

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH  
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FOR LIFE SKILLS PROMOTION OF  
THE ADOLESCENTS: A CASE STUDY OF A SELECTED COMMUNITY  
IN THAILAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

The research objective were: 1) to study the problems and the community needs about of adolescents, 2) to encourage participation in making a life skills program appropriated for adolescents and community needs 3) to develop life skills program which could be completed by the stakeholders and be presented with guidelines to develop activities so as to create by themselves and 4) to apply the Participatory Action Research (PAR) to find out life skills program. The participants were formal and non-formal leaders, parents, local governor, school teachers and adolescents. The researcher had collected the data by observing non-participation and participation, in-dept interview and note-taking, field note, reference from documents, and participating in the community planning project itself. The result of the study: 1) Youth risk behavior problem that related with occupation were time management, games addiction, adaptive behavior, lack of social skills, sex behavior, violence and social participation in community. 2) Participants were able to make a life skills project that served the community need and set development activities to strengthen the community for the adolescents and 3) Community members had jointly learned, acquired skills and gained working experience in developing the life skills program for concrete activities that obviously developed the locality and the readiness and would exchange the lessons learn together. Accordingly, role of occupational therapist in mental health community is facilitator for collaboration to adolescents who are the main force in the future and participants that contribute awareness of their own resources by planning, action, monitoring and evaluation.

**Keywords:** Occupational Therapy, Mental Health, Life Skills, Adolescent

## **INTRODUCTION**

The research objective were: 1) to study the problems and the community needs about of adolescents, 2) to encourage participation in making a life skills program appropriated for adolescents and community needs 3) to develop life skills program which could be completed by the stakeholders and be presented with guidelines to develop activities so as to create by themselves and 4) to apply the Participatory Action Research (PAR) to find out program.

Occupational therapy is a health profession that uses the purposeful activities to achieve multiple and complex rehabilitation aims. The main goals of the occupational therapy are to support the reintegration of individuals in daily living skills as well as to increase their independence and autonomy. Interventions of occupational therapists have primarily focused on self-care, productivity, and leisure time activities. Since the life skills includes a wide range of abilities that enable a person to perform personal care and more complicated tasks such as traveling, shopping, community participation etc., occupational therapists provide life skills training programs to meet the needs of the clients. This article aims to contribute to the current understanding and practices of life skills from an occupational therapy perspective. The introduction brief discussion of the importance of life skills in occupational therapy. After this introduction Achieving essential life skills is crucial in order to adapt to changing environmental conditions and meet the demands. Life skills contribute to the development of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem by helping people to understand and respond different situations [1, 2].

Occupational therapy has a key role in the lives of people who deal with disabling or potentially disabling conditions. Occupational therapy interventions are in accordance with the needs, interests, and values that are of importance to the clients. To this end, occupational therapists offer a unique and holistic approach to enhance or enable participation in daily life activities. They use therapeutic activities by identifying client problems, goals, and treatment focus to improve independence in life skills and to promote quality of life [3, 4].

In occupational therapy field, a skill is defined as a performance component acquired through training and practice. Skills contribute people to function as part of the community in which they belong [5]. Occupational therapists assist the clients to create individualized goals through life skills training. These goals include achieving skills such as banking/budgeting, shopping, meal preparation and planning, coping with stress, community access, assertiveness, and self-advocating. As life skills educators, occupational therapists use a client-centered approach to assess occupational performance areas and associated environmental factors. Life skills training can be given in the client's home or in various community areas, such as banks, markets, streets,

as individual trainings, or group workshops that provide opportunities for the clients to learn from each other where appropriate [6].

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Life skills are those abilities that help to deal with challenges in life and to promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being and competence. There are a wide range of life skills and definitions are usually broad and generic. Life skills can be cognitive, behavioral, emotional, personal, interpersonal, or social. As such, the term “life skills” is often not precisely defined. According to World Health Organization (WHO), life skills are defined as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” The five main life skills areas defined by WHO Department of Mental Health are decision-making and problem-solving; creative thinking and critical thinking; communication and interpersonal skills; self-awareness and empathy; and coping with emotions and stress. UNICEF defines life skills as “psychosocial and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop the coping and self-management skills needed for a healthy and productive life” [7, 8].

The research studies and literature of life skills that there are specific life skills. They comprise a set of core skills that improve people’s well-being and help them to be active and productive in the community. These skills may generally be classified in three basic dimensions: (a) cognitive skills, (b) emotional skills, and (c) communication and interpersonal skills [9, 10].

Cognitive skills are decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, and critical thinking. Decision-making is important for health management through choosing different options about health status. Problem-solving is critical for coping with the problems which may cause stress in daily life. Creative thinking promotes problem-solving and decision-making and helps to provide adaptation and flexibility to daily life. Critical thinking analyses and assesses information such as attitudes and values which affects behavior [10–12].

Emotional skills compromise of self-awareness and self-management. Self-awareness includes self-esteem, self-evaluation, our likes and dislikes, and our weaknesses and strengths. Briefly, self-awareness is about our recognition of ourselves. Self-management includes time management, relaxation, and coping skills about stress and emotions such as anger [10, 11]

Interpersonal and social skills are interpersonal relationship skills, communication, and social awareness. Interpersonal relationship skills may be able to make good relationships with friends and family members which provide mental and social well-being. Communication is important for expression of ourselves verbally or nonverbally in certain situations. Social awareness includes empathy, listening actively, and respecting group differences [10, 11].

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Participants of the study; 30 adolescents, 10 community members, 5 local government support staffs and researcher. The researcher had collected the data by research instrument: observing non-participation and participation, in-dept interview and note-taking, field note, reference from documents, and participating in the community planning project itself. Data analysis by categorize and contents analysis for main theme.

## **RESULT**

The result of the study occupational therapy in mental health through community participation for life skills promotion of the adolescents: A case study of a selected community in Thailand.

- 1) Results on youth risk behavior problem that related with occupation were time management, games addiction, adaptive behavior, lack of social skills, sex behavior, violence and social participation in community.
- 2) Results on participants were able to make a life skills project that served the community need and set development activities to strengthen the community for the adolescents
- 3) Results on community members had jointly learned, acquired skills and gained working experience in developing the life skills program for concrete activities that obviously developed the locality and the readiness and would exchange the lessons learn together.

## **CONCLUSION**

Life skills in children and adolescents in community program. Life skills trainings improve skills to create proficiency for human development. Life skills also help children and adolescents to improve their psychosocial competence which is important to deal with challenges of daily life, promotion of health, and for well-being. Specially, where the health issues are associated with behaviors which cause inadequacy to cope with personal and social challenges powerfully, developing of psychosocial competence may be an important way to contribute well-being and health. Therefore, teaching of life skills to children and adolescents is one of the core elements to develop psychosocial competence [10].

Life skills training supports constructive behavior about health, relationships, and well-being. Optimally, it is critical to perform this training when the children and adolescents are at young age before adverse behaviors. Trainings of life skills are based on general life skills and their practice in connection with social and health issues. Methods and approaches such as cognitive-behavioral skills training techniques, didactic teaching methods, group discussion, brainstorming, and role play can be used in teaching of life skills [10, 13]

There are many evidence-based life skills programs which provide education about many issues, such as drug abuse prevention or preventing violence which are related with life skills. For example, the life skills training (LST) program which is a primary prevention program for adolescent drug abuse created positive behaviors about alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. This program included drug resistance skills, self-management, and social skills. Methods which are used in this program were instruction, reinforcement, feedback, practice of the skill, and behavioral homework assignments [30, 31]. Another evidence-based program about life skills is coping skills training for youth with diabetes mellitus which was conducted by Grey and her colleagues. Role play about situations such as managing food choices, giving feedback, using of social problem-solving, and working with small groups are the methods which were used in this training. Results of this training showed that teenagers in the coping skills training program were likely able to cope with diabetes mellitus and other medical situations, and indicated less negative effect of diabetes on quality of life [14]. HIV prevention intervention which is done in Zimbabwe with adolescent female orphans is also an important research. In this intervention, HIV and health knowledge (e.g., condom use) and issues related to culture, gender, sexual, and physical violence were the topics in life skills curriculum of this research. According to the results of this study, participants earned personal hope and value, and effective communication skills [15].

In summary, there is no definite classification of what psychosocial skills may be at the core of life skills, nor is there any clarity about the relationship of these skills to each other. However, it is seen that the skills defined as life skills are cognitive, emotional and behavioral, even though they are classified by different persons and institutions in different ways. These skills are vital to maintaining a productive and healthy lifestyle, having meaningful and satisfying roles, and promoting well-being. For this reason, it is quite natural that occupational therapy, which aims to promote functional independence of individuals in their daily life skills, includes life skills and related training programs.

The result of the study: 1) Youth risk behavior problem that related with occupation were time management, games addiction, adaptive behavior, lack of social skills, sex behavior, violence and social participation in community. 2) Participants were able to make a life skills project that served the community need and set development activities to strengthen the community for the adolescents and 3) Community members had jointly learned, acquired skills and gained working experience in developing the life skills program for concrete activities that obviously developed the locality and the readiness and would exchange the lessons learn together. Accordingly, role of occupational therapist in mental health community is facilitator for collaboration to adolescents who are the main force in the future and participants that contribute awareness of their own resources by planning, action, monitoring and evaluation.

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