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Kanchanaburi Province**

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**International Conference  
on  
“Happiness and Public Policy”**

Organized by Public Policy Development Office (PPDO)

United Nations Conference Center (UNCC)  
Bangkok, Thailand  
18-19 July 2007

## **Thai Youth Happiness: Evidences from Kanchanaburi Province**

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**Abstract:** Thai youths have faced economical and technological development without moral and happiness development, which can lead to many youth problems.

Misunderstanding on youth happiness makes Thai youth problems more severe. The question of “What things provide the youth happiness?” is needed to discover for policy planning related with happiness of youth. This study aims to explore factors affecting Thai youth happiness in Kanchanaburi province, which is the field site of the project “Happiness Indicator: Western Region Study in Thailand” provided by the Institution for Population and Social Research of Mahidol University, 2005. Eleven-scales from 0 to 10 were used to assess the happiness levels. The results showed\ educational level, marital status, relative economic well-being, and psychological well-being have influenced on level of Thai youth happiness. Policy planning of happiness should be concentrated on universal education, family relationship, and also sufficiency economic paradigm to increase Thai youth happiness.

**Keyword:** Thai youth, happiness

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, Thai youths, 15-24 years of age, have grown in the period of globalization, which concentrates on economic and technological development. These developments have been operated to increase the level of quality of life among people without the moral and happiness development. As a result of developments, Thai youths faced with numerous problems, especially their behavioral problems, which can observe from news in many mass media. The examples of Thai youth problems include sexual behavior, game and internet addiction, fighting, school drop-out, football gambling, teenage pregnancy, drug use, and also suicide. These problems can be denoted that the situation of Thai youth happiness is severely occurred.

Youth is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood; biological, cognitive, and social transition (Steinberg, 1996). Changing in youth leads them to be negatively labeled that they make a lot of troubles to the society. Misleading understanding on youth changing and happiness leads to the inefficient implementation and policy, making Thai youth problem more severe. Thus, answering the question about “What things provide the youth happiness?” is needed to explore in Thai context.

Normally, happiness is the mental condition of individuals referred to the better mental health and also the individual life's quality. Many researchers, especially psychologists, try to measure the happiness of individuals through the scale-measurement and many of them were more likely to measure in terms of “degree of satisfaction” “hope” and “attitude” (Diener, 1984; Meadow et al., 1992; Huebner, 1995). Additional, happiness can be referred as the psychological well-being for the people in the society or national level by using many prospects and indirect measurement.

Different population age groups have different happiness. It was found that the circumstances that make people happy change with age. For example, financial security and health are important or happiness later in life, whereas, for younger adults, success at school or work and satisfying intimate relationships are important for happiness. However, many studies of youth happiness were done in developed nations (Conger and Petersen, 1984; Grob et al., 1991; Huebner et al., 2000). Youth happiness should be studied in the context of developing countries. Thailand is the South-east Asian country that can represent the developing countries.

Kanchanaburi is one of the provinces in central region of Thailand, which composes of various population and geography. This province is the study area of the project “Happiness Indicator: Western Region Study in Thailand” conducted by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University. This study selects the sample of 346 youths, 15-24 years old, who live in Kanchanaburi province. Many aspects were considered as the determinant of happiness, including the economical well-being, household physical environment well-being, physical health well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being, and moral and spiritual values. Thus, this study aims to explore the factors influencing Thai youth happiness. The results were expected to provide the appropriate way to consider for the policy related with youth and their happiness.

### **STUDY OBJECTIVES**

1. To study the characteristics of Thai youths in the Kanchanaburi province.
2. To explore the factors affecting Thai youth happiness in Kanchanaburi province.

### **THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH**

Youth refers to those aged below twenty-five years, according to the National Youth Policy and the United Nations definition (ESCAP, 2000). There are three features of adolescent development that gives the period its special flavor and significance: (1) the onset of puberty, (2) the emergence of more advanced thinking abilities, and (3) the transition into new roles in society. They are changes that occur universally, all adolescents in every society go through them (Steinberg, 1996). Although all adolescents experience the transitions of the period, the effects of these changes are not uniform for all young people due to the different contexts. Many pieces of evidence provide contexts of youth life that affect youth development. Steinberg (1996) considered four contexts; families, peer groups, schools, work and leisure, while Santrock (1996) added culture as the context to be considered. In Thai context, researchers provides five realms; family, education, health, work, and leisure (Soonthorndhada et al., 2005). The detail of contexts of youth quality of life can be described as below:

**1. Families:** Families are the first context of population that has a major role for rearing, supporting, and socializing the children. The family changing have directly effected to children well-being (Steinberg, 1996).

**2. Peer Groups and School:** Youth in modern society spend a remarkable amount of time with their peers. Studies show that a youth's moods are most positive when they are with their friends, and that time spent with friends become more rewarding over the course of youth (Larson, 1983; Larson and Richards, 1991). Schools also play an extremely important role in structuring the nature of youth in modern society (Steinberg, 1996). At School, children learn rules, discipline, homework and also socialization process.

**3. Working and Leisure:** The participation of youth in the world of work has gone through a number of dramatic economic and social changes during the past 100 years. The majority of American teenagers hold part-time jobs during the school years due to the rising of compulsory schooling. In developing countries, where industrialization is still in a relatively early stage and a large percentage of the population is poor, youth generally leave school early. In these countries, most youths enter full-time employment and work for their families (Steinberg, 1996). For leisure activities, these are the activities without or outside school and work. In United States, leisure occupies more of a youth's time than do school and work combined (Steinberg, 1996). Leisure activities can socialize youth for adult roles and may enhance a youth's well-being and strengthen their attachment to school.

## **THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS**

Happiness concept is not the new thing, it has been discussed since Aristotle era in term of "eudaimonia", which concern about moral and developed to be "happiness" by numerous Western philosophers. Although many philosophers and psychologists have speculated about the roots of happiness for centuries, the scientific study of happiness is relatively recent.

Happiness can mean several different things. It can refer to people's overall evaluation of their own lives, or momentary feelings of pleasantness. Researchers sometimes prefer to use the term subjective well-being, which refers to a combination of life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and low negative affect. Happiness defined by Bradburn (1967) as the different between positive and negative affect. Some researchers suggest that happiness is not only related to present and recent past events,

but also to expected or hoped for positive events (Costra and MaCray, 1980; Diener, 1984; Staats and Stassen, 1985).

Researchers conceive happiness in two complementary ways: (1) in terms of a judgment that life is satisfying and (2) in terms of the predominance of positive compared with negative emotions in one's life (Diener, 2000). Several questionnaire measures are widely used in surveys and other research. In 1965, Bradburn and Caplovitz developed a ten items true/false inventory a positive and negative affect score and the difference between these two scales creates a third score called "affect balance". While Andrew and Withey, 1976, developed the D-T scale- Delight at one end to Terrible at the other. This scale explained the people feel about their happiness level. Another researcher named Cutter (1985) developed a conceptual model of quality of life elements and each dimension of quality of life could be measured objectively or could be based on a subjective evaluation reflecting the population's self-image of well-being.

For answer the question about "Who is happy?", it was difficult to exactly identify that who are happier than others. Some researches provide that there was no difference between male and female happiness. Inglehart (1990) concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that any one time of life was happier than any other. However, many evidences suggest the factors affecting the happiness and subjective well-being. Some of factors that affect the happiness can be shown as the following:

**1. Family relationship:** Different in family situation cause a huge different in happiness. Frey and Stutzer (2003) pointed that there is always the risk that less happy people are more likely to get divorced. However, happiness depends on the time of getting divorced, before divorce is worse but the year after divorce male return on average to their average level of happiness, but women continue to suffer (Lucas et al., 2003).

**2. Work:** Work provides not only income but also extra meaning to life. The German Socio-Economic Panel shows that a given person the pain of unemployment is high and it is bad to be out of the labour force (Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 1998).

**3. Community and friend:** Social capital refers to the quality of the community (Putnam, 2000). The social capital is crucial for whether we make friends and how safe we feel, which related with happiness.

**4. Physical health:** Not surprisingly, bad health is negatively correlated with happiness. Health problems that prevent people from engaging in life's everyday activities or from caring for themselves have the greatest impact on lowering life satisfaction (Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman, 1978). However, it is important to note that low subjective well-being might lead to bad health in terms of getting sick more often.

**5. Income:** Many pieces of evidence attempted to explore the relationship between income and happiness. For macro level, the answer seems to be that wealthier countries do indeed have higher average level of life satisfaction than poorer countries (Myers and Diener, 1995). For micro level, there were many evidences conclude that absolute economic well-being has related with the people's happiness, but also relative economic well-being, the economic position, influences the happiness (Solnick and Hemenway, 1998; Pingle and Mitchell, 2002).

## **METHOD**

Dataset of "Happiness Indicator: Western Region Study in Thailand" conducted by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2005, was used to investigate factors of well-being influencing on Thai youth happiness. The objective of the project emphasized on the happiness indicator construction. This dataset collected the population who was more than 15 years old in Kanchanaburi and Chainat province, provinces in Western Region, Thailand. In Kanchanaburi province, data from 4,594 populations in 1,440 households have been collected. There were 346 youths in 346 households used as samples in this study, representing for each household due to preventing selection bias.

To assess information on happiness in this study, one single question was used: "In general, how do you feel about your life at present?" Score range from 0 to 10 was defined from "Not happy at all" to "Very happy". Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the model that have level of happiness, interval scale, as a dependent variable. The models were separated to be male and female models.

Independent variables in this study include (1) Demographic factors: age, marital status, educational level, working status, family structure, household size, residential area; (2) Economic well-being factors: material of housing, numbers of types of assets, type of drinking water, type of toilet, comparative economic status; (3) Household physical environment well-being factor: score of household physical

environment; (4) Physical health factors: physical health, smoking behavior, alcohol drinking behavior, exercise behavior (5) Psychological well-being factor: score of emotion; (6) Social well-being factor: score of social well-being; (7) Moral and spiritual values: score of attitude about moral and spiritual among Thai people.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THAI YOUTH IN KANCHANABURI PROVINCE**

Table 1 report the characteristics of sample separated by male and female. There are more females than males in this study. More than half of the males belong to the younger age group (15-19 years old) and more than half of the females belong to the older age group (20-24 years old). Females are more likely to get married and also to get widowed, divorced, and separated than males. Most of the youths have a lower secondary school level (38.7% in males and 39.7% in females) and very few youths have no education at all. More than half of the males are working, while most of the females have no working experience. Completed nuclear family is the most occurred family structure in Kanchanaburi province. Nearly 27 percent of males have single-parent family, both nuclear and extended family. Females tend to live in extended families more than males. About 70 percent of youths in the Kanchanaburi province are living in rural areas. Female youths are more likely to live in urban areas than male youths.

Considering the comparative thinking about economic status with neighbor among youth, nearly half of them think that their economic status is richer than neighbors, while one-tenth of them think that they are poorer than neighbors. About their physical health well-being, a higher number of males get sick during one month more than females, 18.7% and 86.9% respectively. Males also have more health risk behavior such as smoking and drinking alcohol. Nearly 40 percent of males have ever smoked cigarettes before, while only 2.6 percent of females smoke. More than half of the percentage of males drink alcoholic beverage while only 11 percent of females drink. For exercise behavior, about 65 percent of males have current exercise, while only 33 percent of females have current exercise.

Most of households in Kanchanaburi province are using permanent material such as brick, cement, and wood. Only 7 percent of them are using non-permanent material. When considering drinking water, most of them use rain water (40%) as the main source of drinking water.



**Table 1: General Characteristics of the Sample (Categorical variables)**

	Variables	Percentage	
		Male	Female
Age group	15-19	63.9	46.1
	20-24	36.1	53.9
	Total	100.0	100.0
	(Amount)	(155)	(191)
Marital status	Single	87.7	57.6
	Married	11.6	39.3
	Widow/divorced/separated	0.6	3.1
	Total	100.0	100.0
Educational level	No education	0.6	4.2
	Primary school	32.3	22.5
	Lower secondary school	38.7	39.8
	Upper secondary school and higher	28.4	33.5
	Total	100.0	100.0
Working status	Not working	44.5	55.0
	Working	55.5	45.0
	Total	100.0	100.0
Family structure	Completed nuclear family	49.7	53.9
	Single-parent nuclear family	18.7	11.5
	Completed extended family	9.7	18.3
	Single-parent extended family	8.4	7.9
	Grandparent-headed households with no parent present	4.5	2.1
	Other family structure	9.0	6.3
	Total	100.0	100.0
Residential area	Urban	27.1	33.0
	Rural	72.9	67.0
	Total	100.0	100.0
Comparative thinking about economic status with neighbor	Poorer than neighbor	10.7	10.2
	Same as neighbor	40.7	42.0
	Richer than neighbor	48.6	47.7
	Total	100.0	100.0
Sickness in the past one month	Yes	18.7	13.1
	No	81.3	86.9
	Total	100.0	100.0
Smoking behavior	Not smoke	61.3	97.4
	Smoke	38.7	2.6
	Total	100.0	100.0
Alcohol drinking behavior	Not drinking	41.9	89.0
	Drinking	58.1	11.0
	Total	100.0	100.0
Current exercise behavior	Not currently exercise	34.2	66.5
	Currently exercise	65.8	33.5
	Total	100.0	100.0
Material of housing	Not permanent material		7.2
	Permanent material		92.8
	Total		100.0

Source of drinking water	Tap water	18.2
	Underground water	5.2
	Rain water	40.2
	Bottled water	36.4
	Total	100.0

Table 2 provides the description of interval variables. Score of psychological well-being given into score ranges from 0 to 14, it can be found that males have higher average scores of psychological well-being than females, however, the psychological well-being score is quite high. The score of social well-being ranges from 0 to 8, the average score is quite high. Males have higher scores than females. The score of attitude about moral and spiritual issues among Thai people given into scores ranging from 0 to 24, it can be observed that thoughts about moral and spiritual issues among Thai people is not much good, with males giving the higher score than females.

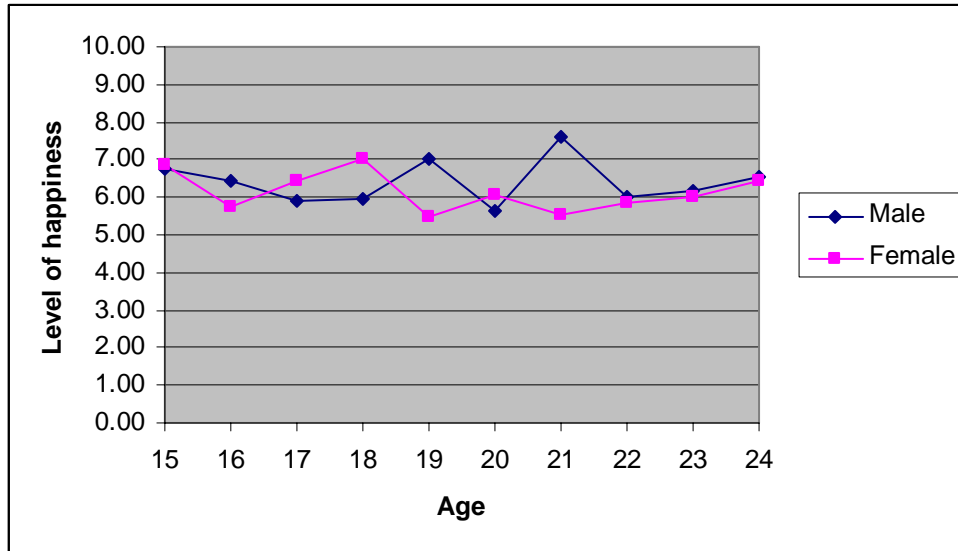
Average household size in Kanchanaburi province is about 4 persons per household. Average numbers of type of asset in household is about 10 types from total 33 types, which identified by the questionnaire. The score of household physical environment well-being given by scores ranging from 0 to 22, it can be found that the average score is 17.6, meaning that the household environmental well-being among the households in Kanchanaburi province is quite high.

**Table 2: General Characteristics of Sample (Interval variables)**

Variables	Mean	
	Male	Female
Score of psychological well-being (score 0-14)	11.0	10.1
Score of social well-being (score 0-8)	6.3	6.2
Score of attitude about moral and spiritual among Thai people (score 0-24)	15.3	14.5
Household size	3.9	
Numbers of type of asset (33 types)	10.2	
Score of Household physical environment well-being (score 0-22)	17.6	

About dependent variables of this study, level of Thai youth happiness, it can be found that the average level of male happiness is 6.35 which are a little bit higher than females, which equals to 6.11. When considering happiness levels by age and sex, trends of happiness are quite fluctuated in the younger youth age groups and quite different between males and females. When age increases to 22-24, trends of happiness are not as fluctuated and there is not much difference between males and females, meaning that older youth age groups are nearing adulthood and therefore there is not much fluctuation in emotion.

**Figure 1: Average Level of Thai Youth Happiness by Sex in Kanchanaburi province**



### **FACTORS AFFECTING THAI YOUTH HAPPINESS**

As a literature review, it can be denoted that happiness of population has been affected by many factors and happiness can be assessed in the various ways. Multiple linear regression was carried out to analyze the factors that affected Thai youth happiness and its dependent interval variables. Male and female happiness have been separated to analyze. Also, each sex has two sets of variables for analyzing into 2 models; demographic variables are initial sets for model 1 and added with the well-being variables in model 2.

In table 2, on the model 1 of males, it can be found that the demographic variables such as marital status and educational level influences on male happiness. Males who are widowed, divorced, or separated tend to have less happiness than single males. Higher education has positively affected male happiness. Males who studied in lower secondary schools have more happiness than those who only have educational experience in primary school.

When the factors of well-being have been added in model 2 of males, the demographic variables of marital status and educational level are also associated with male happiness. Widowed, divorced, or separated males have lower level of happiness

than single males. Higher educated males have higher levels of happiness than lower educated male. Well-being variables of comparative thinking about economical status with neighbor, scores of psychological well-being, smoking behavior, and current exercise behaviors have influenced on male happiness. Males who think they are richer than their neighbors are happier than those who think they are poorer than their neighbors. Males who smoke tend to have higher levels of happiness than those who don't, while males who are currently getting regular exercise tend to have higher levels of happiness than those who are not. The scores of psychological well-being has positively related with levels of male happiness.

For model 1 of females, it could be observed that marital status, educational levels, and family structures have affected the happiness levels of females. Same as males, widowed, divorced, or separated female have lower levels of happiness than single females. Educational levels have positively influenced happiness among females. Additionally, females who live in other family structures, which does not include their parents or grandparents, have lower levels of happiness than those who live with their complete extended families.

When the factors of well-being are added in model 2, demographic variables of marital status and educational levels have also affected female happiness. Single females tend to have higher levels of happiness than widowed, divorced, or separated females. Higher educated females have higher levels of happiness than lower educated females. The well-being variables of comparative thinking about economic status with neighbor and scores of psychological well-being have affected female happiness. Females who think that they have the same economical status or are richer than their neighbors have higher levels of happiness than those who think that they are poorer than their neighbors. Similarly to males, the scores of psychological well-being are positively associated with female happiness. Females who have higher scores of psychological well-being refer to higher levels of happiness.

**Table 3: Coefficient of Regression on Factors Influencing on Thai Youth Happiness by Sex**

Variables	Male		Female	
	Model1 $\beta$	Model2 $\beta$	Model1 $\beta$	Model2 $\beta$
Constant	5.433***	.095	7.345***	3.986*
<b>Demographic variables</b>				
Age	.019	.056	-.045	-.050
Marital status (single: ref.)				

Married	-.449	-.231	-.320	-.472
Widow/divorced/separated	-2.371*	-1.481*	-.657*	-.499*
Educational level (primary school: ref.)				
Lower secondary school	.768*	.711*	.615**	.235*
Upper secondary school and higher	.701	.109	.776	.386
Family structure (completed extended family: ref.)				
Completed nuclear family	.535	-.004	-.315	-.150
Single-parent nuclear family	.881	.297	-.688	-.564
Single-parent extended family	-.243	-.545	-.676	-.198
Grandparent-headed households with no parent present	.338	.750	-.908	-1.187
Other family structure	.059	-.499	-1.006*	-.783
Household size	.129	.117	.057	-.003
Residential area (urban: ref.)				
Rural	-.446	-.262	-.309	-.084
<b>Well-being variables</b>				
Material of housing (non-permanent material: ref.)				
Permanent material		.330		.049
Numbers of type of asset (total 33 types)		-.001		-.019
Type of drinking water (bottled water: ref.)				
Tap water		-.657		.656
Underground water		.121		.411
Rain water		-.370		.678
Comparative thinking about economic status with neighbor (feeling poorer than neighbor: ref.)				
Feeling same as neighbor		.707		.916*
Feeling richer than neighbor		1.681***		.911*
Health status (not sickness: ref.)				
Sickness		.596		-.508
Smoking behavior (never smoke: ref.)				
Ever smoke		.577*		-.642
Alcohol drinking behavior (never drink: ref.)				
Ever drink		-.412		.038
Current exercise behavior (not current exercise: ref.)				
Current exercise		.557*		-.246
Score of household environment well-being (score 0-22)		.007		.013
Score of psychological well-being (score 0-14)		.337***		.181***
Score of social well-being (score 0-8)		-.046		.126
Score of attitude about moral and spiritual among Thai people (score 0-24)		-.012		-.018
R <sup>2</sup>	.116	.467	.107	.296
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.032	.334	.041	.163

\*p<0.05, \*\*<0.01, \*\*\*<0.001

## DISCUSSION

From the multivariate analysis of both sexes, demographic variables of widowed, divorced, or separated youths, and lower educated youths tend to have lower levels of happiness than those who are not. Also, youths belonging to the broken marriage group tend to have very low levels of happiness. Thai males seem to get more suffering from the broken marriage status than Thai females. Education of

people can increase their human capital and opportunities for their growth, leading to higher levels of happiness among youths.

As a literature review of factors affecting happiness, relative economic well-being has influenced youth happiness. Economical positions depend on comparison with other people. The results show that male and female youths who report they are poorer than their neighbors have lower levels of happiness than those who think that their economical status is the same as their neighbors or that they're richer than their neighbors. Also, a rise in other people's income can severely lower someone's level of happiness. Physical health behavior of smoking and current exercise behavior effect on male happiness. Surprisingly, smoking males have higher happiness levels than non-smoking males. While current exercise behaviors increase male happiness levels, it is related with the scientific fact that exercise stimulates the brain's pituitary gland to release endorphins, making the feeling of happiness. The psychological well-being refers to better mental health, which relates with happiness. On the other hand, happiness can be referred as the psychological well-being for the people in society (Diener, 1984). The results show that the scores of psychological well-being are positively related with Thai youth happiness.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

This study attempts to explore factors affecting Thai youth happiness by using the dataset from the "Happiness Indicator: Western Region Study in Thailand", which was collected in Kanchanaburi province, 2005. These are the factors that have positive effects on levels of happiness of Thai youths: being single, having higher education levels, feeling that they have the same economic status as or richer than their neighbors, and higher scores of psychological well-being. While male youths have higher happiness levels due to smoking and current exercise.

Policies should provide the universal upper secondary education to Thai youths, reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of education, to increase their levels of happiness. Family relationships should be concentrated for the prevention of broken marital status of youths. Finally, the sufficiency economy paradigm should be promoted to reduce the income comparison and income disparity of Thai youths and also Thai people.

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