

# Factors Influencing Happiness of the Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren in Rural Areas of Northern Thailand

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**Objective:** To study the factors influencing happiness of grandmothers raising grandchildren in the rural areas of Northern Thailand.

**Material and Method:** Cross-sectional survey research was conducted among 400 grandmothers, aged 50-79 years, who raised their grandchildren in the rural areas of Northern Thailand. Participants were selected by cluster sampling. Data were collected through a structured interview from April to July 2009 and analyzed by frequency, percentage, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient, and Multiple regression analysis.

**Results:** Nearly half (46.8%) of grandmothers raising grandchildren had high level of happiness, followed by moderate level (40.4%) and low level (12.8%). The factors, which significantly influenced the happiness of the grandmothers, were self-esteem, social support, and family relationships ( $p$ -value <0.05). In addition, self-esteem, social support, and family relationships could significantly predict happiness of the grandmothers by 48.1%. Self-esteem had the highest predictive power of happiness among grandmothers.

**Conclusion:** The factors influencing happiness of grandmothers raising grandchildren were self-esteem, social support, and family relationships. To promote happiness of grandmothers, responsible organizations should establish activities that enhance the grandmother's self-esteem, provide sufficient social support, and promote good family relationships.

**Keywords:** Happiness, Grandmother raising grandchildren, Self-esteem, Social support, Family relationship

*J Med Assoc Thai* 2013; 96 (Suppl. 5): S92-S97

Full text. e-Journal: <http://www.jmatonline.com>

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Happiness is the issue that is being discussed widely in the positive view of health. Happiness is desirable for all people in society including the grandmother group in rural area who responsible for raising grandchildren. If the grandmother enjoyed good health, this could result in good caring of grandchildren too. The phenomena of grandmothers raising grandchildren are partly because of changes in the economy and society-oriented which emphasized on industrialization and urbanization of Thailand. Working age populations migrate from the countryside into the cities to find works, mainly in Bangkok and nearby zones. Migration of working-age population is an adjustment for family members to modern society. If the status of the migrants are father or mother, it is

necessary to leave their children with grandparents at home<sup>(1)</sup>. The result is the elderly, mostly are grandmothers, become responsible for the caring of grandchildren including food, living, and rearing. The study of Nanthamongkolchai S<sup>(2)</sup> found that almost all major caregivers of children, not their parents, were grandmothers. However, if the authors consider the results of previous studies on the issue of happiness of the grandmother while serving the grandchildren, there is no such direct study in Thailand. Therefore, it is the rationale for conducting the present study. In addition to exploring the issue of the health of the elderly in general, it was found that there are few such studies. The study of Gray RS et al<sup>(3)</sup> found that the elderly in Kanchanaburi and Chainat province over 65 years had an average happiness score of 5.7 out of 10. The study of Sumngern C et al<sup>(4)</sup> found that the elderly who belonged to Senior clubs of Chonburi perceived their happiness as good, fair, and poor, respectively, 12.4, 37.9 and 49.7%. While a study in

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Nanthamongkolchai S et al<sup>(5)</sup> observed a group of elderly females in Rayong, Thailand and found that 50.2% of the elderly females had a moderate level of happiness, followed by low level (27.1%) and high level (22.7%).

The grandmothers who lived in the North were one of the groups who had been affected by the migration to urban areas of working age family members. They left the responsibility of child rearing to the grandmothers. This can be seen from the migration survey by the Institute for Population and Social Research, and the National Statistical Office of Thailand that found the majority of the migrants to Bangkok and surrounding area were mostly from the Northeastern and Northern part of Thailand<sup>(6,7)</sup>. The grandmothers had to take care the grand children, family, including their own health care; these can cause many problems and may lead to a decrease in happiness. Therefore, researchers were interested in studying the factors that influence the happiness of the elderly women who raise grandchildren in rural areas and aimed to develop a program of health promotion for these grandmothers.

#### **Material and Method**

The present study was a cross-sectional survey. The areas studied lay within six districts of two northern provinces of Thailand: Lap Lae, Muang, and Thong Saen Khan in Uttaradit, along with Shong, Nong Muang Khai, and Rong Kwang in Phrae. The subjects consisted of 400 grandmothers raising children between the ages of one and twelve. The subjects were selected using cluster sampling from six districts in Uttaradit and Phrae provinces as noted above, then sub-districts and villages in rural areas were selected to complete the sample size. Data were collected through interviews from April to July 2009. The questionnaire for the present study was developed by the researchers and consisted of seven parts. Part I asked about age, religion, marital status, education level, monthly income. Part II contained thirteen multiple choice questions to determine family relationships rated with a scale of three responses developed using the concept of Friedman MM<sup>(8)</sup>, Morrow WR and Wilson RC<sup>(9)</sup>. The family relationships were classified as poor, moderate, and good. Part III covered sixteen social support questions evaluated through receiving social responses based upon the concept set forth by Cobb S<sup>(10)</sup> and Schaefer C et al<sup>(11)</sup> which addressed issues of financial support, emotional support, appraisal support, social participation support, and information support. Social support was classified as either low,

moderate, or high. Part IV contained eight questions to determine the level of participation in social activities categorized into three levels based on the concept set forth by Lemon BW et al<sup>(12)</sup>. Participation in social activities was listed as low, moderate, and high. Part V contained questions concerning self-esteem based upon ideas set forth in Coopersmith S<sup>(13)</sup>, again with three levels. Responses to the twenty multiple-choice questions were scored as high, moderate, and low. Part VI evaluated participants' perception of their social environment using 8 questions adapted from the measurement of social environment by Gray RS et al<sup>(14)</sup>. Perception in social environment were listed as low, moderate, and high. Part VII utilized 21 questions to measure happiness of the participants. Questions were based on concepts of happiness constructed by Diener E<sup>(15)</sup>, Argyle M et al<sup>(16)</sup>, and Neugarten BL et al<sup>(17)</sup>. Happiness was classified as low (<59), moderate (60-79), high (total score >80).

The interview questionnaire was examined by three experts for content validity. Reliability was accomplished by a pilot study among thirty grandmothers with characteristics similar to those in the actual study population. The results were analyzed for reliability by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The reliability values of the questionnaire were as follows: family relationships = 0.83, participation in social activities = 0.78, social support = 0.85, self-esteem = 0.87, perception in social environment = 0.76, and happiness = 0.91. Data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient, and the Stepwise multiple regression with the significant level at  $p < 0.05$ .

#### **Ethical consideration**

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee for Human Research, Faculty of Public Health Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand with the approval number MUPH2008-185.

#### **Results**

##### **General characteristics of grandmothers**

The results showed the average age of the grandmothers was 61.1 years old, of which 49.6% were between 60 and 69 year. All grandmothers were Buddhist, 55.3% finished primary school, 59.7% were widowed/divorced, 59.8% had a monthly family income of around 3,000-5,000 baht, with the average being 4,309.90 baht. The majority of grandmothers (67.5%) had good family relationships, 56% had a high level of

social support, 44.5% had a high level of self-esteem, about half (52.2%) had a high level of participation in social activities, and 84.0% had a high level of perception of social environment (Table 1).

### **Happiness of grandmother**

The grandmothers' happiness was assessed by the questionnaire and the scores classified into three levels. Nearly half (46.8%) of grandmothers raising

grandchildren had high happiness followed by moderate level 40.4%, and low level 12.8%.

### **Factors related with life happiness**

It was found that self-esteem, family relationships, social support, participating in social activities, and perception in social activities were associated with happiness of the grandmothers with a statistic significance at (p-value <0.05) (Table 2). Age,

**Table 1.** Number and percentage of grandmother who raised grandchildren classified by general characteristics, family factors and social factors (n = 400)

Factors	Number	Percentage
Age (year)		
50-59	153	38.2
60-69	198	49.6
70-79	49	12.2
Mean = 61.1, SD = 6.76, Min = 50, Max = 79		
Religion		
Buddhist	400	100
Education level		
No	169	42.2
Primary	221	55.3
Secondary	10	2.5
Marital status		
Couple	131	32.8
Single	30	7.5
Widow/divorced	239	59.7
Family income (baht)		
Less than 3,000	174	43.5
3,000-5,000	174	43.5
Over 5,000	52	13.0
Mean = 4,309.90, SD = 3,295.87, Min = 500, Max = 28,000		
Family relationship		
Poor (13-26)	28	7.0
Moderate (27-30)	102	25.5
Good (31-39)	270	67.5
Social support		
Low (15-30)	62	15.5
Moderate (31-35)	114	28.5
High (36-45)	224	56.0
Self-esteem		
Low (20-41)	115	28.8
Moderate (42-47)	107	26.7
High (48-60)	178	44.5
Participation in social activities		
Low (8-15)	97	24.2
Moderate (16-18)	94	23.6
High (19-24)	209	52.2
Perception of social environment		
Low (8-15)	14	3.5
Moderate (16-18)	50	12.5
High (19-24)	336	84.0

monthly family income had no association with the happiness of the grandmothers (p-value >0.05).

**Factors influencing and predicting the happiness**

Factors which influenced and could predict the happiness of the grandmothers were analyzed by stepwise multiple regression and found that self-esteem, social support, and family relationship could predict 91.4% of the happiness of the grandmothers raising grandchildren. The factor with the highest influence on happiness of the grandmothers was self-esteem (Beta = 0.395) followed by social support, and family relationship with Beta of 0.250 and 0.240, respectively (Table 3). Therefore, the happiness of the grandmothers raising grandchildren = 9.829 + 0.395 self-esteem + 0.250 social support + 0.240 family relationship.

**Discussion**

The results showed that nearly half (46.8%) of grandmothers raising grandchildren had a high level of happiness and 40.4 had a moderate level of happiness. Therefore, most of them had either a moderate or a high level of happiness. This can be explained that most grandmothers were considered as young old age (mean = 61.1 years), they were generally in good health and

able to take care of the grandchildren happily. It could see from 61.8% of the answer from elderly females that they were happily rearing grandchildren. 67.0% of the elderly females were satisfied with life as it is, and 63.0% feel satisfied for what happened by their own ability. These led to the emergence of self-esteem and readiness to adapt and cope with the changes in their role and challenges of their lives, which included caring for their beloved grandchildren that would lead to happiness. These results differ from the present study of Sumngern C et al<sup>(4)</sup> which found the 12.4% of the elderly in a community who belonged to senior clubs in Chonburi perceived their happiness at a good level. If compared with the study of Nanthamongkolchai S et al<sup>(5)</sup> which studied elderly females in Rayong, it also found a difference by which only 22.7% of the elderly women had a high level of happiness compared to 46.8% by the present study. The difference occurs because the elderly women in the present study were happy and proud to take care of their beloved grandchildren and they expected the good future in return for taking care of the grandchildren.

The result showed that there were three factors influencing and predicting happiness of grandmothers raising grandchildren. These were self-esteem, social support, and family relationship. These factors could

**Table 2.** Factors related with happiness of grandmother who raised grandchildren (n = 400)

Variables	Life happiness of grandmother	
	Coefficient correlation (r)	p-value*
Age	0.110	0.823
Family income	0.024	0.631
Self-esteem	0.579	<0.001
Family relationship	0.588	<0.001
Social support	0.444	<0.001
Participation in social activities	0.336	<0.001
Perception in social activities	0.361	<0.001

\* p-value tested by Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient

**Table 3.** Stepwise multiple regression analysis between predictors and happiness of grandmother who raised grandchildren (n = 400)

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Beta	t	p-value
Self-esteem	0.346	0.257	0.395	8.879	<0.001
Social support	0.434	0.235	0.250	5.959	<0.001
Family relationship	0.481	0.194	0.029	4.783	<0.001

B(0) = 9.829, Sig F <0.001

predict happiness of grandmothers at 48.1%. Self-esteem had the strongest influence on happiness of grandmothers. It seems that grandmothers recognize their self-value and potential to perform daily activities and grandchildren rearing, have good relationships with people, and are satisfied with the social level of their environment. The grandmothers with high self-esteem were motivated to take care of themselves and that led to a better happiness and quality of life. The result was consistent with Nanthamongkolchai S et al<sup>(5)</sup> which found that self-esteem had an influence on happiness in elderly females. A study of life satisfaction among women in Korea found that self-esteem was the predictor in explaining the level of life satisfaction<sup>(18)</sup>.

The second strongest factor influencing happiness of grandmothers was social support. The result corresponded to the study of Bishop AJ et al<sup>(19)</sup> which found that social support influenced happiness in older adults. A study by North RJ et al<sup>(20)</sup> found that social support is related to happiness in adults, which is congruent with the present study. Social support is an essential need in the lives of grandmothers. It enhances their physical and mental health and helps them to adjust for happy living. Family relationship was also found to influence happiness of grandmothers. Due to physical, mental, emotional, and social changes, the grandmothers raising grandchildren needed more care and support from family members. Therefore, good family relationships contribute to healthy self-esteem of grandmother family members thereby contributing to their happiness. The result was consistent with Nanthamongkolchai S et al<sup>(5)</sup>, who found that support from family members and family relationship influenced the happiness in elderly females.

To promote happiness of the grandmothers raising grandchildren, responsible organizations should establish activities to build up self-esteem in the grandmothers and strengthen their social support and family relationships.

#### **Acknowledgment**

The researchers would like to give special thank to Phrae and Uttaradit Chief Medical Officer for data collection permission. Thanks also to the local coordinator for data collection, and the grandmothers who provided the data. The study was funded by the China Medical Board of New York (CMB), Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand.

#### **Potential conflicts of interest**

None.

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## ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขของยายที่เลี้ยงหลานในเขตชนบทภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย

สุธรรม นันทมงคลชัย, โชคชัย หมั่นแสงทรัพย์, ทิมพัสสรุรงค์ เตชะบุญเสริมศักดิ์, อาภาพร เผ่าวัฒนา

**วัตถุประสงค์:** เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขของยายที่เลี้ยงหลานในเขตชนบทภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย

**วัสดุและวิธีการ:** เป็นการวิจัยเชิงสำรวจภาคตัดขวาง กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ ย่า ยาย ที่ทำหน้าที่เลี้ยงหลานซึ่งมีอายุระหว่าง 50-79 ปี ที่อาศัยอยู่ในเขตชนบทภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย จำนวน 400 ราย ได้จากการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบจัดกลุ่ม เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์ระหว่าง เดือนเมษายนถึงเดือนกรกฎาคม พ.ศ. 2552 วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้สถิติ ความถี่ ร้อยละ สัมประสิทธิ์สหสัมพันธ์ของเพียร์สันและการวิเคราะห์ถดถอยพหุคูณแบบขั้นต้น

**ผลการศึกษา:** ย่า ยาย ที่เลี้ยงหลานในเขตชนบทเกือบครึ่งหนึ่ง (ร้อยละ 50.2) มีความสุขในระดับสูงรองลงมา คือ ระดับปานกลาง ร้อยละ 40.4 และระดับต่ำ ร้อยละ 12.8 ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขของยายได้แก่ ความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเอง แรงสนับสนุนทางสังคม และสัมพันธภาพในครอบครัว ( $p$ -value < 0.05) ซึ่งปัจจัยเหล่านี้ สามารถร่วมทำนายความสุขของยายที่เลี้ยงหลานได้ร้อยละ 48.1 และความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเองสามารถร่วมทำนายได้สูงสุด

**สรุป:** ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขของยายที่เลี้ยงหลานได้แก่ ความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเอง แรงสนับสนุนทางสังคม และสัมพันธภาพในครอบครัว ดังนั้นหน่วยงานที่รับผิดชอบ ควรเสริมสร้างความสุขของยายโดยการเสริมสร้างความรู้สึกมีคุณค่าในตนเอง สนับสนุนทางสังคมอย่างเพียงพอ รวมถึงส่งเสริมให้เกิดสัมพันธภาพที่ดีในครอบครัว

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