PH021344: MAJOR HEALTH SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
KEYWORDS: SOCIAL SUPPORT, ELDERLY
PIYATHIDA KUHIRUNYARATN: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL
SUPPORT AMONG THE ELDERLY IN KHON KAEN PROVINCE,
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Objectives: The general objective of this project is to develop the plan to strengthen social
support among elderly people in Khon Kaen Province through evaluation. The specific objectives
are 1) to assess the elderly characteristics in four areas: socio demographic characteristics, social
network, social integration, and personal health characteristics, 2) to assess the level of perceived
social support and factors among elderly people, 3) to determine the data about the elderly people,
their social network and community organizations, in terms of activities, needs, in addressing
social support among the elderly, and 4) to develop the plan, that combines quantitative and
qualitative information for the development of intervention, to strengthen social support among
elderly people.

Methods: This study used an exploratory and cross-sectional descriptive design with both
quantitative and qualitative methods, to elicit evidence to inform the community empowerment
process. The study group was composed 756 elders who 60 years old or greater, living in eight
villages in Khon Kaen Province, Thailand. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the
information and perceived social support was measured by PRQ85. In addition, the in-depth
interview were used for assess the elderly and their social network in activities, needs, in
addressing social support among the elderly. The data were analyzed using the independent
sample t test, ANOVA and multiple linear regressions: with only p<0.05 being considered as
statistically significant while content analysis were applied for qualitative data analysis.

Results: The response rate was 97.08%. This study found high level of social support perceived
among elderly. According to the PRQ85, the highest dimension of social support perceived
among the elderly was the opportunity for nurturing dimension while the lowest dimension was
the one is an integral part of group. Results from multiple regressions indicate that educational
level, number of elderly close friend, knowing community staff, working status, elderly club
membership and joining community party were statistically significant related to perceived social
support. In addition, qualitative data confirm that the family is the major support among Thai
elderly. Social support among the elderly and their families is an obligation, thus social support
occurs in terms of caring for parents and supports all kinds of family activities. The neighborhood
has become the important social support source when there are care givers working or living apart.
Most of the day time the elderly spend with their friends, thus friends’ support influences health
behavior, attitude and information. Community leaders and community staff (both community
health staff and sub-district administrative organization staff) social support provision were top
down activities and cultural activities such as home visits and social activities. Even through in all
areas of the study, elderly clubs were held, the activities were monthly meetings by the
community health staff with few elders joining the club. Some of the elderly did not join because
of their health problems, family duties and some activities not being appropriate for them which
some elders refused to do. This study also found that there were no integrated community
programs initiated for elderly health and social support. All activities that were running in the
community were policy implementations and this study also found that all staff needs elderly care
and social support training.

Conclusions: Based on the findings, empowerment process using community forum and AIC
were used as the first round among the representative elderly and stakeholders. Empowering
Community Initiatives for Strengthening Social Support among the Elderly through Evaluation: A
Project for Elderly Participation and Involvement in the Elderly Club were initiated. It is
acknowledged that an extensive study with the project implementation and evaluation, wide time
span and multidisciplinary research study team are crucial to establish more valid intervention.

Field of the study: Public Health Student’s Signature
Academic Year: 2006 Advisor’s Signature

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