HEALTH INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR OF LOCAL WOMEN VILLAGE HEALTH VOLUNTEERS IN COPING WITH COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to study the health information behaviour of local women village health volunteers in coping with the COVID-19 outbreak in Chiang Mai Province. The study employed quantitative research methods, and a questionnaire will be used as the research instrument. The sample consisted of local women village health volunteers who habituated within four subdistricts; Suthep Subdistrict, Mae Hia Subdistrict, Fa Ham Subdistrict, and Tha Sala Subdistrict located in Mueang Chiang Mai District in Chiang Mai Province. The statistics used were frequency, percentage, the mean and standard deviation for statistical description. The findings illustrate the characteristics of local women village health volunteers who require health information for knowledge dissemination to the local community on disease prevention, surveillance and control of the COVID-19 outbreak. Health information is sought from reliable sources of health information, and also, the obtained health information was used to solve problems, including selecting health information/knowledge from clearly identified sources. The problems the VHVs found between the fieldworks were low, and most local women village health volunteers had possessed their technological device(s) or equipment(s) for seeking health information/related knowledge and employed information-seeking behaviour appropriately.

Keywords: Information Behaviour, Health Information, Local Women Village Health Volunteers, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent pandemic has a major impact on many countries in various dimensions and spread cover around the globe that demand national and local response measures suited to a particular context. The Thai case reveals the prominent local actors in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, especially local health workers. The so-called Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) identified by the WHO as the vital success factors of Thailand in tackling the pandemic responses from below at the early phase outbreak. For this reason, it is important in understanding the role of VHVs in participating in primary healthcare networks in a pandemic regarding prevention, surveillance and communication between networks. The questions include how communication to practice happens and which channels and obstacles the VHVs communicated to the local community? In addition, information access and communication channels in delivering messages from senders to recipients are also vital factors for the common understanding of implementing the measures recommended by the government at the community level. This is necessary to explore the information behaviour of the VHVs in order to investigate the information behaviour in prevention and surveillance, including how individual VHVs interact with information. This is a behaviour that connects individuals to access information sources through media as channels for disseminating knowledge. The information behaviours studied in the VHVs group focused on the relationship between information need, information seeking, and information use (Wilson, 2000). Individual needs for information use vary according to personal environment and context. As for information-seeking behaviour consistent with the principle of minimal effort, the person often searches for the closest, convenient, and easy to get access information sources. (Borgman, 2000; Mann, 1993). Information use is the last activity related to information behaviour used to solve problems, anxiety relief, and decision-making in particular circumstances. In addition, Wilson (2000) states that
individual needs lead to different information behaviours, similar to Davenport (1997) points out that information behaviour is a way of accessing information and using it. Leckie, Pettigrew & Sylvain (1996) mentions that individuals have different information needs according to their workload and occupation, and when they are aware of what information they need and results in information-seeking behaviour.

Therefore, the study of information behaviour is vital for individuals to access information, be aware of it, and get basic knowledge necessary for daily life, which is the state's duty to adopt the information behaviour for policy decision-making. Therefore, government organisations or relevant agencies should apply information behaviour in planning for information and knowledge management for their citizen basic rights. The VHV are directly involved in implementing these measures and are closely familiar with the way of life of the local community that demands obtaining appropriate health information behaviour concerning prevention, monitor, and control the spread of COVID-19. In addition to health personals, local government organisations also play a prominent role in the screening and enforcing measures according to the principle of epidemiology, especially at the local community level. VHV are the closest entity to the community and expected to implement these preventive measures, which is an important mechanism in continually driving community healthcare. Thus, it can be said that the VHV mainly situated at the forefront in the local community in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper questions what is the characteristics of the health information behaviour of local women VHV in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 in Chiang Mai, Thailand?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leckie, Pettigrew & Sylvain (1996) views that individuals have different information need according to workload and occupation and information behaviour will happen when they are aware of what information they need. Davenport (1997) argues that information-seeking behaviour is a way of accessing information and use that information. Wilson (2000, p. 50) provides an interesting note that information behaviour is the behaviour that connects individuals to access information sources by using various media as a channel for disseminating information, which includes the information seeking, use and transmission. Wilson believes that individual needs lead to different information behaviours, and that need may not always lead to information seeking because they may face obstacles that make it impossible to find information that meets the needs. In this regard, Spink and Cole (2004) view that information behaviour related to information in various fields such as information seeking, searching, organising and use that information. The information behaviour that occurs varies on the individual context, such as educational and professional needs leading to the information seeking process. AreeChuenwattana(2002) stated that information behaviour is the individual behaviour to express themselves in obtaining information from various sources. This includes information-seeking behaviour and information use behaviour.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

Scope

This study focuses on health information behaviours for prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 in Chiang Mai province. The study population covers 646 women village health volunteers situated in 4 subdistricts; SuthepSubdistrict Mae HiaSubdistrict, Fa Ham Subdistrict and ThaSalaSubdistrict in Mueang Chiang Mai district (Public Health Information System, Public Health Support Division, 2019). The study period was starting from January 15, 2020, to February 15, 2021.

Data Collection and Samplings

This paper presents the health information behaviour of local women VHV in the prevention, surveillance, and control of the COVID-19 in Chiang Mai. The quantitative research method employed; the samples used in the study were 250 volunteers in the Suthep sub-district, Mae Hia sub-district, Fa Ham sub-district and ThaSala sub-district, Mueang Chiang Mai District Chiang Mai Province. A questionnaire as a research tool for data collection covered three aspects of information behaviour; information needs, information seeking, and information use include problems and obstacles in health information seeking and use. A total of 220 questionnaires received accounted for 88.00% of the total sent-out questionnaires. The analysis is based on the conceptual framework of Wilson (2000), Leckie, Pettigrew & Sylvain (1996), Pickard (2007) and related research papers.
V. RESEARCH RESULTS

This paper presents the characteristics of local women VHVs' health information behaviors in coping with COVID-19 concerning prevention, surveillance, and control measures performed in Chiang Mai, as follows:

1. Health information behavior of local women VHVs in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 in Chiang Mai consisted of three aspects; 1) health information need, 2) health information seeking, and 3) health information use. This paper will portray the top five of information behavior described by local women VHVs to answer the research questions as follows.

![Figure 1: The mean of health information need, illustrated by local women VHVs in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of the COVID-19 in the community.]

- The pandemic resulted in realization of health information need
- Health information need for dealing with COVID-19
- Health information need for local community in dealing with the COVID-19
- Health information need and up to date health information in dealing with the COVID-19
- Health information need for observing and primary diagnosis of COVID-19

![Figure 2: The mean of health information seeking, illustrated by local women VHVs in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of the COVID-19 in the community.]

- Health information seeking happen when the pandemic exposed
- Health information seeking from reliable sources
- Health information seeking for themselves and family
- Health information seeking for the local community
- Health information-seeking for idea exchange, advice regularly
Figure 3: The mean of health information use, illustrated by local women VHV's in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of the COVID-19 in the community.

2. Problems and obstacles in health information seeking and (health information) use for knowledge dissemination to communities in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 in Chiang Mai province. It consists of problems and obstacles in health information-seeking and health information use. The key survey result will be portrayed the top five of information behaviour described by local women VHV's to answer the research questions as follows:

Figure 4: The mean of problems and obstacles in health information seeking, illustrated by local women VHV's in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of the COVID-19 in the community.
VI. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The characteristics of local women VHV's health information behaviour in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 in Chiang Mai province consists of health information need; health information seeking, health information use, include problems and obstacles in health information seeking and health information use. The key issues can be summarised and discussed as follows:

Firstly, the explosion of the pandemic resulted in the health information need of local women VHV's in prevention, surveillance and control of the spread of COVID-19 in the local community. The COVID-19 resulted in her awareness of employing up-to-date health information and knowledge in dealing with the pandemic. The results are consistent with Leckie, Pettigrew & Sylvain (1996) that people have different needs for information based on workload and occupation. Wilson (1981) states that an individual's information need arises from the social context and environment that creates the information need. Therefore, women in village health volunteers had health information needs according to their workload, occupation, and social context. This is consistent with Chonticha Dinkhuntod and Smarn Loifar (2016) found that the elderly need information on medical treatment and disease prevention. In case of illness, the elderly need information on health promotion and medical treatment. It is in line with Surachat Puttima (2016), who discovered that cycling club members in Chiang Mai province needed information related to health promotion and healthcare and disease prevention of various illnesses. This is consistent with the results of a study by Jukkrit Wungrath and others (2018) found the health information need for caring for the elderly on issues related to disease and illness management, elderly well-being, including health promotion and disease prevention in the elderly.

Secondly, the explosion of the pandemic resulted in health information-seeking of local women VHV's from reliable information sources (e.g. from healthcare professionals, the Department of Disease Control, hospitals/infirmaries, public health agencies, government agencies, and related organisations). They also demand information-seeking for protection, surveillance, and control spread of COVID-19 for themselves, their family members, and the villagers. This is consistent with Pickard (2007) states that information seeking is the ability to find information from appropriate sources. It could be verified whether or not the information we received is reliable. Similarly, Aree Chuenwattana (2002) stated that information seeking is an activity or interaction that a person does for the purpose or to satisfy a need in a particular matter. The results of this study are consistent with Jukkrit Wungrath and others (2018, who discovered that the person often has information seeking from personal sources from their neighbours, patients or those who have had experience, including from public health volunteers, medical personnel, and local scholars. It is similar to Pornchita Upatum (2016) found that the most popular information sources for the elderly for accessing important information via website concerning healthcare.
Thirdly, the explosion of the pandemic resulted in the health information use of local women VHV's in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 for themselves and their family members. They can select health information from clearly identified sources (e.g. from healthcare professionals, the Department of Disease Control, other organisations and related sources, etc.) and decide whether or not reliable and accurate health information and up-to-date knowledge. The results of this study are consistent with Wilson's notion (2000) that information use is a behaviour related to collecting information for use. As for Thai scholars such as Chatchawan Vongprasert (1994), notes that information use is intended to meet personal needs in their professional and operation development. This is consistent with Chonticha Dinkhuntod and Smarn Loifar's work (2016) found that the elderly mostly use the information for medical treatment and health care and promotion.

Fourthly, the explosion of the pandemic resulted in problems and obstacles of local women VHV's have to face in health information seeking, such as the distance matter that so far from their homes or workplaces (community health centre and hospital). Access to online information sources in the health information seeking or knowledge pursuit is inconvenient, difficult, complicated, not keeping track of health information and its sources for health information seeking continuously. They tend to reluctant to discuss or exchange idea on health information or knowledge with healthcare professionals, other organisations or involved agencies (anxiety, lack of confidence). It includes unable to verify the reliability of health information self-seeking, unable to seek health information from referrals and interpersonal exchange (e.g. shy, lack of confidence), inability to seek health information on their own, and lack of skills to use technological devices in health information seeking (e.g. smartphones, iPads, tablets). Unable to purchase equipment or technological devices for knowledge and health information seeking (e.g. smartphones, iPads, tablets, etc.). This consistent with Chonticha Dinkhuntod and Smarn Loifar (2016), who found that the required information source was far away and did not know how to use the internet. Moreover, it is similar to Jukkrit Wungrath and others (2018), which found that the source of information is unknown and the source cannot be accessed.

As for problems and obstacles in health information seeking are at a low level; they lack the equipment or technological devices in knowledge or health information seeking (e.g., smartphones, iPADS, Tablet, etc.) and do not know where to get this health information. However, the results confirmed that most VHV's have the technological devices used for knowledge or health information seeking and can pursue appropriate health information.

Finally, the explosion of the pandemic resulted in problems and obstacles of local women VHV's have to face in health information use regarding lack of participation in group activities, so they cannot use information or health knowledge to carry out community activities or have little involvement with the community. After receiving health information or knowledge, some cannot discuss, advise, and exchange between individuals (shy, lack of confidence, etc.). Also, they fail to utilise health information or knowledge for observing and investigating the symptoms of patients infected with COVID-19 to family members because they lack confidence or reluctance to use health information for prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, they cannot utilise health information or knowledge to determine and observe the symptoms of patients infected with COVID-19 for individuals in the community. This is similar to Jukkrit Wungrath, and others (2018) found that the information received could not be interpreted correctly.

The problems and obstacles in health information use are at the medium level: the newly acquired health information or knowledge cannot be applied with the prior knowledge to enhancing how to dealing with the COVID-19. In sum, some of the local women VHV's had faced problems in adopting the newly acquired health knowledge with the prior knowledge to enhance the knowledge of the COVID-19. However, local women VHV's had few problems and obstacles in using health information for coping with the pandemic. Thus, this study confirmed that local women VHV's could use the acquired health knowledge to properly pass on to the community in prevention, surveillance, and control of the spread of COVID-19 in Chiang Mai province.

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