



## THE APPLICATION OF BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES TO SOLVING THE MISUSE OF TRAMADOL

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** The problems children and youths encountered evolved in response to the current global landscape. Disturbing trends included an increase in the concurrent use of multiple drugs, rendering treatment more complex than in the past. Furthermore, youngsters were mixing various easily accessible substances to replicate the effects of drugs. This behavior often disregarded the addictive nature of these substances. Children and youths fell into a high-risk category due to their natural curiosity, inclination to experiment, limited experience, and underdeveloped judgment, leading to potentially inappropriate decisions and behaviors. The particular concern was the widely popular drug "Tramadol", classified as a dangerous substance due to its morphine-like effects. This research aimed to study the situation of misuse of Tramadol in children and youths, the influencing factors to the misuse of Tramadol, its impact, and guidelines for solving the misuse of Tramadol.

**Methodology:** This qualitative research employed in-depth interviews with individuals who consumed dangerous drugs like Tramadol. The participants included both males and females and fell under the jurisdiction of the Training Center for Children and Youth.

**Main Results:** Children and youths were increasingly inclined to misuse Tramadol due to its wide availability and affordability. Legal gaps had been used to smuggle illegal Tramadol to children and youths. Influencing factors included peer groups, curiosity, a desire to experiment, lack of discernment, and impulsiveness based on age. The drug could have provided a channel for imagination and fulfillment. Among children and youths who misused Tramadol, there existed a colloquial expression that captured the sensation it brought: "to the vastness and distance". Tramadol evolved into a quiet menace, transforming into a social problem by inducing mental instability, recklessness, and poor decision-making.

**Involvement to Buddhaddhamma:** The application of Buddhist principles, as Buddha taught, can address this issue. Specifically, the *Ti-Sikkhā* principle (Threefold Training) encompassing *Adhisīlā-sikkhā* (Refraining from evil), *Adhicitta-sikkhā* (Intention to do good), and *Adipaṇṇā-sikkhā* (Purification of the mind), along with the four *Suhadamitta* principles (True Friends): *Upakāra-mitta* (The supportive friend), *Samānasukhadukkha-mitta* (The friend who remains steadfast in times of joy and sorrow), *Atthakkhāyī-mitta* (The friend who offers sound counsel), and *Anukampaka-mitta* (The empathetic friend).



These principles can be applied through the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca): Dukkha (Suffering), Samudaya (Origin), Nirodha (Cessation), and Magga (path) to comprehend the underlying causes. This understanding aims to protect children and youths from harm, ensuring their rights and a stable, high-quality life. By nurturing these principles, young individuals can become valuable citizens, forming the bedrock of the nation's future.

**Conclusions:** The misuse of Tramadol among children and youths of Generation Z, often referred to as Gen Z, where it was being treated similarly to a narcotic substance, represented a subtle yet escalating societal concern. Consequently, there was a pressing need to apply Buddhist principles to establish a foundation for prevention and resolution. Specifically, the *Ti-Sikkhā* principle (Threefold Training) and the principle of choosing good friends should have been embraced. These principles worked in tandem to shape the conduct of children and youths, fostering desirable behaviors and imparting the ability to utilize wisdom when addressing various challenges. This approach aimed to reinforce behaviors that aligned with their age and cultivated qualities that adhered to societal norms.

**Keywords:** Buddhist Principles, Misuse, Tramadol

## Introduction

The problems that children and youths encountered evolved in response to the current global landscape. Disturbing trends included an increase in the concurrent use of multiple drugs, rendering treatment more complex than in the past. Furthermore, youngsters were mixing various easily accessible substances to replicate the effects of drugs. This behavior often disregarded the addictive nature of these substances. Children and youths fell into a high-risk category due to their natural curiosity, inclination to experiment, limited experience, and underdeveloped judgment, leading to potentially inappropriate decisions and behaviors. Various environments also played a pivotal role in influencing and shaping the conduct of young individuals (National Statistical Office, 2016). One prominent issue was the misuse of Tramadol, a substance categorized as a dangerous drug by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Despite this classification, children and youths misused Tramadol in forms like tablets/capsules or combined with other components. Its effects encompassed psychedelic disorientation, lethargy, and depression of the nervous system. Excessive consumption could have resulted in nausea, vomiting, constricted pupils, low blood pressure, cardiovascular failure, seizures, and respiratory arrest. Consequently, it could have led to shock and even fatality (Angrakul, 2016).

The prevailing rationale behind the preference for Tramadol among children and youths was its affordability and easy availability at modern pharmacies. Additionally, its popularity had surged among this demographic due to exposure on various social media platforms and its distribution through private parcel services and postal networks. Unfortunately, the addictive properties and potential harm of Tramadol were often disregarded.

The Buddhist principles encompassed the teachings of Buddha, serving as both developmental and learning guidelines, as well as the process for addressing significant societal issues. These principles were designed to be a lifelong training regimen for the body, speech, and mind, leading to



the attainment of wisdom and liberation from various challenges. Given these principles, all Buddhists needed to engage in the processes of learning and logical reasoning. Through this, they could have grasped the nature of problematic situations and the guidelines for effective problem-solving. By adhering to Buddhist principles, it became possible to transform undesirable behaviors, cultivate moral integrity, and bolster ethical conduct. This path facilitated acquiring wisdom and realizing intended success (Komalo, 2018). Therefore, the application of Buddhist principles was a viable approach to solving the misuse of Tramadol.

### Objectives

This research aimed to study the situation of misuse of Tramadol in children and youths, the influencing factors to the misuse of Tramadol, its impact, and guidelines for solving the misuse of Tramadol.

### Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing an interview form with an Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) value of 0.86. The interviews were conducted as in-depth discussions with individuals who had engaged in the use of hazardous substances referred to as "Tramadol". The participants included both males and females and fell under the jurisdiction of the Training Center for Children and Youth. This particular center functioned as an institution tasked with various roles, including supervision, care, treatment, correction, rehabilitation, prevention, character development, and support for children and youths. The individuals who come under the center's purview had typically been adjudicated or court-ordered to undergo training before reintegrating into society. The ultimate aim was to ensure their reentry was marked by pride and a commitment to avoiding repeated offenses. Subsequently, the data gathered from the interviews underwent content analysis using an inductive approach. This analysis method involved deriving insights, themes, and conclusions from the perspectives and viewpoints expressed by the interviewees. These findings were then synthesized into the research outcomes.

### Results and Discussion

Tramadol was classified within the category of dangerous drugs utilized for the management of moderate to severe pain. It exhibited similarity to morphine, albeit with potency levels approximately 5 to 20 times lower (Raksasat, 2017). Tramadol was legally designated to be retailed exclusively through authorized modern pharmacies, and dispensation must have occurred under the supervision of a pharmacist, ensuring the appropriate quantity dispensed did not exceed 20 tablets/capsules/time. The sale of Tramadol to individuals under the age of 17 was strictly prohibited, a measure intended to curtail the misuse of this medication. A significant number of children and youths became acquainted with Tramadol through recommendations by friends or older peers who were familiar with the substance. G. Stanley Hall, a psychologist, observed that the adolescent years often entailed a period of upheaval and stress. Adolescents could have exhibited deviant behavior,



especially when exposed to unfavorable environments, which could have consequently led to misconduct. This perspective was consistent with the viewpoint put forth by Tripathi (2017) on the significance of friendships during this phase of life. Tripathi emphasized that friends exerted a substantial influence on teenagers. Positive friendships could have contributed to a positive life trajectory, whereas association with friends engaging in risky behaviors could have led to challenges in daily life.

Tramadol became attainable for children and young individuals through various avenues, including general pharmacies, grocery stores, game shops, and connections with older acquaintances. Presently, the most prominent medium for its acquisition was social media, primarily because children and youths belonged to Generation Z. This demographic predominantly communicated through text on mobile phones or computer screens, emphasizing text-based interactions over verbal communication. Interestingly, smartphones came to be regarded as the 33<sup>rd</sup> appendage of Generation Z, underscoring the integral role these devices played in their lives according to their generational classification (Bunpen, 2018). Being a cohort born and raised amid rapid technological advancements, Generation Z found it effortless to learn and access diverse information according to their interests, and they could have done so rapidly. Products were offered officially through social media platforms that typically utilized private parcel delivery services or postal networks for distribution. Transactions for Tramadol might involve the purchase of individual tablets or capsules. Alternatively, they could have been packaged in larger quantities, such as jars containing up to 1,000 tablets or capsules, sometimes coupled with Procodyl or other types of liquid cough syrup.

The research also unveiled instances where legal ambiguities were exploited to illicitly smuggle and sell Tramadol to children and young individuals. One tactic involved utilizing the identity of a registered pharmacist while the pharmacist in question was not actively present or on duty. In some cases, drug stores operated as fronts, employing individuals not licensed as pharmacists to oversee operations and deliberately selling drugs exclusively to established patrons. Tramadol was sometimes concealed within private spaces that fall beyond the scope of lawful authority for inspection by regulatory agencies. This could have encompassed storage in areas that authorities lacked the legal mandate to access. Furthermore, methods encompassed the distribution of counterfeit drugs beyond the established system, effectively sidestepping official oversight mechanisms and facilitating their introduction into the market.

Tramadol misuse manifested in two primary consumption methods: either ingesting the drug in its tablet/capsule form or blending it with beverages alongside additional components. In instances where individuals opt for tablets or capsules, the typical dosage varied from 1 to 5 per consumption, and this pattern endured until reaching a range of 20 to 60 tablets or capsules. This method was colloquially referred to as "eating to fulfill". However, a predominant number of users chose to combine Tramadol with various ingredients. Notably, soft drinks, Procodyl, or liquid cough syrup were often served as the primary components for these mixtures. Depending on personal preferences, Tramadol might be blended with Mitragyna Speciosa Korth water (known as 4x100), alcoholic beverages, energy drinks, antidepressants, children's liquids, fruit juices, soda, lemon tea, coconut jelly,

fruit-flavored jelly, or other gelatin-based substances such as pearl jelly. The choice of ingredients could have varied widely based on individual inclinations, as shown in Figure 1.

### Tramadol drug abuse behavior

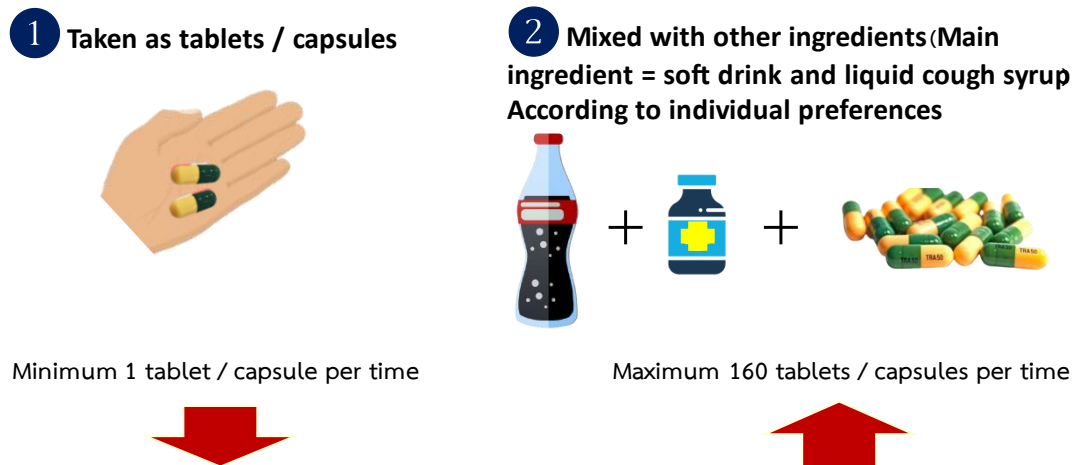


Figure 1 Tramadol drug abuse behavior.

The attraction of children and young individuals to Tramadol misuse in the contemporary era stemmed from their desire to experience the drug's euphoric side effects. The substance was known for inducing feelings of intoxication, pleasure, and a sense of relief by depressing the nervous system, thus alleviating stress and generating sensations of joy. This aligned with findings from a study conducted by Sirisupakritkul et al. (2013), which highlighted that Tramadol was often misused due to its side effects, specifically its ability to induce numbness and psychedelic gratification. The drug could have provided a channel for imagination and fulfillment. Among children and youths who misused Tramadol, there existed a colloquial expression that captured the sensation it brought: "To the vastness and distance". This phrase encapsulated a sentiment of attachment to the experience. Additionally, Tramadol garnered significant awareness among this demographic due to its easy accessibility and affordability. Notably, consuming Tramadol did not raise concern about detection through urine tests, as it did not fall within the category of substances typically screened for, alleviating worries about potential legal repercussions.

As a result, the misuse of Tramadol posed a severe menace to both physical and mental well-being. It exerted its influence on bodily, psychological, and cognitive development, both in the immediate and prolonged periods. Gradually evolving into a concealed peril, Tramadol misuse had the potential to evolve into a pressing social issue, particularly among the younger generation in their formative years. This generation formed a critical resource and embodied the nation's future. The escalating prevalence of children and young individuals resorting to hazardous drugs signified an increasing inability to manage their own impulses. This progression mirrored the trajectory of drug addiction, wherein the user's mind became perpetually tethered to the cravings, necessitating escalating doses to attain the desired effect. Despite an initial illusion of comfort and rapid happiness,



excessive or continuous usage of such substances exacted a direct toll on the individual, manifesting as deterioration in physical health, erratic mood shifts, and the deterioration of both the nervous system and cognitive functions. In severe instances, consequences could have extended to paralysis or even death. Regarding drug addiction, the experience of cravings could have occurred due to the body's inability to acclimate without the substance. This could have led users to engage in unlawful activities to secure their desired drug or even escalate usage to include other forms of drugs. The spiral of addiction could have far-reaching implications on an individual's life and behavior.

Despite the existence of five legal measures in Thailand aimed at regulating Tramadol under the purview of the Food and Drug Administration, concerning trends persisted. In 2016, The Princess National Institute on Drug Abuse, Part of The Ministry of Public Health, noted an escalating annual increase in individuals succumbing to Tramadol addiction. In 2017, concurrently, reports from the Office of the Narcotics Control Board in Bangkok illuminated the prevalence of Tramadol, Procodyl, and liquid cough syrup misuse among children and youths within the Bangkok Youth Detention Center. These developments highlighted the alarming reality that a significant number of Thai children and young individuals were at risk of engaging in dangerous drug misuse without a full understanding of the consequences. Failing to address this issue with due seriousness would have perpetuated the problem. Consequently, the application of Buddhist principles emerged as a compelling guideline for resolving the issue of Tramadol misuse among children and youths. This was because Tramadol, despite its pharmacological classification, was frequently employed to mimic the effects of narcotic substances (Office of the Narcotics Control Board Bangkok, 2017).

According to the teachings of Buddhism, narcotic drugs were substances that could have induced a state of insanity within an individual, leading to negligence and errors in their life choices. The impetus behind their consumption often stemmed from unwholesome mental roots, specifically greed, delusion, and ill-intention. These roots precipitated a diminished sense of awareness, culminating in carelessness and giving rise to inappropriate behavior through actions, speech, and thoughts. This mental state could have resulted in a state of mental instability in various aspects of life, encompassing both secular and virtuous domains. The consequences of such actions manifested as personal and societal issues exerting both direct and indirect impacts. These consequences spanned a wide range, including the emergence of various illnesses, conflicts, theft, sexual assault, physical harm to others, and even loss of life. The cycle of negativity and harm extended to both the individual and society at large, affecting individuals' well-being and the community's harmonious functioning (Komalo, 2018).

## Originality and Body of Knowledge

In the present era, society has entered what is commonly referred to as the "BANI World", characterized by its rapid pace and an unprecedented level of uncertainty and change. Within this context, children and youths, belonging to Generation Z, or Gen Z, exhibit remarkable skills in critical thinking, analysis, creativity, and information acquisition through independent research. However, being in the stage of childhood and adolescence means they often lack the necessary



experience to engage in analytical thinking and differentiate between right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate. In this era of the BANI World, where access to information is easy and convenient but also dynamic and uncertain, a significant risk emerges. This risk profoundly influences the attitudes and behaviors of Generation Z's children and youths. The abundance of information can lead to misunderstandings, the formation of new values within specific groups, and even the rapid adoption of trends that might veer into inappropriate behaviors. Given the inherent characteristics of children and youths characterized by their excitement and curiosity, misusing substances like Tramadol can become a behavior that simulates drug use. This, in turn, becomes a silent threat, evolving into a contemporary issue of significance.

Buddhism stands as the predominant religion in Thailand and assumes a pivotal role in shaping the mental and spiritual direction of society. Monks, who are followers of the Buddha, play a crucial role in upholding Buddhism. They fulfill responsibilities such as preserving the Buddha's teachings, imparting guidance for virtuous living, engaging in acts of social welfare, and serving as exemplars for the Buddhist community. This collective effort contributes to the potency and stability of Buddhism as a guiding force. In essence, monks adhere to the conduct set forth by the Buddha, known as "Buddha-cariyā", which he personally exemplifies. This conduct is in harmony with the principles of the Dhamma (Buddhist teachings) and Vinaya (monastic discipline). Consequently, monks are intricately linked with society, actively participating in endeavors that yield benefits for people across the globe. Through their dedication and engagement, they uphold the Buddha's teachings and offer valuable contributions to the welfare of individuals and the world at large.

The Buddhist principles constitute the teachings of Buddha, serving as a blueprint for human behavior. At the core of Buddhism lies the principle of abstaining from wrongdoing, engaging in virtuous actions, and purifying one's mind - the very essence of Buddhism that all Buddhists are encouraged to practice. This practice is guided by the Ti-Sikkhā principle, which involves threefold training: Adhisīla-sikkhā (Higher morality training), Adhicitta-sikkhā (Higher mentality training), and Adipaññā-sikkhā (Higher wisdom training). One of the Buddhist principles that can be effectively applied to the prevention and resolution of drug misuse among children and youths is the principle of friendship. During this stage of life, friendships wield substantial influence over the cultivation of both positive and negative behaviors. Positive companionship can lead to the development of a virtuous lifestyle, while associations with individuals prone to risky behaviors can result in life challenges. This is further supported by the findings of the study, where many who have used dangerous drugs like Tramadol become aware of it through recommendations by friends or older peers. Therefore, the process of selecting friends becomes a crucial consideration. The Tipitaka teachings emphasize the significance of befriending individuals who contribute positively to one's life, echoing the principle of choosing companions who contribute to personal growth and prosperity. This practice aligns seamlessly with the teachings of Buddha and provides a practical way to address the challenges posed by drug misuse among children and youths. The teachings of the Tipitaka about friendship are as follows:



1. Upakāra-mitta: The friend who helps you in need, you should know that a true friend is friendly and kind for four reasons (DN.(Thai) 11/261/210) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996):

- 1.1 He guards you when you are off your guard.
- 1.2 He guards your property when you are off your guard.
- 1.3 He is a refuge to you when you are in danger.
- 1.4 He provides a double supply of what you may ask in time of need.

2. Samānasukhadukkha-mitta: The friend who remains steadfast in times of joy and sorrow, it is necessary to be kind to each other based on the virtue of living together, helping each other in times of need, as taught in the Tipitaka that, you should know that a true friend is friendly and kind for four reasons (DN.(Thai) 11/262/210) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996):

- 2.1 He tells his secrets.
- 2.2 He keeps your secrets.
- 2.3 He does not forsake you in your troubles.
- 2.4 He can even die for your sake.

3. Atthakkhāyī-mitta: The friend who offers sound counsel, it is a virtue that creates kindness, care, and care for friends by admonishing things to friends. They admonish their friends when they see that they are not behaving properly for them to do only good deeds. You should know that a true friend is friendly and kind for four reasons (DN.(Thai) 11/263/210) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996):

- 3.1 He keeps you back from evil.
- 3.2 He encourages you to do good.
- 3.3 He informs you of what you have not heard.
- 3.4 He shows you the way to heaven.

4. Anukampaka-mitta: The empathetic friend, you should know that a true friend is friendly and kind for four reasons (DN.(Thai) 11/264/211) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996):

- 4.1 He does not rejoice over your misfortunes.
- 4.2 He rejoices in your good fortune.
- 4.3 He protests you against anyone who speaks ill of you.
- 4.4 He admires those who speak well of you.

Good friends, according to the four true friends' principles that led a safe life away from drugs, are as follows:

1. Support and Protection: A true friend helps and safeguards your well-being, alerting you to your errors, and offering assistance beyond what is asked for. They are there to prevent harm and extend a helping hand when needed the most.

2. Steadfastness in joy and sorrow: A genuine friend remains by your side through both good and bad times. They celebrate your joys and provide comfort during times of sorrow. Their presence and unwavering support are constants in your life.



3. Guidance and Positivity: A true friend guides you toward righteousness, ensuring that you do not engage in wrongdoings or harmful behaviors. They offer counsel, encourage virtuous actions, and actively discourage involvement with detrimental substances like drugs. Their guidance promotes self-improvement and encourages setting positive goals.

4. Consideration and Advocacy: A sincere friend is considerate, fostering an environment of goodwill. They empathize with your challenges, celebrate your successes, and stand up against those who speak ill of you. Such friends truly appreciate your virtues and advocate on your behalf (Chairat, 2017).

Indeed, instilling wisdom based on Dhamma principles from the Tipitaka is a valuable approach for children and youths. These principles empower them to develop insights, understanding, and discernment as they navigate life's challenges. The teachings of the Four Noble Truths (An. (Thai) 23/54/344) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996), a foundational concept in Buddhism, can serve as an effective framework:

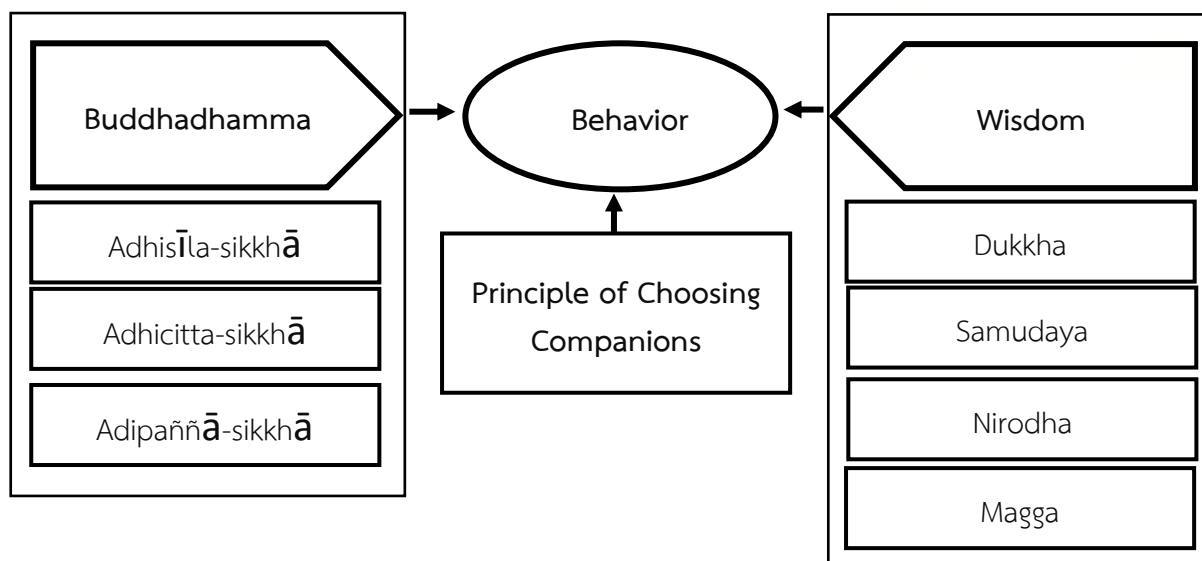
1. Understanding suffering (Dukkha): Defining the problem of using Tramadol as a narcotic substance or defining the suffering that happened clearly.

2. Identifying the cause of suffering (Samudaya): Searching for the cause of suffering that occurs or the reason for using Tramadol.

3. Realizing the cessation of suffering (Nirodha): Considering the root cause to find the real cause.

4. Following the path leading to the cessation of suffering (Magga): Determining methods to achieve the goal or goal of solving the problems that have arisen.

Therefore, children and youths who are equipped with knowledge and intelligence or who are aware of the dangers that come with life should use wisdom to find solutions to problems. They should use reasons to consider and solve various problems with intelligence by considering what is harmful, what is defiling, what is correct, what is appropriate, what is useful, what should be given, what should be kept, and what should be received. They should choose and use these as guidelines for a quality life. This will help them understand themselves, comprehend society, and learn how to choose friends, leading to self-esteem and a sense of value. They can be accepted by the family, community, and society, all of which are important for protecting children and youths from danger. This results in a good quality of life, in line with the rights that children should receive, promoting stability and growth. Additionally, it serves as a crucial foundational force in the country's development, especially in the era of the fast-paced and uncertain changes of the BANI World. Children and youths deserve to receive protection, care, and training to cultivate good attitudes and reinforce behaviors appropriate for their age and desirable according to social norms. This framework aligns with the rights outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Thailand is a signatory, and the Child Protection Act of 2003, recognizing that children and youths are essential citizens of the nation's future, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** The application of Buddhist Principles to Solving the Misuse of Tramadol.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Buddhadhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, should have served as a model for humans to use as a guideline for their conduct. Particularly at the core of Buddhism, it laid the principle of abstaining from all evil, engaging in virtuous deeds, and purifying one's mind. This essence of Buddhism aimed for all Buddhists to abide by the Ti-Sikkhā principle, encompassing threefold training: Adhisīla-sikkhā (Refraining from evil), Adhicitta-sikkhā (Intention to do good), and Adipaṇṇā-sikkhā (Purification of the mind). Buddhist principles that could have been employed to anchor the mind in the prevention and resolution of the misuse of dangerous drugs among children and youths were the principles of friendship and wisdom. For children and youths, who were often referred to as Generation Z or Gen Z, their peers wielded significant influence in shaping both positive and negative behaviors. Employing wisdom to find solutions to problems and utilizing reason to address various challenges with intelligence could have reinforced age-appropriate behaviors and cultivate desirable traits under social norms. The researchers proposed the following recommendations for applying Buddhist principles to prevent and address the misuse of dangerous drugs among children and youths as follows: 1) The government should have formulated a policy aimed at promoting the development of treatment programs for individuals struggling with dangerous drug addiction, guided by Buddhist principles as teachings and behavioral guidelines for children and youths. These programs should have been made available through various accessible service channels, ensuring confidentiality and peace of mind. Methods such as hotlines, Secret Chat, Live Chat, and similar approaches should have been employed; 2) The Department of Children and Youth Affairs should have collaborated closely with the Department of Religious Affairs, which was primarily responsible for enhancing the overall well-being of individuals to implement Buddhist principles. This collaboration should have resulted in the creation of five strategic frameworks: personal empowerment, family cohesion, wisdom cultivation, fostering positive friendships and activities, and community engagement; 3) Recognizing



that the family unit was the fundamental social structure in the lives of children and youths, this institution must have adapted to the characteristics of Generation Z. Parents and guardians should have taken proactive measures to closely observe, track, and guide the behavior of their children and grandchildren. Utilizing reason, they could have fostered an environment of awareness and facilitated discussions about the challenges and consequences associated with the use of dangerous drugs.

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