

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATING CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS OF USING ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE OF THE ELDERLY IN SAMUTSONGKRAM PROVINCE, THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research, titled “An Analysis of the Factors Associating Characteristics and Methods of Using Alternative Medicine of the Elderly in Samut Songkram Province, Thailand” were to study the characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samut Songkram Province, and to analyze the relationship between the factors and the methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samut Songkram Province. The sample used to study was drawn by using the simple random sampling from aging people who live in Samut Songkram Province. The data were gathered between March and April, 2017 by using a questionnaire built by the researchers. The statistical techniques used for analyzing were frequency, percentage, mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviation (S.D), and (Chi-square:  $\chi^2$ ).

The research findings are that the Biologically Bases Therapy (mainly by herbs and healthy food) was used the most, followed by the Energy Therapy (by pray). The Alternative Medical System (by acupuncture) was least used. With regard to statistical testing, the age factor was statistically significantly correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of eating healthy food of the elderly in Samut Songkram Province at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The adequate income factor was also statistically significantly correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of Qigong and Chiropractic at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Moreover, the factor of perception about health care based on the alternative medicine was statistically significantly correlated with the characteristics and methods of alternative medicine in terms of traditional Chinese medicine of the elderly in Samut Songkram Province at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

**Keywords:** Alternative Medicine, the Elderly, Perception about Health Care

## INTRODUCTION

Alternative medicine is healthcare and treatment practices, including traditional Chinese medicine, chiropractic, folk medicine, and naturopathy, that minimize or eschew the use of surgery and drugs<sup>1</sup>. A variety of health care practices, such as homeopathy, naturopathy, and Reiki, whose tenets often differ from those of mainstream medicine and are not generally taught in conventional medical schools<sup>1</sup>. Thus, alternative medicine is the science for diagnosing, treating, promoting health and preventing health from diseases. It is alternative to take care and rehabilitate people's health in order to fulfill a weakness of modern medicine, especially incurable diseases<sup>2</sup>. At present, several public health and services are provided with both alternative and modern medicines which are in accordance with lifestyles and ways of the elderly life<sup>3</sup>.

Population ageing is one of the greatest social and economic challenges facing Thailand. This is because Thailand has become a perfect population ageing society. The number of older people is growing. Thailand is currently ranked the third most rapidly ageing population in the world. The number of people aged 60 and over in Thailand now stands at about eight million, accounting for 13 percent of the population. Population ageing is a relatively new occurrence for Thailand. It was just in 2001 that Thailand became an ageing population with more than 7% of the population over 65. By 2040, Thailand's aging population is expected to increase to 17 million, accounting for 25 percent of the population. This means that out of every four Thais, one will be a senior citizen<sup>4</sup>.

Samutsongkram Province has begun to be an aging society. This is because in 2016 this province had the elderly with the number of 35,157 or 21.16 % of the whole population of the country. Samutsongkram Province ranked the first in Health Region 5 and ranked the second of Thailand in terms of the number of the elderly. The trend has increased steadily<sup>5</sup>. The aging society has high dependency which affects health, economy and society of the elderly. They must be taken-care by health agencies, local societies, and families. Thus, factors associating characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province need to be analyzed.

### **THE RESEARCH PURPOSES**

1. To study the characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province.
2. To analyze the relationship between the factors and the methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province.

### **METHODOLOGY**

An analysis of the factors associating characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province is a mixed method research between a quantitative research and a qualitative research. The sample used to study was drawn by using the simple random sampling from aging people (60 years and over) who live in Maglong Subdistrict, Muang District, Samutsongkram Province based on Cohen's Large Effect Size (Cohen, 1992 p.155-159). The data were gathered between March and April, 2017 by using a questionnaire built by the researcher, as well as an in-depth interview. The statistical techniques used for analyzing were frequency, percentage, mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), standard deviation (S.D), and Chi-square:  $\chi^2$ .

### **RESULTS**

#### **1. Characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province**

The elderly in Samutsongkram Province most used alternative medicine in the type of Biologically Based Therapy (80.0%). That is, the herbs were used the most (33.3%), followed by healthy food (30.0%). The type of Energy Therapy (prayer) was used as the second rank (53.3%). The type of Alternative Medical System (acupuncture) was used the least (26.7%). (Table 1)

**Table 1**

Characteristics and Methods of Using Alternative Medicine of the Elderly in Samutsongkram Province (n = 30)

Characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine	N	%
<b>Alternative Medical System</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>26.7</b>
Acupuncture	8	26.7
<b>Mind-Body Interventions</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>43.3</b>
Pray	7	23.0
Yoga	5	16.7
Qigong and Chiropractic	1	3.3
<b>Biologically Bases Therapy</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>80.0</b>
Herbs	10	33.3
Healthy food	9	30.0
Taking vitamin	3	10.0
Taking traditional Chinese medicine	2	6.7
<b>Manipulative and Body-Based Methods</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>40.0</b>
Massage	11	36.7
Chiropractic	1	3.3
<b>Energy Therapy</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>53.3</b>
Pray	16	53.3
Total	30	100.0

2. Analysis of the relationship between the factors (age, adequate income, perception about health care) and the methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province

With regard to statistical testing, it is found that the age factor was statistically significantly correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of eating healthy food of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The adequate income factor was also statistically significantly correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of Qigong and Chiropractic at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Moreover, the factor of perception about health care based on the alternative medicine was statistically significantly correlated with the characteristics and methods of alternative medicine in terms of traditional Chinese medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

**Table2**

The Relationship between the Age Factor and the Methods of Using Alternative Medicine of the Elderly in Samutsongkram Province (n = 30)

Age	Eating healthy food	Not eating healthy food	$\chi^2$
60-69years	5	6	6.268*
70-79years	12	1	
80years and over	4	2	

\*  $\alpha = 0.05$

**Table3**

The Relationship between the Adequate Income Factor and the Methods of Using Alternative Medicine (Qigong and Chiropractic) of the Elderly in Samutsongkram Province (n = 30)

Characteristics and Methods of Using Alternative Medicine		Adequate Income Factor			$\chi^2$
		inadequate income	Adequate income(no saving)	Adequate income(saving)	
Qigong	used	12	15	2	9.31*
	Not used	0	0	1	
Chiropractic	used	12	15	2	9.31*
	Not used	0	0	1	

\*  $\alpha = 0.05$

### 3. The Relationship between the Health-Care-Perception Factor and the Methods of Using Alternative Medicine (Taking Traditional Chinese Medicine) of the Elderly in Samutsongkram Province (n = 30)

**Table 4**

Health-Care-Perception Factor/ Alternative Medicine	Taking Traditional Chinese Medicine	Non-taking Traditional Chinese Medicine	$\chi^2$
Low	0	0	30.00*
Moderate	14	0	
High	14	2	

\*  $\alpha = 0.05$

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The research findings are that the Biologically Bases Therapy (mainly by herbs and healthy food) was used the most, followed by the Energy Therapy (by pray) as the second. The Alternative Medical System (by acupuncture) was least used. With regard to statistical testing, the age factor was statistically significantly correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of eating healthy food of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The adequate income factor was also statistically significantly correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of Qigong and Chiropractic at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Moreover, the factor of perception about health-care based on the alternative medicine was statistically significantly correlated with the characteristics and methods of alternative medicine in terms of traditional Chinese medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

The reason why the age factor was correlated with the alternative medicine in terms of eating healthy food of the elderly is that most ageing people are unhealthy. If they do not eat healthy food, it may cause them to be sick, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, paralysis and so on. So, they have to be aware of food that promotes their health, particularly vegetables and fruit<sup>6</sup>.

For the relationship between the adequate income factor and the alternative medicine in terms of Qigong and Chiropractic, it can be explained that many elderly people have non-chronic diseases. They cannot be treated effectively by modern medicine even though they have enough money to pay for rehabilitating their health. The alternative medicine in terms of Qigong and Chiropractic is used to fulfill a weakness of modern medicine, especially incurable diseases<sup>7</sup>. The alternative medicine in terms of Qigong and Chiropractic is appropriate for the elderly who have adequate income, such as retired persons who has a pension or saving money. Old people who are poor must work hard all their life. They do not have a free time to exercise by using Qigong and Chiropractic at all.

With respect to relationship between the factor of health-care perception and the characteristics and methods of alternative medicine in terms of traditional Chinese medicine, it may be because some elderly people believe that traditional Chinese medicine can help them to be strong if they take Chinese herbs continuously. Moreover, both old men and old women perceive that taking traditional Chinese medicine will help them to feel fresh and be able to have sex intercourse more efficiently. According to Chinese clinical studies, herbs, and others that have been added to the list of useful items over the centuries,

can greatly increase the effectiveness of modern drug treatments, reduce their side-effects, and sometimes replace them completely<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, many research studies revealed that two treatments which most often utilize in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) clinical practice are acupuncture and herbal medicine<sup>9</sup>. This is the reason why the factor of perception about health care based on the alternative medicine was statistically significantly correlated with the characteristics and methods of alternative medicine in terms of traditional Chinese medicine of the elderly in Samutsongkram Province.

For future work, the research on “the analysis of the factors associating characteristics and methods of using alternative medicine of the elderly” should be examined in other provinces and regions of Thailand in order to prove and confirm the results. The powerful research findings will contribute the field of alternative medicine to be strongly accepted and utilized more and more by ageing population and modern medical doctors.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for invaluable help throughout this research.

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