

A Synthesis of Community Capitals for Life Skills Development of Children and Youth Phu Tai Ethnic Group to Prevent Drug Abuse in the Northeastern Region of Thailand

Nipittapon Supanyabut^{1*}, Apichart Jai-aree²,
Prasong Tanpichai³

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¹ Ph.D. Students of Human and Community Resource Development Program, Faculty of Education and Development Sciences, Kasetsart University Kamphaeng Saen Campus, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand

^{2,3} Department of Human and Community Resource Development, Faculty of Education and Development Sciences, Kasetsart University Kamphaeng Saen Campus, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand

¹noomputhai@gmail.com, ²feduacj@ku.ac.th

Abstract

Drug abuse is destructive to children. Developing life skills for children and youth is, therefore, important. The objectives of this research were to investigate the current conditions and impacts of the drug problems on Phu Tai community, study Phu Tai children's life skills, and synthesize the community capitals which were appropriate for the development of life skills among children. This study employed research mixed methods. The research area was a Phu Tai community in the northeastern region of Thailand. The key informants were 32 people including community leaders, nurses from the District Health Promotion Hospital, Subdistrict Administrative Organization staff, public health volunteers, local scholars, monks, policemen, guardians, teachers, and children. These informants were selected using the purposive sampling method. In addition, 210 samples who were children in Phu Tai community were selected using a cluster sampling method to answer the questionnaires. In the analysis of the data, the descriptive analysis and content analysis were employed. The results of the study showed that the drug problems in Phu Tai community were quite serious. Many children used drugs which negatively affected their life, family, and community. However, the children possessed a good level of life skills. In addition, the most outstanding community capitals of Phu Tai community are the culture capitals and local wisdom capitals. Such capitals helped united Phu Tai people together. The integration of the culture capitals and local wisdom capitals, especially Phu Tai traditional dance and education on life skills, would definitely help prevent children from drug problems.

Keywords: Community capitals, Life skills, Juveniles, Drugs Abuse, Phu Tai.

1. Introduction

Drug addiction is regarded as a major problem in many countries around the globe. It could bring about many other serious problems regarding society, economy, politics, and public sector management (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: UNODC, 2021). In Thailand, drug problem creates changes in the social structures and leads to the unbalance in the development and the lack of vitality in the community. In addition, most of the social institutes are found to be weak, resulting in the rapid expansion of drug problems throughout the country (Office of the Narcotics Control Board: ONCB, 2022). From the Ministry of Public Health's report of the monitoring and surveillance for drug problems, it is found that juveniles start using drugs at a younger age. This is in line with the data from Princess Mother National Institute on Drug Abuse Treatment (PMNIDAT) which indicates that, from 2017 to 2020, patients at the institute were mainly juveniles, aged 15-24 years (30 – 40%). This group has a high chance to be involved in drug use which could greatly ruin their physical and mental health.

Juveniles can be considered important human resources since they are the future, the foundation of the society, and important force in the development of the country. Promoting the development of knowledge and life skills

among the juveniles is, therefore, the way to prevent them from various problems that might occur (Child and Youth Development Promotion Committee, 2018).

Kalasin Province is one of the three areas in the upper northeastern part of Thailand with the highest report of drug abuse and trafficking (ONCB, 2019). From the analysis of drug situation in villages conducted by the ONCB, it is found that there are 249 villages (15.37% of all villages) which are labeled as 'red' or having serious drug problems, and there are 2,193 drug traffickers, representing 0.23% of the total population at 917,469 and ranking the first in the country (ONCB, 2019). In addition, some parts of the province are highlands connected to Phu Phan Mountains, making them suitable area for the illegal drug trafficking (Narcotics Control Management Center, 2019). This might explain why Kalasin Province has inevitably faced with drug problems. In addition, the Phu Tai ethnicity is mainly engaged in agriculture. Which requires labor, use of force, causing some people to believe that the use of drug addition will give strength have more stamina.

From the field survey conducted in a Phu Tai ethnic group in the northeastern region of Thailand, it is found that a number of juveniles in this ethnic village are involved in drug abuse, and it greatly affects their study and behavior. This is a serious problem since it jeopardizes the core value of Phu Thai people who prioritize peace, harmony and unity within the community, and respect towards the elders above anything else. Therefore, it might be beneficial to employ the unique community capitals and values, including culture and local wisdom, to prevent children in the community from drug problems and help them develop their life skills. The purpose of this study was to analyze the current conditions and impacts of drug problems on Phu Tai community, to study Phu Tai children's levels of life skills required for the prevention of drug problems and the last to synthesize the community capitals which are suitable for the development of life skills among Phu Thai children to prevent drug problems.

2. Literature Review

Drugs are addictive substances which could be either natural or synthetic products. Drugs are substances that change a person's mental or physical state. They can affect the way your brain works, how you feel and behave, your understanding and your senses. This makes them unpredictable and dangerous, especially for young people. The effects of drugs are different for each person and drug. (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2021; WHO and UNODC, 2020; ONCB, 2019). The prevention of drug problems will, therefore, help a person to have healthy body and mind. Drug prevention programs are designed to provide the education and support necessary to diminish drug dependency in communities, schools, and the workplace. Drug abuse prevention has become an important first step in informing specific individuals about the dangers of addiction, prevention techniques and where to find recovery help if it should be deemed necessary. (American Addiction Centers, 2022; ONCB, 2019; Les B. et al., 2012, Department of Academic Affairs, Ministry of Education, 2017; Wimuttipanya, 2014).

Juveniles are in the transition period. They have to encounter a lot of changes in terms of their body, mind, emotion, and society. These changes will significantly influence their relationship with other people around them. If these changes go smoothly, the juveniles will be able to adapt themselves well. Personal relationships and settings also change during this period, as peers and romantic partners become more central and as the adolescent moves into and then beyond secondary school or gains employment. However, as the children explore, experiment, and learn, they still require scaffolding and support, including environments that bolster opportunities to thrive. A toxic environment makes healthy adolescent development challenging. Ultimately, the transformations in body, brain, and behavior that occur during adolescence interact with each other and with the environment to shape pathways to adulthood. (WHO, 1999; UNESCO, 2001; Natsuaki MN, et al., 2014; Child and Youth Development Promotion Committee, 2018). Nevertheless, if the juveniles do not receive proper care and guidance, there is a possibility that they would struggle with the transition and changes. This could lead to many other serious child and youth problems (Office for Promotion of the Learning Society and the Quality of Youth., 2014).

Life skills are the ability of a person to deal with the problems surrounding today's social environment and prepare them for future adaptations. (Office of the Basic Education Commission: OBEC, 2015). Life skills are

crucial when it comes to the prevention of problems regarding drugs, sex, violence, gambling, game addiction, etc. (WHO, 1997; UNESCO, 2001; Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, 2004). The ability to use life skills is the ability to use processes in everyday practice. with self-learning Continuous learning, working and living together in society by building a good relationship between people problem management and appropriate conflicts and know how to avoid behavior Unpleasant environment that affects oneself and others. Hence, the development of life skills is necessary for the development of juveniles in the community since these life skills are required when the juveniles need to adapt themselves and when they encounter challenging things in their life (Borwornchai, 2012; Chaninkul P. et al., 2020; Angkhanit P. et al., 2015). Furthermore, the development of life skills also helps maintain one's mental health. That person will be able to use knowledge and critical thinking to deal with their problems, and live in the community happily. Enhancing life skills to prevent drug abuse It is an effective enhancement of personal and social skills. to cope with drug use situations, such as critical thinking skills decision-making and creativity Self-esteem and situational control skills. Skills in communication, negotiation, refusal and persuasion adaptive skills, etc. (Sukhothai Thammathirat, 2012; OBEC, 2015). Preventing children and youth from drug addiction uses 4simple principles: 1. Must have a future. 2. must have value 3. must have life skills and 4. must have a good role model. (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2021)

The community capitals can be deemed valuable things in the community. Such community capitals are products from the collaboration and wisdom of the people in the community. They could be either abstract or tangible and must be accumulated and passed down from generation to generation (Kretzmann, Jhon P. and Jhon L McKnight, 1993; Green and Haines, 2007; Jai-Aree, 2019). The community capitals include, for example, human capital, physical capital, institution capital, financial capital, culture capital, and local wisdom capital. These community capitals help maintain the stability of the community and create love and unity within the community (Community Development Department, 2010). Social capital is characterized as capital that is attached to the social structure in the community, such as human capital, which serves to bring knowledge and experience to solve drug problems. Institutional capital is family social capital. Acts as a drug immunity social capital in the community serves to build mutual trust. Joining forces in the fight against drugs. The social capital in the structure serves to build a community way of living on a good pattern of living away from drugs. Intellectual and cultural capital serves to create harmony. Forge the unity of the people in the community to have a good way of life. It can be seen that the social capital in the community has integrated into the self-management of the community in drug prevention. (Nanongtoom, 2019; Drug Prevention and Suppression Center Ministry of Public Health, 2018). The best thing that will help the youth to be immune from the dangers of drugs is the social vaccine, whether it is a family. Educational institutions, communities, and the environment must work together to create a safe and quality space for youth. Listen to their problems and feelings with understanding and non-judgment. make them realize their own worth Build the future with his own hands, with love and understanding from family and society around him. (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

This study was conducted using mixed methods. Data collected were both qualitative and quantitative. The population in this study is 460 Phu Tai children, aged 12 – 18 years, who are listed in the house registration of eight Phu Tai communities. The size of the samples was determined using Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1973). The total number of samples is 210 with $e = .05$. These samples were selected using a cluster sampling method. Informants of the study are community leaders, nurses from the District Health Promotion Hospital, Subdistrict Administrative Organization staff, public health volunteers, local scholars, monks, policemen, guardians, teachers, and children. These informants were selected using the purposive sampling method. The total number of the informants is 32.

The research instruments consist of (1) semi-structured interviews with the focus group, (2) life skills evaluation form developed by the researcher. The evaluation form contains two parts as follows: Demographic data of the informants including personal factors, family status, problem solving, leisure activities, and their knowledge on drug trafficking and organization involved in drug problem management. Life skills evaluation form which focuses on five skills as follows: Self-control skill (10 questions), Self-perception skill (27 questions), and

Refusal skill (12 questions). For these questions, five-point rating scale was employed. These five points include ‘totally agree (5),’ ‘agree (4),’ ‘not sure (3),’ ‘disagree (2),’ and ‘totally disagree (1). then Decision-making skill (10 questions). For these questions, the respondents were required to make the decision. If they made a correct decision, they earned two points. If they made the second right decision, they earned one point. If they made a wrong decision, they earned 0 point. The score range was 0 – 20 points. The scoring criteria were adopted from Bloom, et al., (1971). The score range was divided into three levels including ‘good’ (80 % or above), pass (60 – 79 %), and poor (lower than 60 %). And the last Problem-solving skills (10 questions). For these questions, if the respondents answered correctly, they would earn one point. If the respondent answered incorrectly, they would earn no point. The score range was 0 – 10 points. The score criteria were adopted from Bloom, et al., (1971). The score range was divided into three levels as follows including ‘good’ (80% or above), moderate (60 – 79%), and low (lower than 60%) (3) Filed survey form

The questions used in the semi-structured interviews were developed by the researcher and the content validity were tested by 3 specialists and the content validity of the life skills evaluation form was tested by five specialists. Each question had IOC (Index of Item Object Congruence) at 0.6 – 1.00. In order to investigate the reliability of the form, thirty forms were tested with Phu Tai children who were not the selected samples. The alpha coefficient and Cronbach were at 0.95 (Hair, et al. 2006). Data Collection; The data collection process is demonstrated below: The first document research was conducted. The researcher studied the related research articles, books, community plans, and other documents found in the community. Second the research assistants, including an educator, a community developer, and a non-formal education teacher, were recruited to help facilitate the field survey. Third the in-depth interview and focus group were performed. There were 32 informants including community leaders, nurses from the District Health Promotion Hospital, Subdistrict Administrative Organization staff, public health volunteers, local scholars, monks, policemen, guardians, teachers, and children. And the last one Life skills evaluation forms were distributed to 210 children in the focused areas. Data Analysis; The collected data were analyzed in two ways, i.e., qualitative and quantitative analysis. For the qualitative analysis, the data were analyzed using the content analysis. For the quantitative analysis, the statistics used included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

This research was conducted with the vulnerable social group. However, the researcher has received ethical approval from the human research ethic committee from Princess Mother National Institute on Drug Abuse Treatment (Project code: 63014, Approval form no.: 033/2022)

4. Results

1) Conditions and impacts of drug problems on the community

From the interviews, it was found that the drug problems in Phu Tai community was quite serious. Although most people in the community were not addicted to drugs, the community itself was in the area where there were intense illegal drug trading and trafficking. Such problems were visible in all Phu Tai villages. Phu Tai people were also involved in the drug trading and trafficking, and this greatly affected their way of life. The drug abusers were mainly adults who have to work hard to earn money for their family. Most people in Phu Tai community were farmers. They grew sugarcane and casavas, and they need much energy when working. So, they believed that drugs could help boost their physical strength and reduce exhaustion. For children, the causes of drug problems were from false values and imitation. The children tended to imitate what adults did to increase the sense of belonging. Also, they tried drugs to fulfill their curiosity without considering all the negative impacts. In addition, it was found that drugs were affordable and could be obtained easily in the area.

Table 1: Examples of the respondents’ perspectives towards drug problems

Topics	Perspectives
Phu Tai community is an area with the spread of drugs	...Drug abusers could be seen in all villages. Some of them took drugs until they had mental disorder.

	...Those who were in jail were mostly drug abusers, traders, or both.
Phu Tai community is an area with drug trafficking	...Drug trading in Phu Tai community was done by small retailers. People bought and used drugs by themselves. Sometimes they might resell drugs to those who wanted them.
Phu Tai community is a route for illegal drug trafficking.	...Most drugs were from the neighboring countries and the surrounding communities. This was why there were a lot of drugs in the community.

Causes for the spread of drugs in Phu Tai community

From the conversation in the focus group, it was found that there were two causes for the spread of drug in Phu Tai community.

Firstly, families were found to be vulnerable. This was due to the poverty, and it caused Phu Tai people's way of life to change swiftly. At present, Phu Tai people valued money more than other things. They had to leave their village and their children behind, and work in other areas where they could earn some money. Children, therefore, lacked love and care from their parents. When there was no guardian who could educate them properly, these children would be tempted easily.

Secondly, it was also found that there were insufficient public officers working in the area. So, the attempt to control the spread of drugs and drug trafficking in the area was not effective. Furthermore, some parts of the community were connected to the woods and mountains. So, the officers would not be able to deal with drug trafficking problem in this area.

Impacts of drug problems on Phu Tai community

The results showed that drug problems caused many serious problems as demonstrated below:

In terms of families, drug problems caused a lot of problems to families. Some families had to experience loss of income, domestic violence, and divorce. In addition, the drug abusers sometimes committed crimes and were arrested for possession of drugs.

In terms of education, children were found to pay less attention in class. Some did not attend the class and spent time doing some illegal things. Some were fired from school and needed to turn to the non-formal education.

In terms of health, drugs negatively affected people's health. They could cause aging, wrinkled skin, diseases, and mental disorder.

In terms of environment, drugs could ruin the image of the community. Phu Tai community was a cultural tourism community. Having drug problems would cause the tourists to view the community in a negative way.

In terms of economy, drugs affected the daily income of the family since money was wasted on buying drugs which, in turn, did not yield any benefits.

In terms of culture, drug abusers were found to disobey their parents and the elders. They lacked morality and committed bad deeds such as gambling, amoral affairs, and ignorance towards community's activities.

Table 2: Examples of the respondents' perspectives towards drug problems

Topics	Perspectives
Family	...Parents were worried when their children went out. Some couldn't sleep for fear that their children would do something bad.
Education	...At present, more children studied in the non-formal education system. They had to quit school since they had problems with drugs.

Health	...Drug abusers would be bad-tempered. They got frustrated easily and couldn't control themselves. They also became introverts and did not socialize with other people...
Environment	...The community was no longer a safe place for everyone. People in the community were paranoid and didn't trust each other...
Economy	...Drug problems did not affect the economy of the community much but they had a great impact on the family income since the drug abuser needed to waste money on buying drugs...
Culture	...People in the community became more isolated. They disobeyed their parents and the elders. They were also involved in gambling and adultery...

The community's needs in the prevention of drug problems

From the conversation in the focus group, it was found that the community's needs in the prevention of drug problems could be divided into 3 aspects as demonstrated below.

1. The community wanted all families to be 'white' or clean from drugs. All families should hold the same principle "a good person must be honored, and a bad person must not bother a good person." All sectors must be strong and collaborate to prevent the community from drug problems.
2. The family institution must be strong. Parents must pay attention to children. They must open their mind and listen to their children. They should be role models for their children.
3. The community needed to establish groups for the children such as sports group, Phu Tai dance group, and occupational training group. These groups would help increase the role of the children in the community and provide them a chance to spend their time wisely.

2) Phu Tai children's levels of life skills required for the prevention of drug problems

Demographic data

From the survey, it was found that 114 children or 54.29% were males and 96 children or 45.71% were female. They all were Buddhists. In addition, 171 of them studied in the normal track (81.43%) while 35 of them studied in the vocational track (16.67%) and four of them (1.90%) did not study. In terms of their family status, it was found that 81.43 of the children having parents who stayed together and 18.57 of them having parents who were divorced or passed away. Furthermore, 69.05% of the children's parents were farmers with an average monthly income of lower than 10,000 Baht. These children mostly earned money from their parents (90.00%). They lived with their parents (83.33%). The problem that these children had to face was a lack of money (48.10%). When they had problems, they would consult their parents (62.86%). In their free time, they mostly surfed Internet (71.90%). In addition, 75.24% of the children had received information about drugs. The most found drug in the community was Amphetamine (88.57%). When asked how they got involved with drugs, the children reported that they were persuaded by adults or their friends (21.42%). However, the children also reported that the government agencies also came and educate people about drugs (72.86%) and there were some officers coming to arrest the wrongdoers (75.71%).

Levels of life skills in the prevention of drug problems

Concerning the levels of life skills in the prevention of drug problems among Phu Tai children, it was found that there were four skills which were at a good level and one skill which was at a moderate level; the refusal skill was at a good level (\bar{x} = 4.108, S.D. = 0.596); Self-perception skill was at a good level (\bar{x} = 4.031, S.D. = 0.601); Self-control skill was at a good level (\bar{x} = 3.986, S.D. = 0.688); Decision-making skill was also at a good level (\bar{x} =16.209, S.D. = 3.790); and problem-solving skill was at a moderate level (\bar{x} =6.167, S.D. = 2.051) as demonstrated in table 3 below.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the life skills for the prevention of drug problems(n = 210)

Life skills for the prevention of drug problems	Levels of life skills for the prevention of drug problems		Levels
	Mean	S.D.	
Self-control skill	3.986	0.688	Good
Self-perception skill	4.031	0.601	Good
Refusal skill	4.108	0.596	Good
Decision-making skill	16.209 ($x_{\min} = 4, X_{\max} = 20$) (81.045%)	3.790	Good
Problem-solving skill	6.167 ($x_{\min} = 0, X_{\max} = 9$) (61.67%)	2.051	Moderate

The results showed that the overall picture of Phu Tai children's life skills required for the prevention of drugs were good. This was due to the fact that Phu Tai people had strongly preserved their traditional ways of life. They lived in the extended families, and they had a very close relationship with other people in the community. The elders in the community had also cultivated customs, culture, and values among the new generations. This created a sense of love among the children. Although drugs were brought into the community in a greater extent, children were found to have good self-control skill, self-perception skill, refusal skill, and decision-making skill.

3) Community capitals which were suitable for the development of life skills among Phu Tai children

From the study of the community capitals through having the in-depth interviews with key informants, it was found that there were various community capitals which potentially promoted peaceful and harmonious living. The first one was the human capitals. The community leaders performed their duties well. Monks could hold people together. They were good preachers who gave knowledge and cultivated ethics among children and people. There were also many local scholars who helped preserved the uniqueness of Phu Tai community. Teachers at schools were also local people who knew the culture and traditions well. They are the bridge between the schools and the community. Secondly, temples could be considered places which held the Phu Tai people together. People would gather at the temples to perform religious ceremonies on auspicious occasions. Thirdly, family institution was mostly extended. At present, younger generations might establish their own family and live near their relatives. Fourthly, Phu Tai was the ethnic group with unique identity. Phu Tai people were determined to preserve their cultural treasures such as language, dressing styles, traditions, ceremonies, and beliefs. The existence of these things was the key for the community solidarity. Lastly, in terms of the public and private institution, there were many organizations coming to the community to visit and support the community in terms of activities as well as learning resources.

From the synthesis of the community capitals which could be employed to prevent children from drug problems, it was found that the culture capitals and local wisdom capitals were two important community capitals for Phu Tai people. Therefore, these two community capitals were used as a guideline for the development of the Phu Tai traditional dance which had been passed down from generations to generations and performed in various occasions such as Thai Rocket Festival and welcoming guests. This traditional dance helped Phu Tai children to love and proud of their hometown, and it was a way to keep Phu Tai children occupied which could potentially reduce a chance of children involved in drug abuse. In addition, these community capitals were integrated with the community potential to enhance the children's life skills so that they would be able to prevent themselves from drug problems.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The level of life skills of Children and Youth Phu Tai Ethnic Group to Prevent Drug Abuse was high. They had high self-control skill, self-perception skill, refusal skill, and decision-making skill and moderate problem-solving skill. This reflected that the children were able to prevent themselves from drug problems. These skills were forged and cultivated by adults and social media. This was line with Borwornchai D. (2012), Chaninkul P., et al., (2020), Angkhanit P., et al., (2015). The development of life skills also helps maintain one's mental health. That person will be able to use knowledge and critical thinking to deal with their problems, and live in the community happily. Similarly, Rahmati, R., et al., (2018) mention that psycho-social empowerment program is effective in promoting the efficiency of students and increasing their social problem solving and self-control skills. This program can be used as an effective method in increasing the performance of adolescents and preventing inclination to use drug at schools (Boonpleng W., et al., 2018). The program shows an efficacy on enhancing adolescents' self-esteem to prevent drug abuse. To improve the effectiveness of the program, employing more interactive techniques with enjoyable activities could increase active involvement for adolescence that might help to develop the interpersonal relationship and communication skills and the decision-making skill. And according to Phongphanupat T., et al., (2022), the life skills enhancement program the self-awareness, the self-esteem with participatory learning to prevent substance abuse.

The drug problems in Phu Tai Ethnic Group were serious due to the fact that the community members were involved in trading and using drugs. In terms of the community capital, culture capitals and local wisdom capitals were the most outstanding one in Phu Tai Ethnic Group. These culture capitals reflected the identity of the local people, whether it be the relationship between people and the unique culture which bound people together. The integration of culture capitals, local wisdom, and education on life skills would help prevent Phu Tai children from drug problems. This was line with Nanongtoom (2019) and Drug Prevention and Suppression Center Ministry of Public Health (2018). Social capital is characterized as capital that is attached to the social structure in the community, such as human capital, which serves to bring knowledge and experience to solve drug problems. Institutional capital is family social capital. Acts as a drug immunity social capital in the community serves to build mutual trust. Joining forces in the fight against drugs. The social capital in the structure serves to build a community way of living on a good pattern of living away from drugs. Intellectual and cultural capital serves to create harmony. Forge the unity of the people in the community to have a good way of life. It can be seen that the social capital in the community has integrated into the self-management of the community in drug prevention. Arshad et al. (2021) in the sense that the community could cultivate positive values among children through activities and collaboration within the community.

For the recommendations, one of the culture capitals which could promote the development of life skills among children was Phu Tai traditional dance. By joining this activity, the children would spend their time wisely, and this would effectively reduce the drug problems. The researcher thought that the community must hold this activity regularly so that it would be sustainable., The government agencies should take part in the policy formulation which would enable people in the community to show their potential. In addition, they should promote the activities which would cultivate life skills among children living the community to prevent them from drug problems., Further studies should employ the participatory action research and extend the activities to the nearby community which share similar context.

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