, have good relationships with people, and are satisfied with the social level of their environment. The elderly with high self-esteem were motivated to take care of themselves and that led to a better quality of life. The result was consistent with Keiter KJ and Blixen CE⁽¹⁹⁾, and Qunnapiruk L et al⁽²⁰⁾ which found that self-esteem had an influence on quality of life in the elderly.

The second strongest factor influencing life happiness of elderly female was social support. The result corresponded to the study of Bishop AJ et al⁽²¹⁾ which found that social support influenced happiness in older adults. The study of a North RJ et al⁽²²⁾ found that the social support is related to happiness in adults, which is congruent with the present study. Social support is an essential need in the lives of elderly. It enhances their physical and mental health and help to precisely adjust themselves for happy living. Family relationship was also found to influence life happiness. Due to physical, mental, emotional, and social changes, the elderly needed more care and support from family members. Therefore, good family relationships contribute to healthy self-esteem of elderly family members thereby contributing to their life happiness. The result was consistent with Saengthienchai C et al⁽²³⁾, who found that support from family members influenced the mental happiness of the elderly.

In the next generation, the elderly will be the big population in Thailand. These planning for healthy and happy life of elderly should be considered. To promote life happiness of elderly female, responsible organizations should establish activities to build up self-esteem in the elderly, and strengthen their social support and family relationships.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank all the participants in the study. We would also like to thank Dr. Supachai Pitikultang for his kind suggestions regarding.

References

1. Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. World population ageing: 1950-2050 [homepage on the Internet]. 2009 [cited 2009 Aug 11]. Available from: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050/>
2. National Statistical Office. Report on the 2007 survey of the older persons in Thailand. Bangkok: Bureau of Socio-Economic and Opinion 1, National Statistical Office, 2008.
3. Diener E. Subjective well-being. *Psychol Bull* 1984; 95: 542-75.
4. Argyle M, Martin M. The psychological causes of happiness. In: Strack F, Argyle M, Schwarz N, editors. *Subjective well-being*. Oxford: Pergamon Press; 1991: 77-95.
5. Gray RS, Rukumnuaykit P, Kittisuksathit S, Thongthai V. Inner happiness among Thai elderly. *J Cross Cult Gerontol* 2008; 23: 211-24.
6. Assantachai P, Maranetra N. Nationwide survey of the health status and quality of life of elderly Thais attending clubs for the elderly. *J Med Assoc Thai* 2003; 86: 938-46.
7. Nanthamongkolchai S, Makapat A, Charupoonphol P, Munsawaengsub C. Self-esteem of the elderly in rural areas of Nakhon Sawan Province. *J Med Assoc Thai* 2007; 90: 155-9.
8. Registration Administration Center, Rayong Province. Elderly data on 30 June 2007. Rayong: Rayong Registration Office; 2007.
9. Eysenck HJ. *The structure of human personality*. 3rd ed. London: Methuen; 1970.
10. Coopersmith S. *Self-esteem inventory*. 2nd ed. California: Consulting Psychologists Press; 1984.
11. Friedman MM. Social support sources and psychological well-being in older women with heart disease. *Res Nurs Health* 1993; 16: 405-13.
12. Morrow WR, Wilson RC. Family relations of bright high-achieving and under-achieving high school boys. *Child Dev* 1961; 32: 501-10.
13. Cobb S. Presidential Address-1976. Social support as a moderator of life stress. *Psychosom Med* 1976; 38: 300-14.
14. Schaefer C, Coyne JC, Lazarus RS. The health-related functions of social support. *J Behav Med* 1981; 4: 381-406.

15. Lemon BW, Bengtson VL, Peterson JA. An exploration of the activity theory of aging: activity types and life satisfaction among in-movers to a retirement community. *J Gerontol* 1972; 27: 511-23.
16. Gray R, Rak-amnoykit P, Kittisuksathit S. Happiness on sufficiency: Security at the end of life [database on the Internet]. 2006 [cited 2007 Oct]. Available from: <http://www.ipsr.mahidol.ac.th/content/home/ConferenceII/Article/Download/Article09.pdf>
17. Diener E. Frequently asked questions (FAQ's) about subjective well-being (happiness and life satisfaction) [database on the Internet]. 2005 [cited 2007 Aug 14]. Available from: <http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~ediener/faq.html>
18. Neugarten BL, Havighurst RJ, Tobin SS. The measurement of life satisfaction. *J Gerontol* 1961; 16: 134-43.
19. Keister KJ, Blixen CE. Quality of life and aging. *J Gerontol Nurs*. 1998; 24: 22-8.
20. Ounnampiruk L, Ronnarithivichai C, Ucharatana P, Boonchan N, Klainil P, Virojrat V. Quality of life among elderly: the meta-analysis from 1990-2001. *J Gerontol Geriatr Med* 2005; 6: 2-12.
21. Bishop AJ, Martin P, Poon L. Happiness and congruence in older adulthood: a structural model of life satisfaction. *Aging Ment Health* 2006; 10: 445-53.
22. North RJ, Holahan CJ, Moos RH, Cronkite RC. Family support, family income, and happiness: a 10-year perspective. *J Fam Psychol* 2008; 22: 475-83.
23. Saengthienchai C, Kespitchayawattana J, Aunguroch Y, Ingersoll-Dayton B. Relations between supports in the family and mental happiness of Thai aged people. *Journal of Demography* 2001; 17: 1-18.

ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขในชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุหญิง จังหวัดระยอง ประเทศไทย

สุธรรม นันทมงคลชัย, ชูดีไกร ตันติชัยวนิช, โชคชัย หมั่นแสวงทรัพย์, พิทยา จารุพนผล

วัตถุประสงค์: เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขในชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุหญิงจังหวัดระยอง ประเทศไทย

วัสดุและวิธีการ: เป็นการศึกษาเชิงสำรวจภาคตัดขวาง เก็บข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์ผู้สูงอายุระหว่างวันที่ 6 มิถุนายน-31 กรกฎาคม พ.ศ. 2551 กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือผู้สูงอายุหญิงที่มีอายุระหว่าง 60-80 ปี จำนวน 233 คน ได้จากการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบหลายขั้นตอน วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้ความถี่ร้อยละ สถิติสัมพันธ์สหสัมพันธ์ของเพียร์สัน และการวิเคราะห์ถดถอยพหุคูณแบบมีขั้นตอน

ผลการศึกษา: ผู้สูงอายุหญิงร้อยละ 50.2 มีความสุขในระดับปานกลาง รองลงมา คือ ระดับต่ำ ร้อยละ 27.1 และระดับสูง ร้อยละ 22.7 ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขในชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุหญิงได้แก่ ความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเอง แรงสนับสนุนทางสังคม และสัมพันธ์ภาพในครอบครัว ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) ซึ่งปัจจัยเหล่านี้สามารถร่วมทำนายความสุขในชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุหญิงในจังหวัดระยอง ได้ร้อยละ 91.4 และความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเองสามารถร่วมทำนายได้สูงสุด

สรุป: ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขในชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุหญิงได้แก่ ความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเอง แรงสนับสนุนทางสังคม และสัมพันธ์ภาพในครอบครัว ดังนั้น หน่วยงานที่รับผิดชอบ ควรเสริมสร้างความสุขในชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุหญิงโดยเสริมสร้างความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเอง จัดให้มีการสนับสนุนทางสังคมอย่างเพียงพอ ส่งเสริมสัมพันธ์ภาพในครอบครัว เพื่อให้ดำรงชีวิตอยู่ได้อย่างมีความสุข