

Older adults' lived experiences with bamboo bed handicrafts in improving their quality of life

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Abstract

Background: Improving the quality of life for older adults is crucial in Northeast, Thailand, where most have low health literacy and live in substandard conditions. They are more likely to age alone or with a spouse with less support overall.

Purpose: This study aimed to explore how the older adults had lived experiences using local wisdom, knowledge, and skill of bamboo bed handicrafts to improve their quality of life and strengthen the community.

Methods: This research study used a descriptive design based on Husserl's qualitative phenomenological philosophy. Participants were purposively chosen. The semi-structured interview guide was created. The twelve key informants, aged 61 to 78 years, had knowledge and experience of making bamboo bed crafts and were interviewed face-to-face in their home environment by consent. Seniors with cognitive impairment met the exclusion criteria. Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness criteria were used. The content analysis used the Colaizzi method.

Results: This study found four main themes: 1) Meaningful life 2) Happy life 3) Happy society and 4) Coping with deteriorating physical health through resilience adaptation.

Conclusion: Nurses should enhance quality of life for older adults by supporting their psychological well-being through self-acceptance, coping, resilient adaptation, and continued activity.

Keywords: lived experiences; meaningful life; older adults; quality of life

Introduction

Thailand has been considered an aged society since 2005. The social aging population was predicted to increase from 10.78 million in 2020 to 15.59 million in 2030 (Tantirat et al., 2020). Senior citizens in Thailand serve as role models for the younger generation by fostering Thai culture and local wisdom (Ratana-Ubol, 2021). Older adults in various districts of Thailand use their local wisdom and skills to produce OTOP (one tambon, one product) goods, hoping to improve their quality of life and boost rural communities' economies. Participating in this local entrepreneurship had the potential to improve not only their financial situation but also their mental well-being (Ratanasiripong et al., 2022).

However, the study of socioeconomics critical issues to older adults' well-being in Thailand found that they depended on government old-age allowances, had low living standards, and had little formal education (Anantanasuwong, 2021). Seniors with low income were more likely to be anxious in the past, present, and future (Somrongthong et al., 2017). Low self-esteem would be a common feature among older adults who had low monthly incomes or became jobless (Sadjapong & Thongtip, 2023).

Even though giving healthy seniors the chance to work again would help them avoid relying on their families and the government, many senior workers are still unemployed. The Thai government attempted to establish the primary welfare system for informal workers to close the legal gaps and improve their quality of life. These, however, were ineffective in safeguarding

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informal laborers (Tongkachok et al., 2021).

In Northeast Thailand, many older adults completed elementary school. Three-quarters had inadequate health literacy, less than half had a good quality of life (Sirisuwan et al., 2021); they mainly had poor living standards and tended to be alone or with a spouse with less support in their old age. They relied on the old-aged allowances from the government (Anantanasuwong, 2021).

This research study community, a subdistrict in Mahasarakham province, Northeast Thailand, has already encountered a super-aged society. In 2021, there were 24.94% of people aged 60 and over in this community. The bamboo bed handicrafts the villagers have passed down from generation to generation demonstrated their exceptional local wisdom. Many older adults are informal laborers who make bamboo bed handicrafts to improve their quality of life. In the capacity of nurse educators who contribute to the community's artistic and cultural preservation, the researchers aimed to discover how their lived experiences in using local wisdom knowledge and skill of bamboo bed handicrafts affects the quality of life of older adults.

Materials and Methods

Design

This research study used a descriptive design based on Husserl's descriptive qualitative phenomenological philosophy which encompasses bracketing, reflexivity, analyzing, interpretation, and intuition (Gill, 2020), to obtain deep insight into how older adults perceive and make sense of their world by using local wisdom and skill of bamboo bed handicrafts for their quality of life.

Participants and Setting

Purposive sampling was chosen among the senior citizens of a district, Mahasarakham province, Thailand. Researchers sought out seniors who fulfilled the inclusion criteria for the sample after discussing the study's goals with community leaders. The inclusion criteria included the age of all those over 60, regardless of their gender, educational attainment, or socioeconomic status, they consented to participate in the study, gave the researcher permission to record audio from conversations, took pictures, record videos about the process of making bamboo handicrafts, and had excellent communication and expression skills in Thai or local language. The decision to take part in the study would be respected. The key informants, six men and six women all older than 60, ages 61 to 78 years, had knowledge and experience making bamboo bed crafts since they were young. They could discuss the phenomenon based on their own experiences. By consent, they agreed to participate in in-depth interviews. They allowed the researchers to record video and audio during interviews. The exclusion criteria included seniors with cognitive impairment informants who needed to withdraw

from the research and requested not to participate.

Ethical consideration

The ethics committee approved the study involving human subjects, Mahasarakham University, Thailand (approval number:146-161/2023). With the informants' consent, the researchers scheduled a time to interview on the topics. To protect the confidentiality of the informants, researchers did not reveal any personal information. Codes were used to present the information. Throughout the study, the informants had ample opportunities to ask questions and had the option to reschedule or terminate the interview.

Data collection

The semi-structured interview guide was created for the study's topics and issues using open-ended questions (Ruslin et al., 2022). There were: "Can you describe what it means to your experience that the quality of the elderly's life is good or bad?"; "Can you describe how your experience making bamboo bed handicrafts influences your quality of life?"; If the issue in question was delicate or complex, the researchers could ask more in-depth questions to get more information and clarification (Naz et al., 2022) such as "Could you please elaborate a bit more on that?" "How do you feel about that?"

The researcher team had prior experience operating in Northeastern Thai local communities. They speak and understand the Thai Isaan language quite well. Using the technique of phenomenological reduction, the first author conducted interviews to assess the participants' experience of the phenomenon. All interviews were undertaken from May 2023 to August 2023. The researcher asked for a convenient date, time, and location for the key informants to conduct the interview. Participants were interviewed face-to-face in their home environments. An interview lasted 40 – 60 minutes based on the convenience of participants. During the interview, the researcher used non-directive formulations and expressions compatible with the participant's Thai Isaan language. To fully comprehend the context of the interview, audio and video recordings were made, along with field notes from observations about the environment, surrounding characteristics, and non-verbal cues. When the data became saturated, the researcher stopped collecting more. The participants' answers were consistent, and there were no new issues from the additional interviews. The researchers used the code "Person A-L" to protect the identity of the participants.

Data analysis

Researchers simultaneously gathered and analyzed data throughout the study. The researchers used the bracketing method (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021) to set aside personal theories, presumptions, and assumptions and refrain from judging biased opinions to analyze the elderly's lived experiences.

Table 1 Participant's characteristics data

Person	Sex	Age (yrs.)	Education	Occupation	Lives with	Health Status
A	Male	66	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Wife	Back pain, Blurred vision
B	Female	69	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Husband	Back pain
C	Male	74	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Wife, Neice	Back pain, Blurred vision
D	Female	61	Grade 4	Bamboo bed maker (Work for hire)	Husband(Stroke patient)	Living with HIV/AIDS >20 yrs
E	Female	78	Grade 4	Vender, Bamboo bed maker (Stop working)	Husband	Gall stone, coronary heart disease
F	Male	67	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Wife	Head injury (after removing intracerebral clot, then normal)
G	Female	66	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Son, Daughter	Healthy
H	Male	71	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Wife, Daughter, Granddaughter	High blood pressure and cholesterol
I	Male	74	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Wife, Daughter	Alcohol drinking
J	Female	74	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker (Stop working)	Husband, daughter	Back pain with herniated disc
K	Female	74	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker (Stop working)	Alone	Back pain
L	Male	68	Grade 4	Farmer, Bamboo bed maker	Wife, daughter, Grandson	Blind Left eye, Right eye cataract

Table 2. Themes, Categories from the elderly's lived experiences

Themes	Categories
1. Meaningful life	1.1 Struggling life through overcoming hardship 1.2 Making ends meet and avoiding becoming a burden
2. Happy life	2.1 Living with flexible time 2.2 Being stay at home happily
3. Happy society	3.1 Being together working together 3.2 Being helpful and supportive of one another.
4. Coping with deteriorating physical health through resilience adaptation	4.1 Staying to be active while slowing down

The content analysis using the Colaizzi method (Gumarang et al., 2021). The methodological triangulation involved observing participants in their work environment and conducting in-depth interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Two researchers read all transcriptions several times and performed verbatim analysis, extracting significant statements carefully, and creating formulated meanings from significant statements.

The investigator triangulation was applied, with each data set analyzed independently and then compared findings. After researchers agreed on formulated meanings, themes were formed with groups of theme clusters that reflected the issues of older adults' lived experiences. Researchers developed an exhaustive description to explain the discovered phenomenon and produced the fundamental structure to describe the studied phenomenon. The findings were sent

to key informants for member checking to confirm the accuracy and validity of their data before a research summary report was drafted. To confirm the findings, a peer audit was established by an experienced qualitative researcher. The last step of the data analysis process involved translation into English after each quote, explaining themes.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity of the findings, Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness criteria were used (Enworo, 2023). The veracity of the information was confirmed to establish credibility and to ascertain whether the researcher and the informant had the same understanding. Dependability was established by researchers' systematic data collection, verification of the information's accuracy, independent data analysis, deep reflection, and debate to consider the issues. Researchers meticulously documented each transcript to ensure confirmability, and with the benefit of an explainable coding schema, they could locate the original data. Finally, to ensure transferability, researchers explored the experiences of older adults in a particular group with bamboo handicraft skills. While readers can use research findings in comparable contexts, they cannot make generalizations to other populations.

Results

The participants all completed their fourth grade of elementary school. They lived with their families and spouses; only one lived alone. They struggled with a range of health issues, such as back pain, blurred vision, HIV, herniated discs, gallstones, and cataracts. Only one participant had a healthy status. The data on the participants' characteristics is shown in Table 1. Based on the older adults' experiences, the results were grouped into seven categories and then condensed into four main themes as shown in Table 2

Theme 1: Meaningful life

The elderly reflected their values, goals, and priorities to improve their quality of life through their lived experience with meaningful life in two categories included: 1) Struggling life through overcoming hardship, 2) Making ends meet and avoiding becoming a burden.

1.1 Struggling life through overcoming hardship

Older adults deal with a meaningful life by struggling to overcome hardship without stress. They feel steady and view the difficulties as challenges. Although they required a lot of work in the past, such as multiple jobs to earn money, working hard without labor-saving devices, and tiresomely carrying bamboo beds on their backs down alleyways to sell them, their minds were stronger. Hardship gave their life meaning. The examples of the participants' statements were described in a sense of pride as follows:

"...The drought in the area prevented farming from being successful. I had to work many jobs. Making charcoal, riding tricycles for hire, selling cows, and building bamboo beds were all going on to earn money in many ways... Since I lacked a planer, I sharpened the bamboo wood with my knife... I hurriedly got up at three in the morning, loaded the bamboo bed onto my back, and walked downtown to sell it. That's how hard my life is. I haven't stopped making bamboo beds since then, but I can't carry a bed like that..." (Person H)

"...I must get up early at two in the morning to buy wood, chop it myself, and carry all pieces of cut wood from the garden out to the truck. When I finished making bamboo beds, I spent the entire day carrying them to various locations along the alleyways to sell them. If no one buys it, I have it back. It's hard work. (Person C)

1.2 Making ends meet and avoiding becoming a burden.

The older adults avoided becoming a burden by making ends meet with bamboo bed handicrafts. Rather than merely relying on an ageing allowance, they must work to earn their own money for their expenses without troubling their children. The following are example statements:

"...I made bamboo beds because they allowed me more money to buy some food without bothering my son and daughter. Because they had higher housing costs, car and home payments, kids' tuition, water and electricity bill payments, and other expenses. I will make a bamboo bed to earn money until I cannot." (Person F)

Theme 2: Happy life

The elderly participants reflected on their lived experiences with a sense of happiness and improved their own quality of life by making bamboo beds. In the first instance, their happy lives were the result of their liberated lives. In the second, they stayed at home happily.

2.1 Living with flexible time

The older adults reflected that they lived with a flexible time at home. They raised cows, farmed, and made bamboo beds in their leisure time. They could visit their relatives even on their lazy days. Instead of rushing, they were skillfully making bamboo beds. The examples of statements are as follows:

"I must go to the farm and plant groundnuts, corn, and banana trees. On lazy days, I go for walks to my relative's houses and return to make bamboo beds at home. When I make bamboo beds, I do it quickly and diligently and do not go anywhere." (Person K)

"...I make bamboo beds in my spare time. If I plant rice in the rice field, I won't have time to make bamboo beds. Occasionally, I must gather grass for the cows. When I got back to making bamboo beds, it was midday. I keep doing it without stopping when I have free time. (Person A)

2.2 Being stay at home happily.

The older adults talk about how happy lives they had. They liked to work indoors at home, think positively, be able to rest and reach for a hammer or knife to make bamboo beds without staying still. These are the provided examples:

"...At home, the elderly happily hammer nails into bamboo wood to make beds. Usually, my wife and her cousins take a seat here at my home. They jointly hammer nails into bamboo wood to make bamboo beds..." (Person C)

"...When I'm not feverish, I'm happy. I'm not serious, I can make bamboo beds for fun. Stay at home and enjoy working indoors. Just staying still, it's boring. For me, working is beneficial. I will catch the cash if I grab a hammer or a knife. (Person D)

"...Making bamboo beds, I am at home. When I have time, I make bamboo beds. When I need a break, I take one..." (Person I)

Theme 3: Happy society

The participants shared two categories reflecting their lived experience of a happy society: 1) Being together, working together, and 2) Being helpful and supportive of one another.

3.1 Being together, working together.

The participants reflected that making bamboo beds was a long-standing tradition of their grandparents' generation. Every step of the way, the family members have assisted one another. Example statements:

"...Making bamboo beds has been a part of this community since my grandparents' generation. My father made bamboo beds to support me and my siblings financially. My family members help each other build the bamboo beds, carry the wood from the truck into the pile, sharpen bamboo, and hammer nails." (Person E)

"...We have been helping each other to make bamboo beds since our parents' generation. Growing up, kids should assist their parents. My mother took care of her small children. I had to assist my parents with making bamboo beds and looking after my younger sisters after school. After my spouse passed away, I started making bamboo beds to support my kids financially. Until my children grow up, I make bamboo beds with them..." (Person G)

3.2 Being helpful and supportive of one another.

The older adults stated that the villagers are very supportive and helpful. They purchase and deliver bamboo wood for the elderly, assist in finishing bamboo beds on time, and gather them up for sale as stated below:

"...The villagers in this community drive trucks to the Yasothon and Ubon Ratchathani provinces, where they purchase bamboo wood. Anyone in need of wood can place an order, it will be purchased and delivered to that residence..." (Person A)

"...If I have not enough cash to purchase

the bamboo wood, I can borrow money from my relatives, then repay when I get paid from selling bamboo beds..." (Person B)

"...If I cannot finish making bamboo beds in time to order, I ask someone in this village to help me make them, then I give them wages, ice cream, and drinking water. They assist and are kind to me. (Person F)

"...Nowadays, after the bamboo beds are finished being made to order, regular customers will come to pick them up at our house..." (Person H)

Theme 4: Coping with deteriorating physical health through resilience adaptation

The older adults share only one category of their lived experiences, how they deal with their declining physical health with coping and adaptation as follows:

4.1 Staying to be active while slowing down

The older adults reflected that although they became weaker and deteriorated physical health, they cope and adapt by staying active even as they slow down. These are example statements:

"... As I get older, I lose strength and get easily tired. I cannot lift the bamboo beds. My eyes had a slight mistiness. Sometimes, I used a hammer to hit my finger instead of bamboo wood (laugh). As time passes, someone stops making bamboo beds because they grow old. I haven't stopped doing it, just slowly down..." (Person A)

"...Nowadays, I stop to make bamboo beds for a while because of my less healthy body. My right eye has cataracts, and my left eye has a broken cornea. My doctor attempted to change my left cornea, but it was unsuccessful. I could not lift anything heavy, not even a sack of grass. I farm, raise chickens and cows, and make Thai bamboo chicken coop for sale. I had muscle pain from walking over 5 kilometers to my rice field. It's natural to age. (Person L)

Discussion

This study aimed to discover how older people used their lived experiences to apply traditional wisdom, knowledge, and skills about bamboo bed handicrafts to enhance their quality of life. According to the results, four main themes included: 1) Meaningful life 2) Happy life 3) Happy society and 4) Coping with deteriorating physical health through resilience adaptation. A meaningful life is typically the result of exceptional happy or unhappy experiences. (Murphy & Bastian, 2020). When the elderly's work positively affected their lives and families, it became meaningful. A meaningful life was not synonymous with a happy life. Overcoming obstacles could foster a sense of worth and significance in one's actions for other people (King & Hicks, 2021). Living a meaningful life was inherently moral (Fuhrer & Cova, 2023). It was suggested that elderly people who led meaningful lives were in good spiritual health (Lou, 2021).

According to the study's findings, older adults had meaningful life experiences in terms of psychological well-being. They accepted their life even though it was difficult. They had life satisfaction and recognized the challenges that they had overcome hardship by working hard, struggling multiple jobs to make ends meet, performing labor-intensive tasks without the use of labor-saving devices, and laboriously carrying bamboo beds down alleyways on their backs to sell them. These emotional experiences demonstrate their ability to deal with problems and limitations. They feel self-acceptance when satisfied with their prior lives and embrace their good and bad qualities. Self-acceptance is one aspect of psychological well-being (Seifert, 2005). To live a better life, overcoming hardship was the most essential (Matthys et al., 2021).

In addition, older adults can stay independent and avoid becoming a burden by making bamboo beds to make ends meet. Because of the increasing cost of living, relying solely on the government's elderly allowance was insufficient to survive. A financial hardship made one more susceptible to mental health issues (Frankham et al., 2020). The study's participants did not put financial pressure on their sons and daughters. However, to be healthy and realize their full potential, older adults must work.

Making a bamboo bed was a mentally demanding job that required a good memory and attention span of active seniors. With greater inactivity, older people's cognitive abilities decline (Sarabia-Cobo et al., 2020). Elderly who did not work or participate in any activity were more at risk of poverty (Meemon et al., 2022). Poverty and a decline in healthy aging were positively correlated (Nie et al., 2021). If there were elderly members who require care, an economic burden could arise in the families, which could affect their financial status (Nortey et al., 2017). When caring for the elderly, caregiver stress and fatigue are concerns (Tumanggor et al., 2021). An unhealthy coping strategy would stress the caregiver more (Kabaya et al., 2023). The increasing need for caregiving in households with elderly members may lead to a higher caregiver burden (Phetsitong et al., 2019).

This study found the happy lives of elderly participants resulted from their flexible time lifestyle and indoor work at home. The working conditions, income, and living situation of the elderly all affected how happy they were (Ahmed & Mohamed, 2022). The participants reported enjoying farming, cow-raising, visiting relatives, and making bamboo beds. They felt their lives were fulfilled. They were happy when they thought positively. Seniors could stay active into their later years if they could work to preserve their happiness and sense of fulfillment in life (Ramia & Voicu, 2022). Positive self-perception leads to higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction in seniors (Vilkhu & Behera, 2019). Being internally happy and content with life, both past and present, was another way to be successful

in aging (Estebansari et al., 2020).

Not only a happy life but also a happy society that the participants reflected. Making bamboo beds was one of the tasks that the villagers and family members in the study's community had been helping and supporting one another. Helping one another solved many societal issues, whether in small one-on-one interactions, at work, or through changes in policies. Giving people the chance to support one another could increase happiness (Aknin & Whillans, 2021). The social support received from family networks was positively correlated with older adults' quality of life (Gallardo-Peralta et al., 2022). Family support and burden impact the quality of life (Rekawati et al., 2022). With more family interaction, older adults living alone or with their families displayed higher happiness levels (Hwang & Sim, 2021). Seniors lead happier lives when they engage in social activities and support one another (Shah et al., 2021). They would be happier if they pursued happiness in a socially responsible manner (Doh & Chung, 2020). Independence, physical activity, self-awareness, attitude, financial security, social support, and community involvement are factors that have been linked to healthy aging (Abud et al., 2022).

Declines in functional ability were linked to aging. The research participants stated that their bodies become weaker as they age and deteriorate in physical health. They cope and adapt by staying active even as they slow down. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), acquiring and preserving functional ability that promotes well-being is known as "healthy aging." Exercise plays a critical role in improving functional ability and disease prevention (Izquierdo et al., 2021). The participants still had physical activities such as walking over 5 kilometers to the rice field, working on farms, raising cows and chickens, and making bamboo beds. They had not worked out according to their fitness regimen. Aging who followed fitness programs focused primarily on balancing and functional exercises were less likely to fall (Sherrington et al., 2020). Physical activity could promote healthy aging in terms of cognitive function, psychological well-being, and independent functioning for those experiencing cognitive decline (Nuzum et al., 2020). Elderly who were physically active had a lower risk of depression, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, as well as cardiovascular and all-cause mortality. They also had a lower risk of fractures, activities of daily living disability, and functional limitation (Cunningham et al., 2020). This research participants exhibit their mental well-being by coping and resiliently adapting to deteriorated physical health. Resilience and coping were predictors of well-being in adults (Mayordomo et al., 2021).

The limitation of this study was that the samples were homogeneous in terms of low—to middle socioeconomic position among elderly people living in Isaan semi-rural culture. These similarities may limit the diversity of perspectives and the quality of

data.

Conclusion

Bamboo bed handicrafts are meaningful for elderly life in the study's context. Nurses can improve the quality of life for older adults by supporting their psychological well-being through self-acceptance, coping, resilient adaptation, and continued activity. Nurse should assist the elderly to find meaning in life, live happiness and fulfilling lives, and build powerful relationship with others.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest and no competing financial interest or personal relationship could have influenced any of the work described in this article.

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Data Availability

The research's data originates from informants interviews. The data are available on request from the corresponding author.

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