



Policies for developing and promoting income-generating occupational groups for the elderly: Case Study of Sakon Nakhon Municipality, Thailand

Piyanoot Ruangpon[†], Thitawan Insaad^{*}

Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science, Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus, Sakon Nakhon, 47000, Thailand

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Abstract

This study examined the management of elderly occupational groups and the implementation of policies aimed at improving their quality of life by promoting employment. It also proposed guidelines to enhance policy implementation. A qualitative research approach was used, collecting data via in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. The findings showed that municipalities supported the formation of elderly groups to produce and sell goods. However, several challenges were identified, including the lack of cost accounting systems, absence of permanent sales locations, and limited marketing networks. Policy implementation through hierarchical structures resulted in reactive rather than proactive approaches by staff. Although municipalities provided materials and budgets, the lack of sales facilities hindered long-term sustainability. Despite some progress in promoting elderly employment, centralized policy frameworks created gaps in meeting the specific needs of elderly groups. To bridge these gaps, the study proposed guidelines focused on improving group management, strengthening policy implementation, and developing vocational training programs. This study also suggested encouraging collaboration among stakeholders, addressing implementation challenges, and supporting the sustainability and income-generating capacity of such groups.

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Introduction

The global demographic shift toward an ageing population is a major 21st-century challenge. Improved

health systems, socio-economic policies, and reduced fertility have boosted life expectancy, increasing the elderly population to 1.109 billion (14%) in 2023 (UN DESA, 2023). This global trend has national and local

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: thitawan.i@ku.th (Insaad, T.).

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implications, as seen in Thailand, now a complete ageing society, with 20.4 percent of its population classified as elderly in 2024 (Department of Older Persons, 2024). In response to this demographic transformation, the Thai government has implemented policies aimed at addressing the social and economic needs of its elderly population. The Thai Elderly Act of 2003 highlights the importance of promoting employment for the elderly through vocational training, job placement, and occupational support. Municipalities, as the primary local administrative units, are tasked with creating and implementing plans to enhance the elderly's quality of life by promoting employment and reducing economic dependency. In Sakon Nakhon Municipality, for example, the elderly population constitutes 20.1 percent of the total population, with many residents possessing the health and willingness to work but lacking access to sustainable employment opportunities (Bureau of Registration Administration, 2023).

Despite municipal efforts to establish occupational groups focused on such occupations as recycling crafts, sweet fermented rice production, and natural indigo-dyed fabric production, these initiatives face significant challenges. Limited knowledge, insufficient skills, and a lack of market access hinder the sustainability of these groups. Additionally, many elderly individuals face socio-economic vulnerabilities, including insufficient income and social isolation. These challenges highlight the urgent need for more effective municipal policies that address structural, operational, and resource-related gaps in supporting their employment.

This study of a suitable policy implementation framework is grounded in Chandarasorn's (2011) framework, which emphasizes the importance of organizational capacity, skilled personnel, adequate budgets, and appropriate resources in achieving policy objectives. The research also draws upon foundational human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961), which views the accumulated experience and skills of elderly individuals as valuable assets that can be leveraged to enhance their economic and social well-being. Building on these frameworks, the study integrates insights from research on elderly occupational groups (Kitatron et al., 2017) to propose practical guidelines for policy implementation.

While the Thai government and local municipalities have made strides in addressing elderly employment through policy initiatives, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of detailed understanding of the management structures and processes governing elderly occupational groups. Existing studies have largely

provided broad overviews, without offering in-depth analyses of internal dynamics such as leadership roles, resource allocation, or decision-making mechanisms (Kitatron et al., 2017). This study addresses this gap by critically analysing how these groups are organized and managed in Sakon Nakhon Municipality. Second, there is a limited body of research that applies established policy implementation models, such as Chandarasorn's (2011) framework, to municipal-level interventions for elderly employment. Although previous research has highlighted the importance of factors such as organizational capacity, personnel skills, and resource sufficiency, there has been insufficient exploration of the procedural aspects of policy implementation in practice. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how policies aimed at promoting elderly employment are translated into actionable programs at the local level, identifying misalignments between policy objectives and their operational realities. Third, despite the availability of recommendations for policy development at the national or regional level (Higgins et al., 2017; Siriwan, 2024), there is a notable absence of localized, practical implementation guidelines tailored to the socio-economic and cultural contexts of municipalities like Sakon Nakhon. While elderly occupational groups are a promising mechanism for promoting economic and social well-being, previous research has not provided sufficient evidence-based practical recommendations to enhance their sustainability. This study fills this gap by proposing clear, context-specific guidelines that municipal policymakers and practitioners can use to improve the quality of life of, and occupational opportunities for the elderly.

Building on the policy implementation framework and elderly occupational groups, this research focuses on analysing municipal policies and programs aimed at improving elderly employment opportunities. Specifically, the study addresses the following objectives:

1. To analyse the structure, processes, and challenges in managing elderly occupational groups in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.
2. To examine the implementation of policies for improving the quality of life of, and promoting occupational opportunities for, the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.
3. To propose guidelines for implementing policies to improve the quality of life of, and promote careers for, the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.

Literature Review

Policy implementation is the process of putting policies into action to achieve intended outcomes and benefit the public. It serves as a critical phase that connects policy formulation with practical application. Researchers emphasize the need to examine this process to ensure that policies are effectively carried out and meet their objectives.

This study adopts Chandarasorn's (2011) policy implementation model, which builds on concepts from Elmore (1978). The model highlights key factors for effective implementation, including a clear organizational structure, efficient decision-making, and strong communication systems. It also emphasizes the importance of skilled personnel, sufficient budgets, modern equipment, and accessible locations in order to support operations.

In addition, this study is grounded in human capital theory, introduced by Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961), which emphasizes the role of investing in education, skills, and health to enhance productivity and earnings. Applied to the elderly, this theory views their accumulated knowledge and experience as valuable human capital. Leveraging this capital through appropriate policies can enhance the economic and social well-being of elderly populations. However, challenges arise in utilizing and recognizing this capital in later life, which underscores the need for structured support programs.

A practical mechanism for promoting elderly employment is through elderly occupational groups, as described by Kitatron et al. (2017). These groups consist of community members collaborating to produce and sell products, sharing common goals, and operating within stable organizational structures. They

emphasize collective learning, shared responsibilities, and sustainable practices in order to promote economic and social stability. This framework integrates policy implementation models and elderly occupational groups to examine how municipal policies can better support elderly employment. It guides the evaluation of organizational capacity, resource allocation, and operational systems, helping to identify gaps and propose strategies to improve implementation at the local level.

Figure 1 shows the research framework used to study the implementation of policies aimed at promoting and developing occupations for the elderly to generate income in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.

Research on elderly employment and occupational programs increasingly emphasizes the role of municipal-level interventions and local policy implementation, particularly in Thailand and more broadly in Southeast Asia. These studies highlight the importance of structured programs to promote sustainable employment, social inclusion, and economic security for elderly populations.

In Thailand, Phukamchanoad (2024) examined municipal programs in Bangkok supporting elderly occupational groups. The study highlighted that income generation through community-driven product production and sales was facilitated by active community participation. These programs not only promoted economic sustainability but also strengthened social integration. The present research builds on Phukamchanoad's findings by investigating how local-level policies in Thai municipalities can further support elderly employment and improve livelihoods.

At the ASEAN regional level, Makapol (2018) conducted a study across six ASEAN countries examining job satisfaction factors in 239 elderly individuals. The findings revealed that work enjoyment, social engagement, and financial rewards significantly enhanced the elderly's

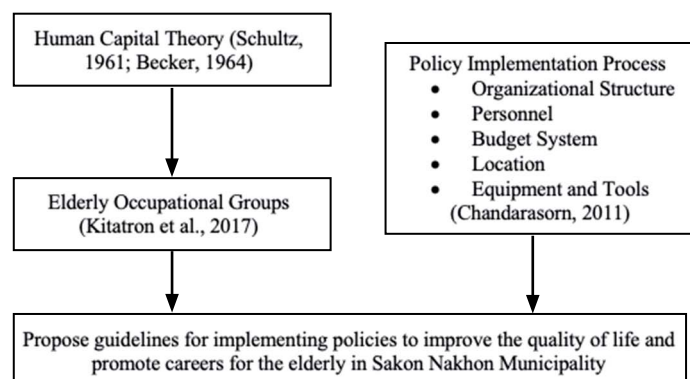


Figure 1 Research framework

quality of life and happiness in retirement. These results underscore the economic and social benefits of elderly employment, reinforcing the need for local-level policy implementation to address employment challenges and promote well-being. This study seeks to extend these insights to policy implementation at the municipal level in Thailand.

In addition, Higgins et al. (2017) analysed elderly employment policies in Singapore and South Korea. Singapore's age-friendly workplaces and South Korea's Elderly Job Bank emphasized structured programs that focus on skill-matching, job placement, and workplace adaptability. These models provide frameworks for sustainable employment which the present study adapts to address elderly employment challenges in Thai municipalities. Siriwan (2024) further examined South Korea's local government strategies, which focus on matching elderly workers with community-based jobs aligned with their skills and local needs. These strategies highlight the importance of developing tailored programs to enhance employment opportunities for elderly populations. This study applies similar principles to explore strategies for supporting elderly occupational groups in Thailand, particularly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.

Methodology

Research design

This qualitative research used purposive sampling to select five elderly occupational groups with ongoing production activities that have been supported by Sakon Nakhon municipality. These groups were chosen because they represented active community enterprises with formal organizational structures and demonstrated economic sustainability through continuous production.

Participants

This study included 29 key participants divided into two groups: 25 members of elderly occupational groups and 4 government officials. The study involved five groups, each consisting of five participants, for a total of 25 participants. These groups were selected from elderly occupational groups specializing in the following crafts: Natural indigo-dyed fabrics,

Souvenirs, Thai cemetery flowers, Brooms made from recycled plastic bottles, and sweet fermented rice. These groups were chosen because they represented

diverse products and operational models, offering a comprehensive perspective on elderly occupational group management. Participants were specifically selected based on their roles as leaders or active members actively engaged in the groups' operations and management, ensuring their ability to provide informed insights into group dynamics, challenges, and development needs. The second group consisted of four government officials, including one executive and three staff members from the municipality's Social Welfare Department. These officials were chosen for their direct involvement in overseeing policy implementation and program management related to elderly occupational groups. Their expertise and responsibilities enabled them to provide valuable insights into operational processes, barriers, and strategies for improving policy execution and supporting elderly occupational initiatives.

Research instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection: semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data in three key areas: group management, focusing on organizational structures, processes, and challenges in managing elderly occupational groups; product cost analysis, examining production processes, product details, and cost-efficiency aspects; and policy implementation, analyzing how policies are executed in practice. Observations, both participant and non-participant, were used to collect data on production activities, workflows, sales processes, and training programs. Finally, focus group discussions were employed to generate ideas and propose guidelines for improving policy implementation, with the goal of enhancing the elderly's quality of life and promoting their employment.

Reliability and Validity Measures

The data were verified using multiple strategies to ensure reliability and validity. Triangulation techniques (Cresswell, 2017) were employed by cross-checking data from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions to confirm accuracy and identify patterns. To ensure content validity and alignment with the study's objectives, the research instruments were reviewed by three experts—two in public administration and one in business administration—who confirmed that the tools were appropriate, relevant, and suitable for addressing the research goals. The experts achieved an

80 percent inter-rater agreement, indicating a high level of consistency in their evaluations. Participant checking was also conducted by presenting findings to participants for review, ensuring the results accurately reflected their perspectives and enhanced reliability and validity. Table 1 shows the coding and indexing procedures used to analyse the data, including the categorisation of themes, structure of conclusions, and validation through expert review to ensure reliability and validity.

Research procedures

Table 1 Analysis of data and reliability and validity checking

Research Objective	Coding & Indexing	Structure Conclusion	Validation and Practicality Assessment
1. To analyse the structure, processes, and challenges in managing elderly occupational groups in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.	1. Pre-coding: Categorized data into operations and challenges/obstacles. 2. Defined indexes based on relevant issues. 3. Field Notes: Recorded specific themes and patterns	Categorized data into themes, such as management and product distribution channels. Summarized findings focusing on gaps like local vs. online sales. Provided supporting quotations: "Our group focuses on direct sales because online platforms are not set up yet." – Thai cemetery flowers Group.	Expert Review: Three experts, 2 in Public Administration, 1 in Business Administration, reviewed the indexes for accuracy and consistency. Revised data based on feedback to ensure reliability.
2. To examine the implementation of policies aimed at improving the quality of life and promoting occupational opportunities for the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.	1. Pre-coding: Statements organized into factors affecting policy implementation and obstacles. 2. Defined indexes based on relevant issues. 3. Field Notes: Recorded specific themes and patterns	Categorized data based on policy implementation and challenges. Summarized findings emphasizing personnel competency and barriers to training and oversight. Supporting quotations: "There are not enough officials to oversee programs, leading to gaps in follow-up." – Head of Community Development Division.	Proposed data review by the group members, staff, director and relevant officials to verify accuracy and completeness. Presented findings in a meeting to gather feedback, suggestions, and additional input for revisions and improvements.
3. To propose guidelines for implementing policies to improve the quality of life and promote careers for the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.	1. Pre-coding: Indexed problems - Index of Problems and Obstacles in Management of Occupational Groups and Implementation of Policies and Index of Solutions to Implementation of Policies 2. Define indexes based on relevant issues problems, and 3. Field Notes: Recorded specific themes and patterns.	Categorized data into problems, obstacles, and solutions. Structured a development plan emphasizing online marketing strategies and targeted training. Supporting quotations: "Training on pricing and marketing strategies would reduce losses." – Member of Souvenir Group.	1. Proposed guidelines for implementing policies to promote occupations, with suggestions for improvements from focus group participants. 2. Focus group participants approved the proposed guidelines. 3. Executives included strategies for participatory monitoring and evaluation in the 2025 local development plan.

The research was conducted in a series of sequential steps to ensure a structured and thorough investigation. First, the study area and participants were chosen using purposive sampling, focusing on elderly occupational groups and relevant stakeholders. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process, with

ethical approval obtained from Kasetsart University (KUREC-CSC66/042) to ensure adherence to established research guidelines. Next, research instruments, including interview guides and observation protocols, were developed and validated by three experts to ensure their reliability and validity. These tools were carefully designed to capture meaningful data relevant to the study's objectives.

Data collection and engagement activities began with an initial training session on Occupational Development Training for Elderly Groups, conducted

by four government officials. Following the training, the officials participated in individual semi-structured interviews lasting 10–15 minutes each, during which they provided insights into five key aspects: organizational structure, personnel, budget, materials and equipment, and facilities. Afterward, the 25 participants engaged

in their respective groups to produce and manage their crafts. Approximately 2–3 weeks after the training, semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted individually with each participant, also lasting 10–15 minutes, to assess their progress, challenges, and group dynamics. Once the production phase was completed and the participants began distributing their products, focus group discussions were held. These discussions included two members from each of the five groups (10 participants in total) and two government officials. The focus groups were designed to explore in-depth perspectives on the processes, challenges, and potential improvements in the operations of elderly occupational groups. Finally, the collected data were systematically coded to identify patterns and themes. These patterns were categorized to enable the researchers to draw conclusions and interpret findings based on the participants' experiences and the operational context of the elderly occupational groups.

Results

Structure, Processes, and Challenges in Managing Elderly Occupational Groups in Sakon Nakhon Municipality.

In order to answer Research Question 1, the findings are discussed in five key areas: group structure and establishment, production processes, marketing practices, financial management and product costs, and the challenges of elderly occupational groups.

Group Structure and Establishment

The elderly occupational groups in Sakon Nakhon Municipality were initiated and supported by the municipal Social Welfare Department in line with the municipality's policy for elderly development. These groups adopted a flat organizational structure aimed at promoting collaboration and shared decision-making among members. Key roles included those of the president, vice president, treasurer, marketing coordinators, and committee members, ensuring clear task distribution and operational efficiency. This structure emphasizes equal participation and collective management, which supported group sustainability while reducing reliance on centralized authority.

Production processes.

The production processes of these groups utilized a combination of traditional skills and newly acquired techniques from training programs facilitated by the

municipality. Members employed existing skills, such as indigo dyeing, fermented rice-making, and crafting souvenirs, while also learning new techniques like pattern design for indigo fabrics, broom-making from plastic bottles, and crafting cemetery flowers.

"The provided tools are unsuitable for making brooms, so we must purchase specialized wire-cutting pliers ourselves, increasing production costs."

(Chairperson of the Plastic Bottle Broom Group, That Dum Community, April 30, 2024)

This approach reflects the integration of lifelong learning and continuous skill development to sustain economic activities while addressing practical challenges such as tool shortages and cost inefficiencies.

Marketing practices

In terms of marketing practices, product distribution relied heavily on direct sales channels through community markets, municipal events, and study visits organized by the municipality. However, the absence of online marketing platforms limited opportunities to expand market reach and boost sales. These findings emphasize the need for training in online marketing and digital tools to modernize sales approaches and expand market access beyond local events.

Financial management and product costs

The findings reveal that elderly occupational groups share profits from sales among members. However, there is no systematic record of product costs, and cost summaries are prepared only after sales occur. Pricing decisions rely on estimations and competitor comparisons before finalizing prices. Regarding accounting practices, no clear system is in place. Analysing the production costs and profitability of the groups shows that the Thai cemetery flower group demonstrates the highest profitability, with a net profit margin of 10.1 percent based on production costs and 52.4 percent on net sales. This indicates low production costs and high value-added products. The Khao Mak, Souvenirs, and Natural Indigo-Dyed Fabric groups show moderate profitability levels. Their net profit margins based on production costs are 89.6 percent, 42.9 percent, and 21.7 percent, respectively. All three groups generated adequate income and profits. The Broomsticks from Plastic Bottles group, however, experienced the highest losses, with a net profit margin of -64.2 percent based on production costs and -179.0 percent on net sales.

"We need more advanced training topics, such as pricing strategies and cost-profit analysis, as the current

sessions repeat basic content.”

(Member of Khao Mak Group, Nongsanom, April 30, 2024)

Challenges of Elderly Occupational Groups

The study identified several challenges in the management of elderly occupational groups. One major issue is budget constraints, as there is insufficient funding to support group activities and further development. Additionally, the groups face a lack of technological knowledge, limiting their ability to utilize modern tools and platforms essential for business operations. Another significant challenge is the lack of advertising and online sales channels, which restricts their ability to reach broader markets and attract more customers. Furthermore, the groups do not have permanent sales locations, forcing them to rely heavily on trade fairs or fulfilling special orders, which affects their consistency in generating income and sustaining growth.

Implementation of Policies to Improve the Quality of Life and Promote Elderly Occupations in Sakon Nakhon Municipality

This section addresses Research Question 2, which examines the implementation of policies aimed at improving the quality of life of, and promoting occupational opportunities for, the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality. The findings focus on key areas of implementation, including organizational structure, personnel, budget allocation, materials and equipment, and facilities. These aspects highlight both strengths and challenges in policy implementation, providing insights into gaps and areas for improvement.

Organizational Structure

The Social Welfare Department oversees municipal policies aimed at improving the quality of life and promoting elderly occupations under the Local Development Plan (2023–2027). The structure includes four departments: social welfare promotion, community development, social work, and general administration. The Community Development Department handles elderly occupational promotion, supervised by the division director. The hierarchical system ensures oversight but limits decision-making flexibility among operational staff.

“The staff responsible for occupational promotion

are insufficient, leading to oversight of some tasks or lack of close monitoring.”

(Head of Community Development, 12 February 2024)

Personnel

Personnel are divided into three levels: executive, management, and operational. Executives supervise and monitor policy implementation, managers plan and develop elderly occupational groups, and operational staff handle training and evaluation. However, limited numbers of staff, strict regulations, and overlapping responsibilities hinder proactive approaches, data collection, and innovation.

Budget

The budget revealed that the Social Welfare Division received a budget of 230,000 baht for the year 2023 to organize vocational training programs, such as indigo dyeing, fermented rice production, souvenir crafting, and broom-making from plastic bottles. However, the allocation process had to be conducted under strict governmental regulations. Most of the budget was allocated for speaker fees, refreshments, and training day materials, which had to strictly adhere to predefined expense categories. As a result, the budget could not be used for other purposes related to the development of occupational groups, limiting its use exclusively to organizing training sessions.

“The budget disbursement regulations, which clearly define the scope of budget usage, require officials to plan activities and projects in strict compliance with these regulations. This lack of flexibility makes it difficult to address the specific needs of occupational groups, such as organizing new activities.”

(Social Welfare Division official, Sakon Nakhon Municipality, April 30, 2024)

Materials and Equipment

The Social Welfare Department provided basic materials and tools for training programs. However, groups had to fund replacing consumable materials by themselves, and some equipment, such as certain broom-making tools, were unsuitable, negatively impacting productivity.

Facilities

Training facilities were divided into two levels. At the municipal level, multi-purpose buildings and elderly centres supported training, visitor receptions, and product sales 2–3 times per month. At the community level, local homes, pavilions, and learning centres were used for production and storage. While these facilities were accessible and adequate, the lack of permanent sales locations limited opportunities for ongoing product sales. *“The lack of permanent sales locations remains a major obstacle, limiting sales opportunities to special events or municipal fairs.”*

(Municipal Administrator, 2 April 2024)

Policy Implementation Analysis

The findings reveal gaps between policy design and implementation. Although the policies provide a comprehensive framework, challenges include limited numbers of personnel dedicated to the elderly occupational programs, insufficient budgets to support training expansions and post-training activities, and a lack of consistent monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

Guidelines for Implementing Policies to Improve the Quality of Life and Promote Careers for the Elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality

This section addresses Research Question 3, which focuses on proposing guidelines to improve policy implementation for promoting occupational opportunities for the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality. The findings are organized into three key areas based on data collected through the focus groups and interviews with the elderly participants and municipal staff.

Development of Elderly Occupational Group Management Systems

Enhancing sales channels and marketing.

Elderly occupational groups expressed the need for better sales opportunities to increase their income levels. Recommendations to address this included establishing a product distribution centre at the Elderly Quality of Life Development Center to serve as a central hub for showcasing and selling products. Additionally, organizing Elderly Markets 1–2 times per month at the centre would provide regular opportunities for sales and community engagement. To further support income

generation, launching a *Mentor Shops* program was proposed. This program would offer advisory services and consignment sales areas, enabling elderly groups to receive expert guidance while expanding their market reach.

“If the municipality helps set up permanent sales spaces, it will increase the income and make our products more widely known.”

(Focus Group Participant, March 1, 2024)

Strengthening network organizations.

To reduce costs and improve collaboration, the elderly groups proposed forming a network organization under the brand name ‘Sakon Nakhon Municipality Elderly Occupational Groups’, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This network would promote partnerships between related groups, such as using indigo-dyed fabric from one group to produce souvenirs in another, allowing them to share raw materials and lower production costs while enhancing efficiency and productivity.

“If our group can collaborate with others, such as that using indigo fabric to make souvenir bags, it will lower material costs.”

(Focus Group Participant, March 1, 2024)

Improving cost and profit management.

The elderly groups emphasized the need for financial management systems to accurately track profits and costs. Recommendations included developing templates for cost logs and profit-and-loss records to standardize financial tracking. Additionally, it was recommended that training sessions should be provided to ensure groups can effectively use these templates. To further support implementation, it was proposed to assign support staff to assist with financial tracking and provide ongoing guidance to maintain accurate and transparent records.

Organizational Capacity Development

Budget management efficiency

The municipal budget was mainly allocated to instructors and refreshments, resulting in insufficient funds for materials and post-training support. Recommendations included reallocating budgets to prioritize essential materials and tools, as well as reducing non-essential expenses to improve funding efficiency and better support elderly occupational programs.

Enhancing staff capacity

Municipal staff operated reactively due to limited data

and planning tools. Recommended strategies to improve efficiency included collecting data on group incomes, management, and skills in order to inform policies using a Data-Driven Strategy. Additionally, it was recommended that implementing After Action Reviews (AAR) could help refine plans and training programs based on lessons learned, ensuring continuous improvement and better outcomes.

Equipment and material support.

Groups faced challenges with unsuitable equipment and material shortages, which limited productivity. Recommendations included developing request forms to specify equipment needs, conducting annual surveys and focus group meetings to assess requirements, and delivering customized equipment tailored to each group's needs in order to improve efficiency and outcomes.

Development of Elderly Vocational Training Programs

Current training programs relied heavily on lectures rather than hands-on activities, limiting skill development and income generation. Participants requested more practical training to address these gaps. Recommendations include conducting needs assessments to design targeted training, shifting focus to practical workshops, and partnering with experts and universities through MOUs to provide specialized training and mentorship. Additionally, monitoring outcomes is suggested to evaluate training effectiveness and guide improvements.

"If we receive training on marketing and pricing strategies, it will help us a lot. Currently, we just estimate prices ourselves, which sometimes leads to losses."

(Focus Group Participant, March 1, 2024)

The proposed guidelines emphasize practical strategies to improve policy implementation for occupational development for the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality. These strategies focus on enhancing sales channels, building networks, improving financial management, reallocating budgets, strengthening staff capacity, and modernizing training programs. By addressing gaps identified through qualitative data, the recommendations provide a localized framework tailored to the needs of the elderly. These steps aim to enhance income generation, promote career development, and support sustainable livelihoods for municipal occupational groups for the elderly.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the policies and implementation aimed at developing and promoting income-generating occupational groups for the elderly in Sakon Nakhon Municipality. By examining the findings across key areas, namely, group structure and establishment, production processes, marketing practices, financial management, and challenges, this section discusses how these results align with existing frameworks and literature on policy implementation and employment of the elderly.

Management of Elderly Occupational Groups

The grouping of elderly occupational groups in Sakon Nakhon Municipality is promoted by the municipality itself. The operational structure emphasizes grouping elderly individuals to produce and sell handicrafts and locally made products such as fermented rice (*khao mak*), indigo-dyed fabric, brooms made from plastic bottles, and sandalwood cemetery flowers. These elderly occupational groups adopt a horizontal organizational structure focusing on production, marketing, finance, and production costs under the supervision of the municipal Social Welfare Department. Despite the progress in implementing policies to improve the quality of life and promote elderly employment, several challenges remain. These include a lack of formal production cost accounting, the absence of clear bookkeeping practices, no permanent sales locations, and insufficient marketing and sales networks (Jaengsawang et al., 2023; Pimtha et al., 2023).

Policy Implementation for Elderly Employment Promotion

Sakon Nakhon Municipality implements policies based on Thailand's national development strategies, which focus on promoting elderly employment. The municipality follows a top-down approach, where the policies of the Ministry are implemented through annual action plans or function-area plans. Although the elderly employment promotion policy has shown progress, with elderly groups continuing production, gaps persist in efficiently translating policy formulation into implementation. The hierarchical organizational structure restricts the decision-making power of frontline personnel, resulting in reactive rather than proactive actions. Project monitoring is inconsistent,

budget allocation is imbalanced, and comprehensive support for occupational groups is lacking. Additionally, there is no permanent marketplace for selling products. Chandarasorn (2012) highlights that organizational structures, budget constraints, personnel capabilities, and the adequacy of resources and facilities affect policy implementation. The top-down approach often fails to align with the specific needs of elderly groups, as noted by Wattho (2020). Thai policies emphasize developing new skills for elderly workers and promoting group-based productivity, whereas international approaches focus on utilizing existing skills and tailoring programs to local contexts. For instance, Japan empowers local authorities to design and implement plans in collaboration with communities, ensuring that policies effectively address localized needs. Similarly, Singapore promotes elderly employment through structured programs that encourage workforce participation and the utilization of seniors' existing skills. Likewise, South Korea operates an 'Elderly Job Bank' scheme, where local governments match elderly individuals with suitable jobs within their communities, enabling seniors to continue contributing based on their prior experience and expertise (Higgins et al., 2017; Siriwan, 2024). Although Thai municipal operations do align with central policies, they fail to address localized needs effectively.

Recommendations for Policy Improvement

To bridge the gap between policy design and implementation, a bottom-up approach should complement the existing top-down approach to promote elderly employment (Karim, 2023). The resulting *Hybrid Implementation Policy* (Elmore, 1985) encourages collaboration across administrative levels, balancing central directives with local needs. Proposed strategies include strengthening organizational management structures and accounting systems through group management development, improving communication between central authorities and local officials to increase decision-making flexibility as part of policy implementation enhancement, and providing training programs aligned with elderly skills and local market demands through vocational training activities. The municipal Social Welfare Department can integrate these strategies into local development plans and annual operational plans. This approach reduces gaps in policy implementation, ensuring integrated public policy design while supporting elderly occupational groups at the grassroots level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the management of elderly occupational groups and the implementation of policies aimed at improving their quality of life and promoting employment. The findings highlight that forming occupational groups offers both economic and psychological benefits by generating incomes and fostering a sense of pride and self-worth in elderly individuals. These initiatives empower participants and enhance their overall well-being. However, this study faced limitations in fully evaluating the long-term impact of policy implementation on career promotion due to time constraints, which restricted data collection to a single fiscal year.

Despite the progress made, challenges remain in policy implementation, including limitations in group management, vocational training programs, and access to sustainable resources. Addressing these issues requires greater flexibility in policy design and implementation, ensuring alignment with local needs and contexts. Collaboration with educational institutions and the private sector can further strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives.

The municipality has promoted the formation of elderly occupational groups through a Top-down policy approach, focusing on group activities to produce goods and generate income. However, this centralized approach created a gap between policy formulation and implementation, as it failed to reflect the actual needs of the elderly. At the occupational group level, challenges in management undermined group sustainability. At the municipal level, limited staff decision-making authority and a focus on meeting policy indicators, rather than initiating innovative activities, hindered effective support. Additionally, the absence of permanent sales locations deprived the groups of consistent product distribution channels, leading to unsustainable income.

To address these challenges, the study recommends adopting a Hybrid Approach, integrating Top-down and Bottom-up strategies. This approach would allow the elderly to actively participate in project design, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes, ensuring that policy execution aligns with the specific needs of the target groups and enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of elderly occupational groups.

Policy Recommendations

The Ministry of the Interior should empower local

administrative organizations to play a more active role in designing plans, projects, and performance indicators that directly address the specific needs of local elderly occupational groups. Decentralized planning will ensure policies are responsive to local contexts and priorities.

Practical Recommendations

Local administrative organizations should adopt participatory approaches, enabling elderly individuals to actively contribute to shaping programs and activities that support elderly employment. Encouraging collaboration with educational institutions and private sector partners can enhance vocational training and create sustainable income-generating opportunities.

Research Recommendations

Future studies should focus on policy evaluation, particularly analyzing the economic impacts of initiatives promoting elderly employment and improving the quality of life. These studies should provide evidence-based insights to further refine and enhance policies and practices. This integrated approach ensures that policies are practical, inclusive, and sustainable, ultimately fostering the well-being and income-generation potential of elderly occupational groups.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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