



Empowering Preparation for Old Age: An Application of the SDU Health Care Project

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the concepts of empowerment in personal preparation for middle and late adults as well as to describe the application of empowerment within the SDU health project as an empowerment mechanism. Empowerment might play as mediator to enhance an optimal preparation for old age in a completely age society among staffs at Suan Dusit University. The results showed that the empowerment to prepare for old age consists of five aspects: physical, emotional, economic, social and housing and includes the processes of self-assessment, problem identification, problem analysis, planning and implementation, which help to improve individuals' awareness and preparation for old age, leading to active aging in an era of rapid change in which technology has become a part of people's daily lives.

Introduction

This article is written based on data derived from the development of the SDU Health Care Project. This project was conducted for Suan Dusit University adults and elderly staffs. The main purpose of the project was to promote quality of life during a working life which was crucial to become a successful aging. Staffs should be able to augment their empowerment. Therefore, the preparation before retirement implies to reduce physical and mental deviation and psychosocial problems in the future. The concept of this project was used empowerment theory in preparation for retirement. The objectives of this study were 1) explore the concepts of the empowerment of personnel preparation for middle and late adults and 2) to describe the application of empowerment on SDU health care project.

Across health promotion concepts, empowerment is a concept that researchers applied the framework into the research studies to understand the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over the decisions that affect one's life, including perceptions of personal control as behaviours to realize control. Empowerment focuses on internal motivation and derive to promote interpersonal relationship. In addition, the transfer of power with the outcome of liberation, emancipation, energy and power-sharing can determine several perspectives, including social and developmental strengths (Shearer et al., 2010).

Situation of the Thai elderly

Thailand is an ageing society with an ageing population accounting for 16.73% of a total population

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of 66,558,953. The population over 60 years of age consists of more females than males and resides mostly in the north-eastern region, followed by the central region (Department of Older Persons, 2019). The number of older people in Thailand has increased rapidly, exceeding the previous forecast of 10.8 million people or 15.2% of the total population in 2020 (Nunsupawat, 2009). Preparing for an ageing society is vital to adults enabling older adults to age actively (Purakom, 2016), live valuable lives and enjoy a good quality of life. The preparation for an ageing population requires both policy and management planning to ensure proper development. To broaden the scope of policy planning, the United Nations (2013) has divided an ageing society into 4 different levels: 1) an ageing society in which the population is getting older, 2) an aged society in which the share of people aged over 60 exceeds 10% of the total population or more than 7% of the entire population is aged 65 and above, 3) a completely over-aged society, in which the proportion of people over 60 exceeds 20% of the total population or more than 14% of the entire population is aged 65 and above and 4) a super-aged society in which the share of people aged over 60 exceeds 28% of the total population or more than 20% of the entire population is aged 65 and above (Purakom, 2016; Thaniwattananon, 2016; Siriphanich, 2018; Chewasopit, 2019). The above information indicates that Thailand has become an aged society in nearly two years (Department of Older Persons, 2020). Therefore, the government policies must be implemented promptly to support the country's forthcoming transition to a completely aged society and individuals should seek knowledge and prepare themselves for active ageing in a complete-aged society.

Many researchers are interested in exploring the enhancement of the preparation for an ageing society. Statistics show that 67 million or 10% of ASEAN's total population of 654 million in 2018 were elderly. Thailand has the second largest share of elderly people in ASEAN next to Singapore. The older population in Thailand accounts for 18% of the entire population, making it an aged society. The country is predicted to become a complete-aged society in 2022 (Siriphanich, 2018). In addition, the ageing process of individuals is induced by internal and external factors (Othaganont, 2011). It is thus necessary to prepare individuals for ageing in a complete-aged society to ensure their good quality of life and active ageing.

Preparing for elderly

As a result of social structural changes induced by economic growth and advances in medical and public health technology, Thailand has transitioned to an ageing society and the process of becoming a completely aged society. The government has realized the importance of social transformation and formulated a master plan under the 20-year national strategy (2018-2037) for driving the development and enhancement of human resources, including a national economic and social development plan to guarantee equality and social protection by developing and preparing citizens for an ageing society and enhancing senior citizens' quality of life and security by protecting and promoting the welfare rights of senior citizens (Phitayanoraseth, 2020). In short, the Thai government is preparing the country for an ageing society.

Self-preparation is also necessary. Individuals should start preparing for retirement while still in working age in order to achieve active ageing with a good quality of life and happiness. The preparation should begin with physical and mental training, active fostering of social contacts and ensuring economic security (Touhy & Jett, 2018; Siriphanich, 1995; Chuenwattana, 2012). Evidences have shown that promoting well-being on physical, mental, psychosocial, as well as housing preparation is warranted to enhance active aging. That Physical, mental, economic aspects as well as housing and social preparation should be made for an individual to pursue active ageing, which will allow them to enjoy a good quality of life in old age by being able to perform daily activities with little or no assistance or, in other words, being more independent (Meechana et al., 2017; Bunchai & Wongthanavas, 2012; Chuenwattana, 2012; Sukhot & Hongwityakorn, 2016; Ratana-Ubol et al., 2009; Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011).

Promoting physical well-being is needed. Ageing causes a decline in physical function, i.e. regarding vision, hearing, muscles, skin, bones, heart, respiratory system, gastrointestinal system, urinary system, immune system and nervous system which can result in memory problems or even dementia. Starting caring for physical health at a young age by practicing the 3 E's (eating healthy food, exercising and emotional management) and having an annual check-up can help maintain physical fitness, enhance functional capacity, prevent illnesses and diseases that hasten physical deterioration, manage stress and anxiety and avert potential accidents and dangers (Cress, 2017; Ratana-Ubol et al., 2009; Chuenwattana,

2012; Bunchai & Wongthanavas, 2012; Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011; Sukchot & Hongwityakorn, 2016; Meechana et al., 2017). Factors that affect individuals' self-care behavior are marital status, membership of aging clubs, participation in aging clubs' activities and application of self-care manuals for seniors (Silangirn, 2017).

Regarding mental preparation, it can be claimed that older people often have mental health issues caused by the loss of the ability to do things independently, isolation, anxiety over physical decline and dependency which cause emotional changes, moodiness, sleep problems and low self-esteem that can lead to depression. Early mental preparation has an impact on adaptability and readiness for change. Mental health and physical health are connected in other words, good physical health leads to good mental health. Maintaining the aging's mental health requires family support. Family members can help keep seniors mentally healthy by encouraging their self-esteem, doing activities together and choosing words carefully (Cress, 2017; Ratana-Ubol et al., 2009; Chuenwattana, 2012; Bunchai & Wongthanavas, 2012; Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011; Sukchot & Hongwityakorn, 2016; Meechana et al., 2017). In summary, good physical preparation leads to positive mental health.

Pertaining social preparation, it is crucial that there have been changes in Thai society and family structure such as a shift from extended families to nuclear families. The way people live and communicate has particularly changed. As a result of ageing, people lose

their social status and roles, financial stability, friends and ways of living. Social preparation for old age should be done by planning for social participation, utilizing one's knowledge and skills, accepting change, preparing for ageing with a caregiver, engaging in social activities for seniors and creating a safe living environment that allows the elderly to live independently (Cress, 2017; Ratana-Ubol et al., 2009; Chuenwattana, 2012; Bunchai & Wongthanavas, 2012; Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011; Sukchot & Hongwityakorn, 2016; Meechana et al., 2017).

Economic preparation, the shift from working age to old age results in sudden changes in household economies (Cress, 2017; Ratana-Ubol et al., 2009; Chuenwattana, 2012; Bunchai & Wongthanavas, 2012; Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011; Sukchot & Hongwityakorn, 2016; Meechana et al., 2017). Therefore, economic preparation, i.e. financial planning, investments and backup career plans, should be made to ensure financial stability in old age. Some studies have also mention a reported significance of housing preparation for seniors.

According to Table 1, the studies showed that most people made physical and economic preparation, followed by social and housing preparation. Adaptation, mental preparation, and knowledge preparation have also been explored in some studies. The studies on preparation for old age aimed to improve the ageing's quality of life and investigated personal factors associated with preparation for ageing, such as age which affects an individual's awareness, status, education, income and

Table 1 Synthesis of studies on preparation for old age

Studies on preparation for old age	Physical preparation	Economic preparation	Mental preparation	Adaptation	Knowledge preparation	Social preparation	Housing preparation
Ratana-Ubol et al., 2009	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Chuenwattana & Beadnok, 2012	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Bunchai & Wongthanavas, 2012	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Junphet, 2015	✓	✓				✓	✓
Sukchot & Hongwityakorn, 2016	✓	✓				✓	
Meechana et al., 2017	✓	✓				✓	✓
Wanitchakham, 2019	✓	✓				✓	✓
Jirojanakul et al., 2019	✓	✓				✓	✓

financial situations (Pattrapagdekul et al., 2011; Yommana, 2008; Thammatawat, 2011). Sukchot & Hongwityakorn (2016) have described happy ageing as one's sense of independence in terms of not being a burden to others, and the ability to spend more time alone, spend time with family and support the community.

In conclusion, preparation for old age is an essential factor to achieve active ageing. Therefore, people should make efforts in the fields of physical, mental, social, economic/financial and housing preparation in order to enhance their future happiness and independent living.

Empowerment

According to the profiles of Suan Dusit University (SDU) staffs SDU is an educational institute, which recruits middle and late adults. The faculty of nursing has a strategy for preparing for healthy ageing among SDU workers. We conducted a pilot study to allocate workers, who were willing to participate in this project and empowerment was used as the main concept to design activities on this project.

Empowerment has been studied and applied in various fields. It has been particularly applied to processes to enhance individuals' awareness and self-confidence in self-management, especially in terms of healthcare, or as a mechanism for helping individuals direct their behavior towards their goals based on different attitudes and beliefs (Freire, 1972; Gibson, 1991; Zimmerman,

2000). Empowerment is the opposite of powerlessness which has negative impacts on the body and mind.

Individual powerlessness is caused by 1) allowing others to make oneself feel powerless; a person feels that they are not able to do anything, 2) allowing oneself to feel powerless; a person believes that they are not capable, so they do what others tell them and refuse to develop themselves and 3) being prevented from developing by systems or others (Anderson, 1986). The empowerment process is thus necessary for enhancing an individual's self-care agency for preparing for ageing. A summary of the empowerment process as a diagram is following (Vajhollah & Naghavi, 2019).

Empowerment is a mechanism for promoting one's self-control, ability to understand and analyze problems (Zimmerman, 2000) and self-preparation for old age. It is an endless learning process (learning spiral) in which one analyzes their experience to understand causes and related factors, leading to planning and implementation for preparing oneself for ageing. Empowerment can be used to enhance an individual's ability to self-assess, leading to solution planning consisting of 5 steps: 1) experiencing, 2) naming experience, 3) analyzing, 4) planning, and 5) doing. These steps will bring about positive changes and help individuals gain self-control and move towards their goals. Therefore, the Faculty of Nursing, Suan Dusit University has employed the "SDU Health Care Project" as an active mechanism for empowering the university personnel's preparation for old age.

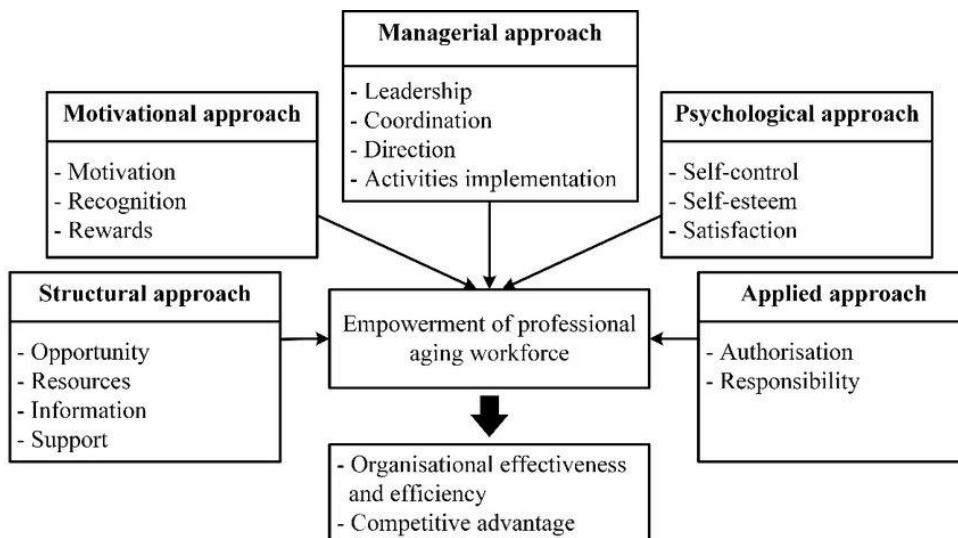


Fig. 1 Conceptual model of empowerment of the professional aging workforce
Source: Vajhollah & Naghavi (2019)

Suan Dusit University's personnel for quality ageing through "SDU health care project"

The Faculty of Nursing, Suan Dusit University has realized the importance of preparation for old age and invited the employees from all departments to participate in the "SDU Health Care Project". This project is applied to foster their understanding, awareness and cooperation in practising self-care for active ageing. The concept of the empowerment process has been applied to the enhancement of the university personnel's awareness of the preparation for quality ageing, focusing on five aspects: physical preparation, mental preparation, economic preparation, social preparation and housing preparation. This project is for the conservation of health and preparation for ageing by bringing knowledge, preparation for being the ageing and the empowerment of personnel. This activity recruited small group of participants. Therefore, the target audience is those who voluntarily participate from Suan Dusit University. The activities consist of basic health screening tests such as taking the history of congenital disease, blood pressure measurement, height, waist circumference and making a diary for participants to record their data. The activities provided knowledge about health care in high-risk diseases for the ageing, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, eye disease, osteoarthritis, etc. In addition, Manivet Tara therapy, eye exercises are an activity suitable for the elderly. A Line group has been created in order to ensure continuous communication, knowledge sharing and to be used as a tool for monitoring and communicating to stimulate the group continuously. The details of five aspects of preparation are as follows:

1. **Physical preparation.** The project has organized activities to promote the participants' self-care by teaching them how to take care of their bodies to prevent physical decline e.g. caused by infections, cardiovascular diseases, degenerative bone and joint diseases (especially knee osteoarthritis), diabetes, dementia and visual degenerations and providing participants with knowledge and training in self-care exercises such as knee exercises, eye exercises, brain exercises for preventing and improving dementia symptoms, Maneevaj exercises, yoga and aquatic therapy. It has also conducted activities to promote healthy eating behaviors among participants, encourage participants to keep a health journal, help check participants' blood pressure and advise participants on annual check-ups.

2. **Mental preparation.** The project has organized activities to foster participants' self-esteem and motivate them to build their own self-esteem, encourage teamwork among participants, teach participants how to balance their emotions and feel positive and happy on a daily basis and how exercise can help improve their physical appearances and moods, help participants manage stress and embrace change and reality through meditation and promote participants' positive thinking by encouraging them to look on the bright side.

3. **Economic preparation.** The project has organized activities to teach participants how to save and make money in retirement and prepare for retirement expenses, including emergency funds and expenses for life, health and accident insurance. It has also organized group activities for participants to analyze their present financial situations (income, sources of income and expenses), learn about financial management and planning, investment and backup career planning for pre-and post-retirement and practice financial planning in a given situation, i.e. shopping at the market.

4. **Social preparation.** The project has organized activities to provide knowledge about teamwork, encourage participants to exchange their knowledge and experience, promote the use of modern technology and set up social networks for sharing self-care knowledge to enhance participants' self-care knowledge and ability and self-esteem through community activities, social clubs, and meetings.

5. **Housing preparation.** This project derives supportive activities related to housing environmental supports such as house repairs and renovations, environmental household safety and functional activity promotion as well as physical ability and activities of daily living enhancing. These activities can reduce risk of the household accidents and motivate older adults to perform their physical performances.

Conclusion

Based on a systematic review, the preparation for the aging focused on physical, psychological, economic, social and environmental aspects. Moreover, we applied empowerment concepts into the activities to motivate individuals. Suan Dusit University's target audience consists of employees ranging from working age to the elderly. Thus, the Faculty of Nursing has promoted personnel to prepare for the aging among adult age by using comprehensive activities to get ready for healthy

aging and enhance empowerment of staffs. The outcomes showed that the “SDU Health Care Project” has been used as a mechanism for empowering and encouraging the university personnel to start preparing for ageing by encouraging them to prepare how to promote physical and mental wellness as well as economical sustainability. We expected that the participants will be able to take care of their physical and mental health, monitor their eating and exercise habits constantly, prepare mentally for old age by seeking advice from their close seniors, etc., create a savings plan and spend money carefully, find a backup job to cover retirement expenses and participate in community activities, to ensure that they achieve active ageing and have a good quality of life in old age so that they will not become a burden on their families or society in the future. Moreover, there are several fruitful suggestions toward this project: 1) empowering personnel’s preparation for old age to enhance a level of self awareness in preparing for old age. Young workers need to emphasize their health at the beginning of their employment; 2) enhancing organizational strength which apply a strategic health plan to approach an empowering personnel’s preparation for old age. Also, this project may apply the empower concept to focus on promoting health in workplace for successful aging in a gradually disruptive society.

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