

# Thai Elder Abuse Problems and Prevention

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## Abstract

The present qualitative research aimed to study 1) the nature of abuse experienced by Thai elders, 2) the causes of elder abuse, and 3) the prevention of elder abuse. The key informants were the Thai elders and directors of 9 Social Welfare Development Centers for Older Persons and old age homes in Buriram, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Pathom, Pathum Thani, Chonburi, Lopburi, Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, and Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. The in-depth interview technique was applied to collect data. The results suggested that the abuse of older people in Thailand could be categorized into 4 main groups, which were neglect, financial abuse, verbal abuse, and physical assault. The occurrence of elder abuse resulted from the individual factors of elders and abusers such as sons and daughters, sons-in-law, husband's brothers, and grandchildren. The preventive measures to reduce elder abuse included driving Thai local administrative organizations to play a role in caring the elderly in each community, formulating a specific law on elder abuse, strictly complying with the elder abuse law, and encouraging community volunteers such as care-for-the-elderly-at-home volunteers and village health volunteers to pay attention to and look out for the elderly in communities.

**Keywords:** Elder Abuse, Preventive Measures, Thai Elders

## Introduction

In 2015, the world's population aged 60 years and older accounted for 12% of the total population (7,349 million people). An ageing society refers to a country in which at least 10% of the population are over 60 years of age. There are several ASEAN countries becoming an ageing society such as Singapore and Vietnam, where the elderly population accounts for 18% and 10% of the total population respectively. In Thailand, the elderly population accounts for 16% of the total population, indicating that the country has already become an ageing society as well (Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute, 2016).

When people become old, they have to face changes in many aspects and are more likely to have illnesses and disabilities. This situation makes the elderly have problems doing daily activities and need assistance from caregivers. Caregivers may feel bored, burdened, and stressed, which may result in both intentional and unintentional forms of verbal assault, physical abuse, and intimidation. There are many kinds of elder abuse, including psychological abuse, sexual abuse, property abuse, and neglect that make the elderly suffer mentally and physically.

Considering the problems of elder abuse in international context, the results of a study conducted in 28 low-and middle-income countries in different regions suggested that the older people aged 60 years and over mostly suffer from psychological abuse (16%), followed by financial exploitation (6.8%), neglect of caregivers (4.2%), physical abuse (2.6%), and sexual abuse (0.9%). Elder abuse is likely to happen in hospitals and nursing homes rather than other

community places. The nature of elder abuse occurring in these places include violation of human dignity such as letting the elderly wear dirty clothes; daily abuse such as providing inadequate care and making the elderly suffer from bedsores, overuse of medication, medicine withdrawal; and emotional or psychological abuse (WHO, 2002).

In Thailand, the statistics of elder abuse have not been systematically recorded. However, according to a social situation survey carried out by the Bureau of Inspection and Evaluation, Office of the Permanent Secretary for Social Development and Human Security (2017), apart from general problems such as being unable to help themselves, having no access to public services, having no house registration, being poor, and having to take care of their children, 1.04% of Thai older people were found to also suffer from physical and psychological abuse. Moreover, the statistics collected by the National Police Agency revealed that in 2007 there were 344 criminal cases where the victims were the elderly aged 60 and over. The number of criminal cases with elderly victims reached 703 in 2015 and continues to increase every year. The most violent violation against older people is psychological assault, followed by abandonment of a dependent older person and property exploitation (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2017).

The occurrences of elder abuse seem to increase in accordance with the increasing number of older people. Thus, it is interesting to examine whether, how, and why Thai elders have experienced elder abuse before moving into the social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes in order to find out effective measures to prevent elder abuse.

## **Research Objectives**

The present research aimed to study 1) the nature of abuse experienced by Thai elders, 2) the causes of elder abuse, and 3) the prevention of elder abuse.

## **Literature Review**

The present research was conducted based on the conceptual theory of domestic violence, especially the violence against the elderly that refers to actions that cause physical, mental, emotional, and social suffering to the elderly aged 60 and over and can harm the welfare of the elderly. The violence against the elderly can be done in forms of physical assault, psychological harm, neglect or abandonment, sexual abuse, and elder exploitation as well as intentional and unintentional violation of older people's rights. Apart from the concept of domestic violence, this research also focused on the concept of elder abuse (Action on Elder Abuse: AEA, 2017), which states that elder abuse refers to intentional actions or lacks of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which can cause harm or a risk of harm to an older person aged 60 years and over. There are many forms of elder abuse, which can be generally divided into the following categories: 1) physical elder abuse, which refers to the use of physical force that results in physical pain, injury, and impairment and the physical assaults such as beating, pushing, misuse of medication, and detention; 2) emotional elder abuse, which refers to the infliction of mental anguish through verbal acts, intimidation, insults and hurtful words, false accusations, social exclusion, and isolation; 3) sexual elder abuse, which refers to the unwanted sexual contact with an older person, sexual photography, forced witness of sexual, and forced nudity; 4) elder neglect or abandonment by caregivers, which refers to the intentional and unintentional neglect of an older person or the failure to fulfill a caregiving obligation; and 5) financial exploitation, which refers to the illegal or inappropriate use of an older person's resources, preventing an older person from accessing information and benefits,

counterfeiting, misuse of assets, theft of money or property, coercion and deception, and improper use of power of attorney.

In Thailand, there is a research study on elder abuse suggesting that the abuse of older people are mostly caused by their family members, children, or spouses. Dependent and poor elderly are likely to be the victims of elder abuse. Most elder abuse cases are caused by adult children who have to care for their elderly parents alone. Their abusive behaviors may result from the fact that they were abused during childhood and the pressure and stress of caring for elderly parents for a long time, which leads to elder neglect, negative relationship, and poor attitude towards the elderly. They tend to have aggressive and disrespectful actions and use harsh words to hurt the elderly's feelings. In addition, the abuse of older people is also involved with other factors such as family living conditions, health status, and alcohol and drug use of family members (Ruchiwit and Sriwichai, 2004; Ketpichayawattana and Wivatvanit, 2009; Nawanakul, et al., 2006; Somanusorn, 2004; and Sook-Ium, 2008; Kuanliang, 2016).

Moreover, the present research also took into account the concept of public policy, which refers to the government intentions designed to solve various social problems. Policymakers need to understand the nature of elder abuse problems in order to successfully formulate an effective policy. The present study on elder abuse was carried out to understand 1) the nature of problems negatively affecting the older people that are likely to become the majority of the country's population in the future, and 2) the government agencies involved with elder abuse and their interactions with elder abuse problems (Thamrongthanyawong, 2003), which will be helpful to the policymakers in identifying problems and determining appropriate solutions to those problems in a proper way.

## Research Methodology

This research is a descriptive qualitative study that aimed to study the nature, causes, and prevention of elder abuse.

**Key Informants:** the key informants were divided into 2 groups according to the research objectives. To answer the first and second research objectives about the nature and causes of elder abuse, the data saturation technique was used to select the first group of key informants that consisted of 28 Thai elders in 9 social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes, namely Buriram Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons, Thammapakorn Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons in Chiang Mai, Pathum Thani Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons, Nakhon Pathom Old Age Home, Banglamung Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons in Chonburi, Lopburi Old Age Home, Ban Bang Khae Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons in Bangkok, Chaloem Rajakumari Old Age Home (patronized by Luang Phor Pern) in Kanjanaburi, and Watsanawet Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. The second group of key informants, who were selected to respond to the third research objective about the prevention of elder abuse, comprised the directors or representatives of the above 9 social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes.

**Research Instruments:** the research instruments of this study were two interview sheets with a series of open-ended questions, which were already verified by the experts. The first interview sheet was composed of two main parts: 1) the general information part and 2) the nature and causes of elder abuse part. The second interview sheet was concerned with the prevention of elder abuse.

**Data Reliability and Validity:** in order to ensure the reliability and validity of data, the following procedures were carried out.

In the preparation stage, the researcher learned how to use qualitative research methods and attended the lectures on qualitative research methods in order to better understand the principles of qualitative research, including qualitative data collection, data analysis, and research instruments. The interview questions were designed by the researcher and then examined by the experts so as to confirm their validity and consistency with the research objectives.

After the data analysis was completed, the researcher had the research assistant review the data analysis process and check the analysis results again in order to ensure the accuracy and avoid biases that might occur. The key informants also ascertained that the research results were factually accurate and consistent with their perception. In addition, after letting the people with knowledge about qualitative research and related theories, who were not involved with the present research, read the analysis results, they confirmed that the results were understandable and deemed reliable.

**Data Collection:** the data were collected by the researcher during August 2017 to July 2018. The following data collection procedures were carried out.

Regarding the selection of the study areas, the researcher sent the letters to the Director-General of the Department of Older Persons, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and the presidents of provincial administrative organizations in order to ask for permission to interview the directors of and the elders in social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes that were under the supervision of the Department of Older Persons and the provincial administrative organizations. After receiving approval, the researcher coordinated with 9 social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes using the information obtained from the Department of Older Persons in terms of phone numbers and the list of abused elders in each center for older persons and old age home. The researcher was recommended to start collecting the data at Pathum Thani Social Welfare Development Center for Older Persons first. After interviewing, the director or representative of each social welfare development center for older persons and old age home was asked to suggest other informants based on the snowball technique. The researcher continuously carried out the interviews until the data were saturated. Finally, there was a total of 28 Thai elders participating in the study.

Before starting the actual interview, the researcher asked for the details of abuse experienced by each elder from the director or representative of the center for older persons or old age home and targeted the elders who were able to communicate well and willing to disclose their information. When meeting the key informants, the researcher began to build good relationships with them through self-introduction and then informed them about the research objectives, research procedures, research duration, and the right to not participate in the research, the data confidentiality and anonymity of the informants, and the overall data analysis method. The interviews were carried out in a private room within the social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes.

The researcher used the in-depth interview method to individually interview each key informant. The key informants were asked to explain their experiences regarding elder abuse as well as the causes and the prevention of elder abuse. The rights of the key informants and the interview etiquettes were taken into account throughout the interview process. After the interviews were completed, the researcher thanked the key informants and asked the director or representative to further suggest other key informants. Each interview took about 40 minutes to 1 hour. The

researcher continued asking questions until the data were saturated or no new data were obtained.

The data interpretation and analysis were conducted simultaneously with the data collection. The validity of data was examined before conducting the next interview. The interviews were continuously carried out until reaching the data saturation point. After the data collection was completed, the researchers analyzed the data and make conclusions based on actual facts.

**Data Analysis:** after the interview process, the researcher carefully listened to the voice recordings of the interviews and transcribed them word-by-word. The researcher repeatedly read the full transcription in order to thoroughly understand the content, before classifying and selecting the important messages or sentences that were related to the nature, causes, and prevention of elder abuse. The key informants were also asked to recheck the validity of the data. Then the researcher and the research assistant read the obtained data together again, before drawing the conclusions.

## Research Results

The present research aimed to study the elder abuse experiences of Thai elders, the causes of elder abuse, and the preventive measures to minimize elder abuse. The qualitative data were collected from 28 Thai elders and 9 directors or representatives of the social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes. The analysis results could be divided into 4 parts: 1) the general information about the key informants, 2) the nature of elder abuse experienced by the key informants, 3) the causes of elder abuse, and 4) the prevention of elder abuse.

### General Information about the Key Informants

The first group of the key informants, who provided the information related to the first research objective, were 28 older people with elder abuse experiences. Of all key informants, 10 of them were females (67.85%) and 9 of them were males (32.14%). They were mostly aged between 71-80 years (n= 13, 46.42%), followed by 60-70 years (n= 10, 35.71%) and 81-90 years (n= 5, 17.85%). Their education was mostly at the primary school level (n=11, 39.20), followed by the high school level (n=6, 21.42%), unspecified (n=5, 17.85%), uneducated (n=3, 10.71%), and the bachelor's degree level (n=3, 10.71%). In terms of marital status, most of them were widowed (n= 12, 39.28%), divorced (n= 11, 39.28%), single (n=4, 14%), and married (n= 1, 3.57%). Regarding their previous occupation, most of them were merchants (n=10, 35.71%), employees (n=9, 32.14%), pensioners (n=4, 14.28%), housewives (n=2, 7.14%), farmers (n=2, 7.14%), and unspecified (n=1, 3.57%). Almost all of them had siblings (n=24, 85.71%), whereas only 4 of them were found to have no sibling (14.28%). More than half of the key informants had children (n=18, 64.28%) while 9 of them had no children (32.14%). Only 1 key informants had adopted children (3.57%).

The second group of the key informants, who provided the information related to the second research objective, were 9 directors or representatives of 9 social welfare development centers for older persons and old age homes.

### Nature of Elder Abuse Experienced by the Key Informants

Based on the data obtained from the interviews, the nature of elder abuse could be divided into 4 groups: neglect, financial abuse, verbal abuse, and physical assault. The details are as follows.

1. Neglect: the key informants' family members did not give enough attention and support to their daily activities. Therefore, they had to take care of themselves despite not having ability to do so. The key informants provided more details as follows.

“My family didn’t have enough money. I worked at the other place before moving to be a housemaid in Bangkok. Later, when I moved back to live with my brother and his wife, they neither gave me food nor took good care of me because I had no job. Therefore, I decided to move into the center for older persons.”

“When I was about 60 years old, my son was arrested and I bailed him out. His wife didn’t help me do anything, although she knew that my eyesight was not good. When I turned 72, I moved to live in another house that I bought. My son left me alone and never came to see me. I got recommended to enter an old age home in order to receive elderly care.”

2. Financial abuse: the family members asked for or seized the money and assets from the key informants. Sometimes, they even got threatened for money. The key informants gave further information as follows.

“My husband died very suddenly. He was the eldest son. He and his sister bought a house together and paid for it in instalments. After my husband died, his brother came to borrow our car and never returned it. As he is a gambler, he used that car to pay for his gambling debt.”

“I have a daughter. She is hairdresser. Her husband is a show-off. He deceived me to give him my title deed so that he could take out a loan. I decided to give it to him because I love my child. This made me lose my house. At first, I lived with my daughter. After I could not walk, she moved out to live alone. The sub-district administrative organization found me and sent me here.”

3. Verbal abuse: the family members scolded, blamed, or used verbal acts to cause psychological pain to the key informants. The key informants provided more information as follows.

“My son never calls me mom. He calls me by my name like my sister-in-law does. He is very aggressive with me. When he wants something, he will say, “Hey, buy me a bicycle,” without calling my name. I need to buy him everything he wants. He always scolds and intimidates me into giving him money. The last time, I was cursed because I overcooked rice. I apologized to him but he did not forgive me. He said that he was my father and I was not his mother.”

“I lived with my daughter. I quarreled with her because of her dog. Her dog was vicious. It once bit my hand hard because I patted my daughter’s shoulder. I just jerked my hand away but my daughter was angry with me. She loved the dog more than me. She said if I didn’t want to stay with her, I could move out. It made me feel so hurtful so I grabbed my clothes and left the house with only 250 baht in my pocket.”

“She said-If you want the right to be a family, I am not ready now. I can’t accept you as a family member. If you want money, just send me a letter instead of calling because I don’t want to be awkward and uncomfortable.”

4. Physical assault: the family members or other people hit, slapped, threw things at, or caused physical pain to the key informants. They gave more information as follows.

“I recently got rebuked because I overcooked rice. I said sorry but he did not forgive. I was bleeding because he slapped me on the jaw area. My wound needed several stitches. I decided to escape because he became more violent.”

“I had no money because I used it to buy stuffs for my children. My friend let me stay with her but I didn’t want to bother her for long. I moved out and took out a loan of 5,000 baht to set up a small business. As I couldn’t repay the loan, a loan shark hit me on the face. I was scared so I ran away and moved into the center for old persons.”

## Causes of Elder Abuse

The causes of elder abuse were associated with the key informants' perception about the factors that could trigger and promote elder abuse. The causes of elder abuse could be categorized into 2 main groups as follows.

1. Individual factors of older people: the key informants thought that the following individual factors could contribute to elder abuse.

1.1 Illnesses, which made the key informants unable to care for themselves and caused other people to be dissatisfied with or dislike them. The key informants provided more details as follows.

“When I was about 60 years old, my son was arrested and I bailed him out. His wife didn't help me do anything, although she knew that my eyesight was not good. When I turned 72, I moved to live in another house that I bought. My son left me alone and never came to see me. I got recommended to move into an old age home so as to have someone to take care of me.”

“I have a daughter. She is hairdresser. Her husband is a show-off. He deceived me to give him my title deed so that he could take out a loan. I decided to give it to him because I love my child. This made me lose my house. At first, I lived with my daughter. After I could not walk, she moved out to live alone. She might feel that I was a burden to her.”

1.2 Poverty, which made the key informants have to rely on other people, caused their family members to disrespect them and refuse to take care of them, and made other people unwilling to associate with them. The key informants gave additional information as follows.

“I had no money so they didn't welcome me. They thought that I was a burden. My brother and his wife asked me in an offensive manner that if they let me stay with them, how they could feed their family.”

“I had to rely on my sister. She said that I shouldn't use money or eat a lot and added that you should have been bored of food because you had eaten it for so long. I was like a dog that needed to take care of itself. I had to rely on her because I didn't have money.”

2. Individual factors of abusers: the key informants perceived that the following individual factors of the abusers could lead to elder abuse.

2.1 Use of addictive substances, which was involved with the use of alcohol and drug that made the abusers unable to control themselves. The key informants gave more information as follows.

“My daughter got dumped so she was in despair and started using alcohol and drugs. Later, she moved out and left me alone because I couldn't walk.”

“My eldest son occasionally took care of me. When he had a fight with his wife, he always vented his anger on me. My second son got drunk all day and spent all money on alcohol. The third son didn't receive education.”

“My son is an alcohol addict. He always scolds and throws things at me. He drinks 2 or 3 bottles of alcohol every day. He forced me to borrow money from others so I ran away from home.”

2.2 Gambling addiction, which made the abusers physically and verbally assaulted the key informants in order to get money to repay their gambling debts. The key informants provided further information as follows.

“My husband died very suddenly. He was the eldest son. He and his sister bought a house together and paid for it in instalments. After my husband died, his brother came to borrow our car and never returned it. As he is a gambler, he used that car to pay for his gambling debt.”

“I lived with my husband and son. My son was a gambler. I decided to not tell anyone about my sickness because I didn't want to bother them. I didn't want to live with my son because his words hurt me. He said I talked too much.”

## Prevention of Elder Abuse

The prevention of elder abuse are associated with the preventive systems and mechanisms that are determined and developed with the cooperation between public, private, and civil sectors in order to minimize elder abuse in the Thai society. The details obtained from the directors or representatives of the centers for older persons and old age homes could be described below.

1. In order to deal with the problems about the neglect and abandonment of older people by their family members, which made the first group of key informants (Thai elders) have to take care of themselves despite not having ability to do so, the local administrative organizations should place more importance to caring for the older people in each community, establishing a long-term elderly care system or a community elderly center, and allocating volunteers to take care of dependent older people living alone. The second group of key informants provided more information as follows.

“Each local community should have a community elderly center as well as care-for-the-elderly-at-home volunteers and village health volunteers to take care of the elders that are attached to the bed. The local administrative organization should focus on social work rather than infrastructure.”

“We should increase the ability of elderly care volunteers. The local administrative organization should take care of the underprivileged and pay more attention to social issues instead of road construction.”

2. Regarding the financial abuse and physical assault, the government agencies need to strictly enforce the laws. The financial exploitation of elderly people is included in the Criminal Code while the physical assault is included in the Domestic Violence Protection Act. The second group of key informants gave further information as follows.

“The Elderly Person Act does not impose penalties for elder abuse. However, according to Section 307 of the Criminal Code, any person who is charged by a law or contract with the duty to take care of the person in the helpless condition through age, because of sickness, infirmity in body or mind, abandoning such person in the manner likely to endanger his or her life, shall be imprisoned out of three years or fined not more of six thousand Baht, or both. In addition, the Domestic Violence Protection Act states that any person who commits any act which is considered a Domestic Violence, such person shall have committed a Domestic Violence offense and shall be liable to a term of imprisonment not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding six thousand baht, or to both. Such offense under paragraph one is an offense which can be compromised, but cannot be eradicated according to the Criminal Code or other laws. If the offense under paragraph one is the offense for physical assault under section 295 under the Criminal Code, such offense shall be the offence which can be compromised.”

3. Community volunteers such as care-for-the-elderly-at-home volunteers and village health volunteers should be encouraged to look after and look out for the elderly in communities. The number of volunteers should be increased. The volunteers should be educated on the rights of the elderly and elder healthcare. They should be provided with monetary incentives such as travel expenses and daily allowances and non-monetary incentives such as compliments and medical benefits. The second group of key informants provided additional information as follows.

“There should be a community elderly center and elderly care volunteers in place to take care of the elderly. The ability of elderly care volunteers should be increasingly developed.”

The above information reflects the measures to prevent elder abuse that results from the cooperation between the public and civil sectors. It can be said that systematic mechanisms can prevent the elder abuse problems at their root cause and help reduce the demand for old age

homes because they encourage the community members to take care of each other and focus on long-term prevention.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The conclusions of the present study on Thai elder abuse problems and prevention could be described and discussed as follows.

Considering the nature of elder abuse experienced by Thai elders, it was found that the nature of elder abuse could be categorized into 4 groups: neglect, financial abuse, verbal abuse, and physical assault. The neglect of the elderly may result from the poverty and financial problem of family members. An employee or merchant, who lives a hand-to-mouth life, tends to have poor family relationship due to fatigue from work (Yodphet, 2002), which will possibly lead to verbal elder abuse. Some elders, who were widowed or had no child, needed to stay with their relatives or grandchildren that seemed like distant acquaintances or strangers to them. Moreover, it was found that the elders were hurt the most by the verbal abuse that was done by their own children, especially when they were told that "You are not my mother." This was probably because the elders and their children had a family problem caused by divorce. After divorce, the children might need to live with their father so they had a distant relationship with their mother and develop negative attitude towards their mother. They might think that their mother was a burden or useless elderly person. In addition, psychological elder abuse can be caused by the economic problem. Those that have to work in a big city have to leave their parents at hometown alone, which leads to a gap in relationship. In the past they might do farm work together but at present they need to talk on phone. The distant relationships resulting from the economic problem can contribute to misunderstandings and quarrels between the elderly and their children. The elderly may get rebuked by their children because they are dependent and cannot help themselves.

As for the research results about the financial abuse, it was found that this kind of abuse was most likely to be caused by the elderly's family members such as their adult children, son-in-law, and husband's relatives. Some elders were financially abused by their husband's relatives after their husband died because they had no blood relation. Moreover, the family members might think that the elderly did not need to spend much money and that the elderly should help them when they had financial problems. The present research results are in line with the research findings about the female elder abuse in Thai society of Seeherunwong, Chintanawat, Kangchai, and Sindhu (2001), which suggested that the type of elder abuse that mostly occurred was psychological abuse, followed by physical abuse, abandonment at home, and financial abuse.

Regarding the causes of elder abuse, the key informants perceived that the occurrence of elder abuse derived from their individual factors and the personal habits of abusers that were mostly their children, sons-in-law, husband's brothers, and grandchildren. As the key informants were the elderly with illnesses, they faced psychological changes such as petulance and high sensitivity, needed to rely on assistance from others, and were financially dependent on their family members, which made them vulnerable to elder abuse. Pillemer and FinKehor (1988) suggested that elder abuse is more likely to occur in the elderly living with others rather than the elderly living alone and mostly caused by family members. In addition to the individual factors of the elderly, the abuse of the elderly could result from the alcohol and drug habits as well as the gambling addition of their family members. This is consistent with the research results of Somanusorn (2004), which indicated that the occurrence of elder abuse is derived from the abusers' negative attitude towards the elderly and use of addictive substances. The consequences of being abused include being upset, having to run away, and being hopeless for their life.

Moreover, the results of the present research also suggested that the gambling addiction of the family members could lead to financial exploitation of the elderly, as the family members thought that the elderly did not need to spend much money. This is in line with the World Health Organization (2017), which suggested that the gambling habits of family members is a risk factor for elder abuse. Particularly, the elderly that need to (financially) rely on abusers are at high risk of abuse. It was also found that the female elderly with inferior social status are at risk of being neglected and financially abused, including property retention, when they are widowed.

## Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made.

- Educational institutions should design instructional courses that cultivate students to have good attitudes towards the elderly and understand the nature and types of elder abuse.
- The government should formulate a welfare policy that provides more benefits to families that take good care of the elderly, apart from giving them tax deduction.
- Related organizations such as Thai Health Promotion Foundation should carry out campaigns against alcohol and drug use that are associated with elder abuse.
- Related organizations such as the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security should encourage each community to care for the elderly and provide elderly care volunteers with incentives such as travel allowances and life insurance so that they continue to take good care of and look out for the elderly in the community.
- In Thailand, since there is no penalty for elder abuse included in the Elderly Person Act 2003, elder abuse defendants were punished based on the Criminal Code and the Domestic Violence Protection Act. However, there are some foreign countries that have specific law on elder abuse. For example, in 2006 Japan enacted the Elder Abuse Prevention and Caregiver Support Law that covers all kinds of elder abuse, including physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, and mistreatment of elders by caregivers, care facility staff members, elderly healthcare providers. In terms of the mistreatment of elders, the law states that in cases where any person has discovered an elderly person who is likely to be abused by a caregiver, and if such elderly person's life or health has been materially threatened, such person shall promptly report this to the relevant municipality. The law also stipulates that upon receipt of an elder abuse report, a municipality shall promptly implement measures to confirm the safety of such elderly person. If needed, the municipality shall promptly accommodate the abused elderly person into a facility such as an elderly nursing home in order to temporarily shelter him/her according to the elderly welfare law. The municipality is allowed to enter into such elderly person's domicile or residence.

In addition, the law specifies that in the case where any care facility staff member has discovered an elderly person who appears to be abused by any other staff member who works at the care facility, such care facility staff member shall promptly report this to the municipality. Upon receipt of an elder abuse report, a municipality shall carry out an investigation and report this to the provincial office. The municipality and provincial office have the authority to assure proper management of that care facility in the long run. The decentralization of power allows local agencies to take stringent measures against elder abuse by a caregiver. In other words, the local agencies can revoke the license of any care facility. Therefore, in the future Thai policymakers may need to issue a specific law to prevent elder abuse in order to solve the elder abuse problem in a clearer and more effective way. The local administrative organizations should be used as a mechanism to drive and enhance elder abuse prevention in each community.

Regarding recommendations for further research, future qualitative studies should be carried out to examine the abuse of older people in family, school, hospital, and private elderly nursing home in order to better understand the nature and causes of elder abuse. The research results can be used to solve the problems of elder abuse or propose a new systematic mechanism for coping with elder abuse in an appropriate way.

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