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Cognitive synthesis of violence in children and youth

Kangsadan Chaowatthanakun

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10900, Thailand

Article Info

Abstract

This paper synthesizes the existing knowledge about children and youth violence in Thailand and presents policy recommendations for building social protection for children and youth. It is based on document research, with data collected from research related to violence among children and youth in Thailand during the years 2016–2021. Content analysis was used as the main analysis method. Using "juvenile violence" as a keyword, 84 studies were found to deal with violence against children and youth in Thailand. Most of them are in the form of master's degree students' dissertations, hailing from disciplines as diverse. Their content was analysed with a focus on two main areas: (1) violence perpetrated by juveniles, and (2) youth victimization. While the studies targeted several – fragile – demographic groups, such as children, youth, adolescents, and autistic, MSM, and special needs children, many of the studies presented analogous findings. Violence occurs in the family, at school, in the community, in society, the media, and the online world. The perpetrators tend to be close or distant acquaintances, family members, people in society whom the victims had never met before and repeat offenders. The violence affects the physical, mental, emotional, and stigma attached to juvenile victims. From the overall knowledge synthesis on definitions, characteristics, patterns, causes, effects, and recommendations, this research has led to policy recommendations for social protection for children and youth. Importantly, cooperation from all sectors in society is required to implement these.

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E-mail address: fsockdc@ku.ac.th.

Introduction

"Juvenile violence" is a major problem that affects youth around the world. For instance, in Latin America, 58 percent of children are subjected to violence, and in North America, 61 percent of children are subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. In America, murder is the leading cause of death among juveniles aged 15 to 24. Child sexual abuse is found in 16 percent of girls, 10 percent of boys in Honduras, 15 percent of girls and 8 percent of boys in Colombia. However, 14 percent of girls and 3 percent of boys in El Salvador experienced sexual violence before the age of 18 (Pan American Health Organization, 2020). In 2021, 22,505 children in the UK contacted child care agencies about violence, including 8,389 children who were worried about being abandoned, 6,441 children were worried about physical abuse, 4,418 children were worried about emotional abuse, 3,013 children suffered sexual abuse, and 244 children were sexually abused online (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2022).

In Thailand, a UNICEF survey (2020) found that on average 52 juveniles are subjected to various forms of violence per day, or an average of 2 persons every hour. About three-quarters of children aged 1–14 are subjected to at least one form of physical or mental punishment by a family member. What is more, around 4.2 children in every 100 are more likely to be subjected to severe physical punishment, with more than 10,000 children subjected to acts of violence, most of which are acts of sexual violence. Meanwhile, nearly half of parents and caregivers believe that corporal punishment is essential to raising or training children. Steketee et al. (2021) explain that children and young people are regularly exposed to violence in the home, schools and communities. Such violence can cause physical, mental, and emotional damage to children and youth, and impacts can last until adulthood. Goemans et al. (2023) also found that children and youth who have experienced violence, are at risk of repetition of violence throughout life. The problem of violence in children and young people is likely to increase, and directly and indirectly affects the stability and safety of children and young people's lives according to the concept of social protection. Therefore, it is necessary to create social security and safety for children and youth in accordance with the concept of social protection with the participation of all sectors. Creating a safe space can prevent violence against children and youth. However, the policy and legal problems in the field of preventing violence against children and youth include the fair enforcement of the law in preventing and solving problems, failure to tighten policy implementation, complexity of interpretation, legality, and lack of long-term follow-up. In addition, awareness must be promoted, working with society to understand, and promote effective policy and legal compliance to prevent and solve the problem of juvenile violence equally and fairly.

Objective

This research aims to synthesize existing knowledge of juvenile violence to present policy recommendations for social protection to children and young people.

Literature Review

The concepts used in this research are violence concepts, social protection concepts among children and youth, and participation concepts. The conceptual framework of this research comes from the concept of Unni and Rani (2003), where Unni and Rani proposed that the main measures of social protection include protection measures and promotion. In including the conceptual framework of Wulczyn et al. (2010), it was found that each child and youth must be developed physically, mentally, intellectually, and socially. However, different conditions through absorption, training, and abuse will inevitably affect the mind and behaviour of children and young people. Children and youth must therefore receive social protection.

Concepts and Theories of Social Protection

Social Protection is a process or system established by the government or related organizations to provide protection to people or groups of people living in an environment that poses a risk to the well-being of everyone in society. The Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council (2002) explained that social protection extends to the organization of social safety nets for the disadvantaged and poor, and addresses social risks management arising from economic crises, society, and various disasters. The social protection system will help ensure and protect all people in society. This enables people to have a good quality of life and be able to develop their potential and society to the fullest.

Social protection is a concept that places great emphasis on economic stability and the role of various sectors in social protection. The goal is to maintain the quality of life of the people, especially those who are disadvantaged

in society. Interesting contributions are the work of Unni and Rani (2003) and Devereux and Sebastes-Wheeler (2004). Unni and Rani (2003) propose that protection and promotion should be the main measure of social protection. Devereux and Sebastes Wheeler proposed the concept of transformative social protection.

Unni and Rani's proposals started from the three pillars of security. These include: (1) basic security such as having a basic standard of living: food, health, education, and housing; (2) economic security, meaning having access to reasonable paid work and a decent standard of work; and (3) social security, meaning stability given by having protection factors from risks caused by life crises, such as elderly, deceased, unemployment, illness, disability, and lost property.

In view of Unni and Rani, there are two factors or risks that contribute to insecurity: structural factors including age, gender, occupational status, level of education, etc.; and unforeseen factors including unemployment, changes in demand, commodity prices, deaths, various accidents, etc. Social protection mechanisms should therefore focus on the "root causes" and "characteristics" of insecurity that occur to workers in the informal economy. It covers both protection issues. "Protection" aims to avoid lowering the level of living standards in the event of adverse events. "Promotion", in addition to having the goal of raising the standard of living, also involves supporting it to be able to deal with the insecurities that arise by the structure in this regard. Here, development and learning play an important role.

Devereux and Sebates-Wheeler bring in the work issues aimed at "transformation" that link to the concept of social protection (Devereux & Sebates-Wheeler, 2004). The appeal of this concept lies in the emphasis on "processes" or "movements" to establish social protection. Social protection is defined as measures taken by the public or private sectors aimed at transferring income or consumption to the poor, offer protection from the fragility of living. It includes increasing the social status and rights of marginalized individuals, aims to reduce economic vulnerability, society of chronically poor people, economically vulnerable groups, and those on the marginalized side of society. For this group of researchers, "protection" is done through measures of "social assistance", which aims to alleviate poverty or scarcity, provide assistances to those who cannot help themselves, and also includes social service "prevention" that can be done through social insurance (Naruemon,2007). However, Selvik and Thjømøe (2021) explain that children's rights, such as the right to education and the right to a life safe from violence,

at present, are appropriately supported in the existing preventive measures, but that there is still uncertainty about how it works in relation to supporting children's rights. An important issue is social assistance like juvenile protection facilities, where those involved, whether parents, police or child and family development agencies, see a need to revise the policies and guidelines. Social protection and children's rights are often related because social protection focuses on ensuring that children enjoy rights related to excellence in education, health, safety, and wellbeing especially for children who are in environments at risk of inappropriate well-being. Therefore, children's rights are the basis for formulating policies and measures aimed at enabling children to grow and develop to their full potential.

UNICEF Thailand introduces the concept of social protection among children and youth with the aim of strengthening the social protection system to bridge the poverty gap, and address issues related to children's well-being. The project will come to support the model of social protection, budget attribution, and establish a comprehensive social protection policy for children by strategic partners including civil society, such as educational institutions to assist in data collection and policy advice.

Every child should receive basic income security, at least at the level of the nationally defined poverty line. It ensures that children have access to essential nutrition, education, care, and goods and services. In Thailand, there are only two social protection programs aimed at childcare enacted into law: child welfare under the Social Security Act and the free school policy.

From the concepts of social protection mentioned above, it can be concluded that the social protection system is a mechanism to help children and youth cope with problems, protect them from life risks, and enhance the rights of children and youth. This system realizes basic stability, economic security, and social security, which requires cooperation from all sectors (government, private sector, and civil society) through plans, projects, or safety networks to protect, promote, and change society.

Methodology

This study is a document research based on research related to the issue of child and youth violence in Thailand during 2016–2021 in full text research. The search was conducted from nine main sources, which are sources of research dissemination that are constantly developing and improving the database. Such is under the supervision of government agencies and the education sector.

1. Thai Higher Education Institutions Library Network (ThaiLIS) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Research and Innovation

2. Research Gateway Common Service of National Research Council of Thailand

3. Thai Research Archive of National Research Council of Thailand

4. Digital Research Center of National Research Council of Thailand

5. E-Library of The Thailand Research Fund

6. Research Knowledge Library of King Prajadhipok's Institute

7. Thesis Database of Thammasat University

8. Chulalongkorn University Intellectual Repository of Chulalongkorn University

9. Research and Creative Database System of Kasetsart University

The researcher searched using keywords such as: children, youth, violence, juvenile violence, domestic violence, child bullying, bullying in schools, child abuse, crimes in children, juvenile rape, sexual harassment, adolescent behavior, bullying, online bullying, child neglect, suicide in children, game addiction, gambling addiction in children, drug problems in school, child pregnancy, abortion in adolescents, young mother, youth offenders, quarrels, drug addiction, depression in children, and children with special needs. The research related to juvenile violence was then selected, which resulted in 84 studies. Their content was then comprehensively analysed with a focus on: (1) violence perpetrated by juveniles and (2) youth victimization. Covering both these issues, 53 studies were selected. We used content analysis as the main analysis method and categorized violence against children and youth and classified the patterns and the effects of violence.

Results and Discussion

During 2016–2021, there were 84 studies on violence among children and youth. There were 53 studies on children and youth as perpetrators and victims of violence, most of which were master's theses. Most of the studies examine ways to solve problems of violence and develop models for preventing violence. Looking back over the past 10 years (2012–2021), research on juvenile violence was prominent and widely distributed especially during 2012–2013. Various institutions called for attention to the problem of violence against children and youth, resulting in the promotion of research in this area to investigate and analyze the problem and find appropriate solutions.

During 2016–2021, research on violence against children and youth was conducted in many population groups such as children, youth, adolescents, children with autism, MSM, children with special needs, etc. All groups are vulnerable groups. The scene of the violence occurred in the family, school or educational institution, community, social media, and online. The perpetrators are all close people such as acquaintances, family members, ordinary people in society who have never known each other before, including prisoners who have committed repeat offences. The consequences of acts of violence affect the physical, mental, mental state, emotions, feelings, and stigmas that are carried by the juveniles who have been affected. Additionally, disciplines that study youth violence include psychology, sociology and anthropology, criminology, law, social development, nursing, behavioral science, political science, and education, among others. This can be summarized as in the table below:

The study can be summarized and divided as follows:

Overview of juvenile violence research in 2016–2021
1. Violence perpetrated by juveniles; the research found the following

    1.1 Self-directed violence such as adolescent pregnancy, suicide, and game addiction.

    1.2 Interpersonal violence such as quarrelling, and cyber bullying.

    1.3 Collective violence such as gambling, and drug consumption.

Table 1 Distinguishing characteristics of research related to violence among children and youth during 2016–2021

Characteristics	Findings
Sample group	Children's group, youth, adolescents, children with autism, gay men, children with special needs, etc.
The scene of the violence	Family, school or educational institution, community, social media, and online
Perpetrators	Close people, acquaintance, family members, ordinary people in society who have never known each other before, including prisoners who have committed repeat offenses.
Consequences of acts of violence	Effects on physical, mental, mental conditions, emotions, feelings, and stigmas that are carried by the juveniles who have been affected.
Field of research	Psychology, sociology and anthropology, criminology, jurisprudence, social development, nursing, behavioral science, political science, and education, etc.

2. Youth victimization; the research found the following:

2.1 Physical violence such as domestic violence, and crime in educational institutions.

2.2 Psychological violence such as couple violence, bullying, and depression.

2.3 Sexual violence such as sexual harassment, sexual harassment in schools, being a victim of online sexual harassment, sexual abuse, rape, and child pornography.

2.4 Involving deprivation or neglect such as students dropping out of school, children with autism, children with ADHD, children and youth with special needs, and stigma of HIV infection.

Definition, type, form, and effects of violence

According to research conducted in 2016–2021, most research focuses on the specific issues of violence by defining and dividing the type of violence according to each problem. There are 13 issues that can be classified as follows: (1) Premature sex and teenage pregnancy; (2) depression and suicide; (3) game addiction; (4) quarrelling; (5) bullying; (6) gambling; (7) drug abuse and alcohol consumption; (8) sexual harassment; (9) domestic violence; (10) crime in educational institutions; (11) students dropping out of school; (12) children and youth with special needs and(13) stigma of HIV infection.

These studies define and specifically study the type and patterns of problem severity. They do not aim to define and classify what violence is and what its characteristics are, rather, they define and classify the characteristics of sub-problems such as what bullying is, what are juvenile quarrels, what are the characteristics of sexual harassment in schools, how many characteristics are there, etc. This demonstrates that juvenile violence studies focus on detailed issues rather than on the big picture.

However, the effects of the above violence include: (1) the impact on the juvenile body; (2) the impact on the mental state of children and youth; (3) the impact on the children and youth's family; (4) the impact on society and community, and (5) the impact on the education of children and young people.

Related organizations/suggestions according to the research

Research related to violence in children and young people is based on research recommendations to relevant agencies. These are grouped into seven sectors: (1) government; (2) families, (3) educational institutions, (4) public health agencies, (5) media, (6) legal agencies, and (7) private sector organizations.

In relation to the interaction of government policies or government operations towards policies to solve problems of children and youth, from the collection of information from Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations (2022), The Secretariat of the Senate (2019), Council (2020), UNICEF (2020), and International Labor Organization (2023), the following can be summarized: (1) Preparation and prevention: the government focuses on preparing and preventing problems for children and youth by preparing policies that focus on creating a healthy and safe environment for children and youth, such as: promoting the rights of children and youth, violence prevention, and providing family support and education for understanding and awareness of potential problems with children and youth; (2) Service and Care: the government plays an important role in providing and caring for children and youth in trouble by intermediating in the creation of a system to promote and support the provision of appropriate services, this may include aiding children and young people who are in emergency or at-risk situations; (3) Supervision and enforcement: the government has a role to play in supervision and compulsion to ensure good governance and safety for children and youth by providing relevant laws and regulations, such as: child protection act, managing troubled children and youth, and caring for children living with the elderly; (4) Educational support: the government focuses on supporting the education of children and youth by prioritizing access to education for everyone and providing the same opportunities for children and youth to learn and develop essential skills in society and (5) Building collaborative partnerships: the government has established partnerships with other sectors of society, such as private sector organizations, community groups, and police offices, to jointly solve problems related to children and youth.

However, these government actions to solve problems for children and youth may face problems such as: (1) Budget constraints: the government may have budget constraints to implement programs and activities related to children and youth. This may result in limitations in providing quality services for a sufficiently long period of time; (2) Consistency and policy compliance: there are inconsistencies and compliance issues with policies related to children and young people. This may result in imbalances and instability in the provision of solutions; (3) Defects in the system: in many cases, there may be deficiencies in the operating system, such as a shortage of personnel with specialized knowledge and skills to assist children and youth and lack of monitoring and evaluation of projects or problems in coordination between relevant departments and (4) Social and local issues: for example, difficulties in accessing services for children and youth living in remote areas or factors that hinder the government's efforts to solve child and youth problems.

These fixes may require operational system updates, the promotion of inter-agency cooperation and supporting adequate budgets to enable the government to effectively deliver high-quality solutions to children and youth problems. In addition, promoting social responsibility and participation of local networking groups and communities may also help to resolve such issues.

Discussion

When considering the concept of social protection according to the proposals of Unni and Rani (2003), in which stability consists of basic security, economic security, and social security, the risk of insecurity concerns mostly structural factors including age, gender, occupation status, level of education, etc., and unforeseen factors including unemployment, commodity prices, deaths, various accidents, etc. Social protection mechanisms should therefore focus on the "root cause" and "nature" of labour insecurity. In the informal economy, such covers both protection issues and promotion. "Protection" aims to avoid lowering the level of living standards that are in place when adverse events occur. "Promotion" is for raising standards, living, and supporting to be able to deal with the insecurities that arise from developing and learning.

Over the past six years (2016–2021), research on violence against children and youth has presented problems, causal analysis, and solutions, which are characterized by "protection" and "promotion" of child and youth development. However, the analysis of the causes of problems is often focused on the problem at the individual level rather than the cause at the level of the social structure. It does not cover all dimensions of social protection, which may be summarized as follows: (1) The study of violence is not popular overall, but rather the study of sub-issues, and study "violence" as a concept, rather than as a problem phenomenon such as teen pregnancy problems, gambling problems, drug problems, etc; (2) Almost all root analysis of the problem will be micro-analysis that focuses on individual-level causes such as a person's mental state, anxiety, carelessness, victim's curiosity to try, etc., rather than structural-level causes; (3) There is no suggestion for the private sector. In today's world, there are sections and concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that can connect social work without difficulty; (4) Government recommendations often mention "integration", but there appears to be little integration between agencies. This means that suggestions often lack clarity, are mainly aimed at social institutions, fail to identify the individuals involved, and remain abstract and intangible; (5) Most of the suggestions are guidelines for problem solving rather than preventing problems. The prevention approach comes out in the form of an educational campaign or creates public understanding, but often does not address protection at the structural level such as legislating in a way that prevents and prevented the problems and (6) Recommendations from relevant research.

There are three main relevant sectors that are linked to solving almost all problems of juvenile violence: (1) Government/government agencies; (2) families, parents and (3) educational Institutions, but public health agencies, and media are given priority. While the relevant research did not direct many recommendations to legal authorities and private sector organizations, there have been no recommendations for private/business organizations in past research.

Responses to government policies to solve problems and develop children and youth in the Child Protection Act B.E. 2546 (Office of the Council of State, 2003) and National Child and Youth Development Plan No. 2 2017–2021 (Department of Children and Youth, 2022) include the assessment report on the progress of implementation of the National Child and Youth Development Plan No. 2 B.E. 2017–2021 prepared by Srinakharinwirot University (2021). These three parts found that there is a corresponding key issue to establish a system of protection for children and youth in society that focuses on various related aspects so that children and youth are cared for and supported in all aspects of development according to their suitability and needs. However, knowledge and understanding of the role of government agencies in creating protection systems are enhanced. e.g., the provision of social and health services, prevention and troubleshooting of related problems, and relevant human resource development. It also emphasizes the importance of building cooperation between government agencies to coordinate and work together for systematic development of children and youth, this to create a sustainable society in the future.

If considered according to the concept of social protection, the National Child and Youth Development Plan No. 2 B.E. 2560–2021 has set guidelines and activities that focus on building a comprehensive child and youth protection system that is linked to the principles and standards of the Child Protection Act B.E. 2546. The duties and responsibilities of government agencies in the implementation of the Child and Youth Development Plan are clearly stated to promote and develop children and youth to grow up and reach their full potential in an equal society with equal opportunities to appropriate rights and protection. However, there are still some issues that need to be considered and solved, including: (1) Risk living: there are still several juveniles in situations at risk

of abuse or suffered, such as: infringement, improper operation, and use of drugs; (2) Access to education: there are still inequalities in access to education for children and young people, especially in the areas with difficult socio-economic conditions; (3) Impartiality and equality: there is still impartiality and equity in providing inadequate assistance and development to children and youth, some groups of children and youth from different areas or groups with special conditions have not received enough support and (4) System Strength: there is still a need to strengthen the juvenile protection system, both in terms of raising awareness and public education, building inter-agency cooperation and coordination, and the development of personnel with knowledge and ability to take care of and support children and youth appropriately, etc.

UNICEF's Social Protection Concept for Children and Youth Thailand at the level of major projects/activities found that: child support through the Newborn Child Care Subsidy Program is an important measure to support families and children at the beginning of life, but there are still some issues that should be considered and improved, such as: Terms and Conditions: there may be complex subsidy requirements and conditions or difficulties in reviewing and evaluating eligibility. As a result, some families who need support miss out. Travel efficiency: in some areas with long distances or difficult journeys, access to the Newborn Child Care Subsidy can be difficult and costly, as families may need time and resources to travel to receive the subsidy: (1) Equity and Inadequacy: impartiality and equitable access to subsidies for the care of inadequate newborn children, some families or groups with special conditions may not receive enough support or not receive such at all and (2) Difficulty in monitoring and control: in the process of providing subsidies for the care of newborn children, there may be difficulties such as: checking whether the subsidy amount has been used in an appropriate way, and checking the family's eligibility to receive subsidies, etc. Another important project is the 15-year free school quality program to maximize educational opportunities for children and youth in the country. It provides education at the elementary, upper elementary and junior high school levels, free of charge for all students over a period of 15 years, with an emphasis on quality and practical education. There may be some problems, however, such as: shortage of resources, imbalance of the quality of education, teaching quality issues, including access and equity.

Therefore, two important projects/activities related to social protection are a solution to the problem of violence in children and youth, and a solution to the problem of development in children and youth. However, such does not cover the problem of violence in other dimensions discovered in the search from the research on violence against children and youth during 2016–2021 mentioned in Part 2, such as: problems with premature sex and teenage pregnancy, depression and suicide, game addiction, controversy, bullying, gambling, drug abuse and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, crime in schools, and HIV stigma. The government's response to social protection is not yet comprehensive. The government must consider creating social protection in all dimensions in all aspects in order to develop and solve problems for children and youth.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

Based on findings in the literature relating to juvenile violence coupled with the concept of social protection, this research puts forward the following policy recommendations.

1. According to research, the problem of violence in children and young people is a phenomenon that is increasingly serious and wide-ranging, so it is necessary that this problem be seriously addressed by elevating the problem of juvenile prosperity to the national agenda to ensure that all departments become involved in preventing and solving problems. The government needs to assign host agencies to perform their information duties to gather information on the projects and budgets that each agency implements for children and youth and enable access and utilization of information for the development of children and young people.

2. According to research, Thailand currently has a social protection program. There are two enacted childcare programs: child welfare under the Social Security Act, and the free school policy. Therefore, both projects are considered social protection projects that the government should evaluate, monitor, and develop/improve existing social protection programs to achieve effective social protection for future expansion.

3. Update/enact social protection legislation into special legislation. This considers the elements of the offense different from the common law, for the prevention of potential incidents for juveniles. For example, there is a provision to control the punishment of persons whose behavior is a danger to children and youth, even though they have not yet caused any damage or danger to the children, in order to prevent misfortunes that may occur. In addition, legal authorities should study and improve laws to harder punish offenders for sex crimes and human trafficking, impose penalties on both buyers and sellers, particularly trafficking cases.

4. The government set up agencies and supported the budget to help children and youth in emergency situations such as orphaned, accidental, victim of crime. Help children and youth stay safe and provide a sufficient budget to survive for at least six months before forwarding assistance to other relevant agencies.

5. The government should oversee agencies/organizations/foundations that care for children and young women. There must also be a female executive/supervisor to supervise the prevention of sexual violence that may occur in the area.

6. Policy recommendations for children and young people of different ages.

6.1) Newborns up to two years old; it was found that almost all the problems of violence were due to factors such as the readiness of mothers and families. The focus is on solving the problems of young children, thus creating social protection for children, economic security, and social security.

6.2) Children aged 2–12 years; it was found that the majority of violence comes from the environment, family and community, so the following suggestions are:

(1) Develop child development centers to provide basic stability for children.

(2) Create safe spaces for families and communities.

6.3) Children aged 13 years and older; the problem of violence is mainly attributed to the family environment. Therefore, the following suggestions are:

(1) The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society and related agencies jointly build digital literacy skills for children, youth, and child caregivers.

(2) Build skills to protect themselves from social disasters.

Suggestions for Next Research

For the next study, emphasis should be placed on studying violence among children and youth in each dimension in order to strengthen understanding and permanently solve the problem. It is important to analyze and solve problems at the social structure level and promote public-private partnerships to jointly formulate policies and solve child and youth violence, including long-term follow-up.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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