

# A Study on an Inter-Institutional Collaboration of Family, Community, and Buddhism for Thai Vulnerable Youth

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of the inter-organizational collaboration of family, community, and Buddhism on vulnerable youth knowledge and behaviors. The samples were 302 vulnerable youths in Khon Kaen in Northern Thailand. They were selected by purposive sampling using the criteria of family incomes, marital status of parents, and neighborhood. The other group of samples consisted of 10 officials with the responsibility to take care of vulnerable youth in their area. The instruments included an inter-institutional collaboration plan, a teen pregnancy knowledge test, a social adaptation test, a drug knowledge test, and an interview form. The data were gathered in August 2021 when the samples took part in 5 projects under the inter-institutional collaboration plan involving family, community, and Buddhism. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, and t-test. The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis. The results study illustrates how a planned collaboration between institutions concerned with human development led to the development of knowledge and positive behavioral changes among vulnerable youths.

**Keywords:** Inter-institutional collaboration, Vulnerable youth, Youth development

## 1. Introduction

The world in the post-cold war era is influenced by the capitalist economic system and high competition both between nations and people in a society. With the nature of the economic system that allows independence for capitalists to compete in the market, the social disparity could not be avoided. Poverty, oppression, and instability in life force a certain group of youth to be at risk in both life and education (Lidan, 2013). In developing countries, even families with standard incomes who can afford public education have to face a problematic education in terms of budgets, teaching methods, and quality of staff (Zaki Ewiss, 2020). This widens the distance between the rich and the poor in society as education is a fundamental indicator of a person's future career, family, and quality of life (Croizet et al., 2019).

Moreover, it should be noted that capitalism affected youths in financially uncompetitive families. Children in poor and oppressed families have problems in all aspects of life. These children are regarded as vulnerable youth as defined by (Skinner et al., 2006) as "The ones not having certain of their basic rights fulfilled". Likewise, Word Vision (2014) defined the term "vulnerable youth" as those who may be orphaned, lacking basic needs, uneducated, abused or exploited, discriminated against, and engaged in exploitative labor. The hardship of their lives could open an opportunity for those who seek to exploit them in crime, drug traffic, child labor, etc. In addition, lacking social support could also be a reason why vulnerable youths make decisions leading to their life problems such as unwanted pregnancy,

drug addiction, crime, etc. (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). Therefore, there should be support from both the public and private sectors to help vulnerable youths cope with problems in their lives.

In Thailand, the problems of children and youth also rely on the socio-economic problems in the country. According to World Bank (2022), the Thai economy is like other developing countries—running capitalist systems with the great advantages of big companies. The basic welfares for its people are a free education in public school until grade 12 and universal healthcare that applies to all citizens. However, the past decade marked a downturn in the Thai economy and the COVID-19 pandemic worsens the situation. According to the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (2022), 174,900 Thai citizens outside the agricultural sector had been unemployed for more than a year. With consideration of the fluctuated agricultural product price which is the source of income for the majority of Thai people, it is not a surprise that the national debt rate had been increased for 5 consecutive quarters. The economic problems affect society and increase the number of vulnerable youth in the country.

According to the Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection (2017), 3.7 million Thai youth were considered in the vulnerable group. This number included children with learning disabilities, extreme poverty, illegally immigrated families, displaced status, undocumented status, etc. The data from the Office of Children and Youth Justice System (2021) indicates that 68% of Thai youth committing crimes were from separated families. Moreover, 15% of newborns in the country were from teen mothers. Therefore, appropriate treatments should be applied to support vulnerable youth, limit social problems, and develop society as a whole.

It should also be noted that problems of vulnerable youth are complex and demand co-organization of stakeholders to mind the situations. At this point, the process of inter-institutional collaboration could be applied to improve the situation. O’Leary and Vij (2002) defined inter-institutional collaboration also known as Inter-organizational collaboration as cooperative efforts of two or more parties with common objectives to drive a mission. In essence, it has an open-ended nature, results from the evolution of inter-organizational relationships, and finds widespread application in the private, public, and non-governmental sectors. The growing importance of inter-organizational collaboration in firm and institution operations stems from the uncertainty of the working environment in the modernized world, the demand for more competitive or cooperative working units, and the capability to solve problems that could not be fixed by a single organization (Kozuch & Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2016).

Moreover, one should comprehend the principle of inter-institutional collaboration to apply the method in their context properly. Kang (2021) introduced the components of multi-organizational collaboration which involve resource acquisition, institutional pressure and legitimacy, partners characteristics, and improvement of the program. According to the author, an inter-institutional project would be complete with the shared resource of each organization. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), organizations especially in the non-profit sector are resource-dependent. Therefore, working together would allow them to

share resources such as personnel, tools, and budget to achieve their goals. Institutional pressure and legitimacy are important in forming an inter-institutional collaboration. All parties must have a similar interest in driving a project. Moreover, the characteristics of partners under the agreement of collaborations are also crucial. This depends on the needs of the project and the context of the situation (Behn, 2010). Lastly, institutions should consider the benefits of the collaboration they join. The improvement of the program should be prioritized as a collaboration should be able to complete tasks that a single unit could not do.

Moreover, inter-institutional collaboration has been applied in various contexts around the globe, and the empirical evidence has indicated positive effects on youth development. For example, Palinkas et al. (2014) study the effect of inter-organizational collaboration of public services of child welfare and probation departments in California. The results of the study indicate a decrease in juvenile arrests, substance abuse, youth violence, pregnancy, and behavioral and emotional problems of abused and neglected Youth in the area. In Coleman et al. (2020), the collaboration of schools, teachers, and universities led to an improved program in preparing learners for engineering schools. These organizations played their part to develop an appropriate curriculum for students who were interested in engineering, and both inside and outside class activities were recommended. Lundström (2011) studied the factors leading to the success of an inter-organization collaboration to help marginalized youth in Tanzania. It was found that the aspects of the environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources were the key indicators of the collaboration.

It could be noted in the previous studies that an inter-institutional collaboration must be formed considering the needs of the subjects and context. In Thailand, Buddhism plays a great role in Thai society as the majority of its population believes in Lord Buddha's teaching. The religion puts down its roots in Thai morality, tradition, norms, and ways of life. Therefore, the collaboration of Buddhism, family, and community—the institutions that are close to children and youth could be a potential solution to increase vulnerable youth's social adaptation and solve their social problems. The current study attempts to form a collaboration between family, community, and Buddhism as social protection for vulnerable youth in Thailand. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of the inter-organizational collaboration of family, community, and Buddhism on vulnerable youth knowledge and behaviors.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Samples*

The samples were 302 vulnerable youths in Khon Kaen in Northern Thailand. They were selected by purposive sampling. In detail, the criteria used in selecting the participants were family incomes, marital status of parents, and neighborhood. Of all 12,241 youth in the area, 1,412 youths met at least one of the criteria. Yamane's method (1967) was employed, and it resulted in 302 samples mentioned above. All the participants were treated anonymously and with consideration of ethical issues. The detail of the samples can be seen below.

Table 1. Samples' detail

Gender	Male = 136 (45.03%) Female = 166 (54.97%)
Age	15 = 54 (17.88%) 16 = 53 (17.54%) 17 = 64 (21.19%) 18 = 75 (24.83%) 19 = 56 (18.54%)
Family income	Low = 249 (82.45%) Lower-middle = 53 (17.55%)
Marital status of parents	Married = 215 (71.19%) Divorced = 32 (10.59 %) Separated = 40 (13.24%) Widowed = 15 (4.96%)
Neighborhood	Low-income area = 235 (77.81%) Middle-income area = 67 (22.19 %)

The other group of samples consisted of 10 officials with the responsibility to take care of vulnerable youth in their area. This group of participants took part in the interview session.

### 2.2 Instruments

The instruments included an inter-institutional collaboration plan, a teen pregnancy knowledge test, a social adaptation test, a drug knowledge test, and an interview form. In detail, the plan was developed by the collaboration of family, community, and Buddhism. There were 5 projects to develop the samples' knowledge about social adaptation, teen pregnancy, and drug problems under the plan. All tests were designed in multiple choice, and the interview form was designed in the semi-structured interview with questions to examine changes in samples' behaviors.

### 2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data were gathered in August 2021 when the samples took part in 5 projects under the inter-institutional collaboration plan involving family, community, and Buddhism. Each project took 3 days to complete with the assessment of the samples' knowledge. 10 officials were assigned to take part in an interview session three months after the projects to investigate changes in the samples' behaviors. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, and t-test. The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Samples' Knowledge of Subject Matters

Table 2. Comparative results of the samples' knowledge

Projects	Pretest ( $\bar{x}$ , S.D.)	Posttest ( $\bar{x}$ , S.D.)	t	p
Buddism Integrated Curriculum and the Development of Vulnerable Youth Social Adaptation	12.50, 0.78	25.65, 0.95	16.66	*0.00
Buddism-based Learning and Unintended Pregnancy Prevention	14.65, 0.89	22.67, 0.74	14.66	*0.00
Inter-institutional Collaboration to Protect Vulnerable Youth from Drug	13.48, 0.64	26.54, 0.67	12.65	*0.00
Innovative Media to Protect Vulnerable Youth from Drug	16.57, 0.75	27.56, 0.67	13.54	*0.00
Youth Network and the Development of Vulnerable Youth Social Adaptation	12.65, 0.89	26.64, 0.84	16.87	*0.00

Note. \* $p > 0.05$ .

The results of the study indicate that all projects under the inter-institutional collaboration plan positively affected the samples' knowledge. In detail, in the Buddhism Integrated Curriculum and the Development of Vulnerable Youth Social Adaptation project, there was a significant difference between the participants' knowledge before ( $\bar{x} = 12.50$ , S.D. = 0.78) and after participating in the activities in the project ( $\bar{x} = 25.65$ , S.D. = 0.95),  $t = 16.66$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . Likewise, the participants' knowledge of unintended pregnancy prevention was significantly higher in the post-test ( $\bar{x} = 22.67$ , S.D. = 0.74) than in the pre-test in the Buddhism-based Learning and Unintended Pregnancy Prevention project ( $\bar{x} = 14.65$ , S.D. = 0.89),  $t = 14.66$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . In the Inter-institutional Collaboration to Protect Vulnerable Youth from Drug project, there was a significant difference between the participants' knowledge of drug prevention before ( $\bar{x} = 13.48$ , S.D. = 0.64) and after participating in the activities in the project ( $\bar{x} = 26.54$ , S.D. = 0.67),  $t = 12.65$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . The participants' knowledge of drug prevention was significantly higher in the post-test ( $\bar{x} = 27.56$ , S.D. = 0.67) than in the pre-test in the Innovative Media to Protect Vulnerable Youth from Drug project ( $\bar{x} = 16.57$ , S.D. = 0.75),  $t = 13.54$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . Lastly, the participants joining the Youth Network and the Development of Vulnerable Youth Social Adaptation show the development of their knowledge in the post-test ( $\bar{x} = 26.64$ , S.D. = 0.84) that was higher than in the pre-test ( $\bar{x} = 12.65$ , S.D. = 0.89),  $t = 16.87$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . It could be interpreted that vulnerable youths in this study could develop their knowledge of social adaptation, unintended pregnancy prevention, and drug prevention after participating in the projects under the inter-institutional

collaboration plan.

### *3.2 Changes in Samples' Behaviors*

Moreover, the qualitative data also indicate changes in participants' behaviors after participating in projects under the plan. The data from the interview session were analyzed by the method of content analysis. The results could be summarized below.

#### 3.2.1 Social Adaptation

It was reported by the interviewees that samples could adapt to social norms and values after participating in the inter-institutional collaboration plan. The interviewees suggested that the samples lack attention to social values and behaved on individual interests and the collective influence of friends and examples they expose in media like the internet and television. It was reported that their parents felt that the samples tended to use rude words in communication and did not attempt to alternate the level of language used when communicating with people of different ages or in different circumstances. After joining the projects, they understood their roles as students, members of the family, and members of the community. They communicated more appropriately and took part in community activities more. The interviewees claimed that parents and community leaders were satisfied with the youths after the inter-institutional plan was applied.

#### 3.2.2 Unintended Pregnancy Prevention

Sexuality is a kind of taboo in the conservative society of Thailand. The discussion between youth and their caretakers about sexual matters is not likely to happen. The problems of unintended pregnancy could not be claimed to be improved in a short period. However, the interviewees suggested that there was a positive outcome in the samples' behaviors. Apart from the development of samples' knowledge regarding behaviors, tools, and Buddhism moralities that could prevent unintended pregnancy, it was reported that they were more open to sharing about their love life and problems with people with more experiences such as teachers and parents. The interviewees suggested that this is a positive sign in solving pregnancy problems in teens.

#### 3.2.3 Drug Prevention

Similarly, the difficulties associated with teen drug use cannot be quantified in such a short time frame. In addition, it is challenging to convince the participants to admit they are associated with illegal drugs. Nevertheless, as observed and reported by their parents, the samples drank less alcohol and smoked. Even though it is illegal in Thailand to offer items to minors under the age of 18, it cannot be denied that the subjects nevertheless have access to these substances. Moreover, in other instances, the individuals were reported to have informed their caregivers that they were considering quitting smoking and drinking.

## **4. Discussion**

The results of the study indicate the positive effects of the inter-institutional collaboration of family, community, and Buddhism on both knowledge and behaviors of vulnerable youths

regarding social adaptation, unintended pregnancy prevention, and drug prevention. The results of the study confirm the benefits of inter-organizational collaboration in youth development and education as seen in the previous studies (e.g., Coleman et al., 2020; Lundström, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2012). In this study, family and community institutions that have close access to observe behaviors of vulnerable youths cooperate with Buddhism—an institution that influences Thai tradition, culture, norms, etc. Dharmas-Lord Buddha's teaching were integrated into school curriculums and activities in the projects to help the samples realize the importance of social adaptation and the problems of teen pregnancy and drug abuse.

The results also illustrate the importance of family, community, and religion in developing the potential of vulnerable youth. According to Fernandes-Alcantara (2018), the youth in the vulnerable group is at risk to involve in hazardous social behaviors. Therefore, caretakers, community leaders, and religious leaders should work together to prevent them from social harm such as drugs, child abuse, sexual harassment, etc. it could be noted from the results of the study that a well-managed collaboration plans of institutions that take care of human development resulted in the development of knowledge and positive changes in vulnerable youths' behaviors as shown by the results of the study.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study seeks to investigate the effects of an inter-institutional collaboration of family, community, and Buddhism on the knowledge and behaviors of vulnerable youths regarding social adaptation, unintended pregnancy prevention, and drug prevention. Five projects under the plan were implemented with 302 vulnerable youths in Thailand. Ten officials were also assigned to the interview session to investigate changes in behaviors of the samples three months after the projects. The results study illustrates how a planned collaboration between institutions concerned with human development led to the development of knowledge and positive behavioral changes among vulnerable youths.

The results of the study could be implicated in vulnerable youth development in other contexts. The direction for further studies should be on developing inter-organizational/institutional collaborations with the consideration of issues of environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources. Moreover, scholars should pay attention to youth in vulnerable groups. Factors that could affect issues like involvement in abusive behaviors, the collaboration of stakeholders and participation of the subjects should be studied to provide more information that could benefit children and teenagers of marginalized and oppressed groups.

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