

Report on

Health and Well-Being over the Life Course

College of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

12 January – 13 February 2004

Organised by

Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis

The first APN Training Workshop entitled “Health and Well-being over the Life Course” was held in Bangkok at the College of Population Studies (CPS) from 12 January to 13 February 2004. The workshop examined the social, demographic, psychological and physical aspects of health and well-being from childhood through old age using a multi-disciplinary approach. An important goal of the workshop was for participants to actually develop a research proposal on a topic of their choosing related to the workshop theme. Thus, besides substantive sessions, extensive training was provided on how to write a research proposal. In addition, several sessions addressing methodology were included with an emphasis on qualitative and mixed methods approaches. The workshop was intended primarily for Ph.D. students and junior scientists in fields related to population and health who were interested in the theme of the workshop and who wished to develop skills in developing research proposals. In total, 18 participants and 5 observers attended the workshop for the 5-week training. Participants came from Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Russia and Thailand. Dr. John Knodel, from Michigan University, and Dr. Napaporn Chayovan, from CPS, were responsible for organizing and coordinating the training content of the workshop.

Background

The workshop was originally scheduled to take place during May-June 2003. Planning for the workshop began a year earlier and an entire set of key resource persons had been carefully recruited with this date in mind. Considerable time and effort had been put into the recruitment of appropriate resource persons to maximize coordination between workshop segments and the integration of proposal writing training with the substantive theme of the workshop. We also lined up a full itinerary for a week long field trip. The original dates for the workshop were in part determined to ensure the availability of all the resource persons in appropriate sequence including those agreeing to host the group for site visits during the field trip. Unfortunately, just a month or so prior to scheduled start, the workshop had to be postponed because of the outbreak of the SARS epidemic. By this time, the workshop planning was at a very advanced stage. A detailed program had already been set. Participants had already been selected. Indeed most participants and resource persons had already made their travel arrangements.

Only after some months, when it became clear that the SARS epidemic was under control, were we able to set a new date for the workshop. For a variety of reasons, the new dates were set for early 2004. Fortunately most of the originally accepted applicants were able to adjust their schedule so that they could attend. We were also fortunate that many of the persons who were to host our site visits during the one week field trip were still able and willing to do so. Less fortunate was the fact that three of six key resource persons originally scheduled to do

the training had to withdraw because of conflicts with other commitments. This left us little time to fill the substantial gaps created by their unavailability. We were fortunate that Dr, Philip Guest, the Population Council representative in Bangkok was available to take over the task of research proposal training. In addition, we decided to fill the gaps created by the withdrawal of the originally scheduled key resource persons by inviting a number of local researchers (both Thai and foreign expatriates) to make short half day presentations. Although we realized that this risked a less “coordinated” set of presentations than would be the case had we been able to recruit just a few additional persons who could take responsibility of longer training modules, the multiple single seminar approach was far more practical under the circumstances.

Workshop Structure

During the workshop, participants attended a series of lectures dealing with various substantive, conceptual and methodological issues related to health and well being during different stages of the life course [See attached copy of the workshop schedule in Appendix 2]. Through out the workshop (except for the field trip) training and guidance related to research proposal writing was provided (typically in afternoon sessions). In addition, a one-week field trip to Northern Thailand and a one-day field trip to the IPSR Kanchanaburi project monitoring population change (supported by the Wellcome Trust) were also included in the program to give participants the opportunity to observe examples of actual research and applied programs in action. A weekend outing to Pattaya was also an option for those wanting a short break. In addition to lectures, time was also allocated throughout the workshop for participants to develop individual research proposals which they were asked to complete and present at the end of the training period. Ten computers with access to the internet were set up in the training room for use by workshop participants throughout the workshop.

Evaluation Results

To evaluate this workshop, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the training program. The questionnaire consisted of seven subsections covering the topics and activities in the workshop. Questions in most sections involved rating the level of satisfaction in terms of the content, method of teaching, materials/documents distributed, participation of participants, and appropriateness of time allocation for the topic. A quantitative summary of the evaluations is provided in the Appendix 1.

In addition to filling out the ratings of different aspects of the workshop, participants were invited to offer suggestions for improving each specific workshop component as well as to evaluate and comment on the overall training program. Most participants made at least several suggestions or comments on the form although in several cases the comments were very brief.

Main Modules

There were four main training modules: Proposal writing training; Life course & transition to adulthood; Methodology (qualitative, mixed methods and secondary data analyses); and

Population aging & health. In terms of content, methods of teaching, and reading material & documents provided, most participants reported that the modules on Proposal writing, on Methodology, and on Population aging & health were very satisfactory. Although fewer participants rated these aspects of the module on Life course & transition to adulthood as very satisfactory, all but one participant indicated that the module was at least satisfactory in content and method of teaching and all thought that the material distributed was satisfactory. Most participants viewed the duration of each of the main modules was about right although substantial minorities felt that all but the module on Life course & transition to adulthood were too short.

The suggestions and comments offered about the main modules provide some additional feedback. With respect to the module on proposal writing one participant felt it was too ambitious in trying to get participants to write a fundable proposal in such a short time. However another student expressed a very different opinion writing that “each detail about proposal writing was dealt with very systematically imparting in the participants a thorough knowledge about proposal development”. There were several indications that participants would have liked to have received more individual consulting, particularly earlier on the workshop, as well as more time to work on their proposals, and more time for presentations.

Only three comments were made regarding the module on Life course & transition to adulthood. They suggested the inclusion of more methodological issues of life course analysis, especially for analyzing longitudinal data, and more examples of using the approach with respect to health. One participant noted that “the lectures were well timed and quite interactive.”

Comments of the methodology module indicated participants particularly liked the inclusion of practical exercises. For example one comment indicated that the instructor “was thorough and thoughtful in his teaching. I like how he incorporated some data analysis exercise – both quantitative and qualitative – into the workshop.” The most common suggestion was that these exercises should be expanded. Several participants were particularly appreciative of the introduction to the use of NVivo software to assist in qualitative analysis.

A number of the comments on the module on Population aging & health, praised the instructor and the content (e.g. “Training was very helpful”; “updated data, innovative methods, fresh ideas, excellent speaker”; “Very informative and systematic”; “made a good use of examples”). Several participants suggested the need for exercises as well as more time and examples of measurement issues including statistical indicators. One participant particularly liked the short video that was shown.

Single seminars on special topics

Complementing the four main modules, nine single seminars on special topics were also part of the training, dealing with issues of reproductive & sexual health; child health & well-being; psychological well-being; environmental health; participatory research; ethics & IRBs; and communication with policy makers. The reception of these sessions varied greatly with the topic. The sessions on psychological well-being and child health & well-being were most favorably received. Both rated as very satisfactory by close to half of the participants and all the rest indicated the sessions were satisfactory. Only one session (on ethics & IRBs) received quite unfavorable ratings. This session was one in which the originally scheduled

presenter had to cancel and a replacement person was recruited at the last minute. Apparently there was a misunderstanding in as much the participants were expecting to receive information not only on ethics but also on developing timelines and budgets. Unfortunately we failed to communicate properly to the replacement presenter what was expected to be covered.

Comments about the special topic seminars varied as well. On the positive side, one participant mentioned that the seminars well planned, giving “a complete picture of the various aspects involved in health and well-being over the life course”. Another participant, however, felt that a number of the seminars dealt with issues that were “irrelevant to the substance of this workshop” and that time could have better allocated to proposal writing. The most common comment referred to disappointment with the failure to have the issue of budget and timelines discussed, reflecting the miscommunication the replacement presenter. Other comments indicated a suggestion to have direct interaction with policy makers or media persons about communicating research and a suggestion to add a seminar on gender and health.

Field trip

Most participants were satisfied or very satisfied with most aspects of the one-week field trip to Chiang Mai. The low rating of the day spent learning about the Hmong project merits some explanation. It concluded a half day presentation the project’s research design and a half day to travel to the village which required an almost two hour drive each way in locally hired pick-up style vehicles to traverse very rough road approaching the village. We were hoping to visit the fields where the villagers sprayed insecticides on fruit trees (a central interest of the research project as described in the morning session). However, as it turned out, when we arrived at the village the drivers of our vehicles felt the drive down the very small and rough road to the fields about 5 kilometers away would not be good for their vehicles and refused to go. Since it was too long to walk given the timing of the trip we had to cancel that part of the visit and this left many participants very disappointed as they were keenly interested in the project. In fact we believe almost all participants found the morning session very interesting. It was because of this that they were so disappointed not to get to see the fruit tree fields. Thus the rating of not satisfactory is somewhat misleading as it obscures the very good presentation and mainly reflects circumstances beyond our control.

Most of the comments offered about the field trip expressed disappointment that we could not spend more time for the visit to the highland Hmong village. Due to difficult access, some participants suggested that it would have been good to plan the trip for the whole day to allow time for the visit of the research sites and gain a greater understanding of the issues being researched. On a more general level, one participant complained that we visited too many places while another found the trip “well organized” and visits to the different sites “educative and informative”.

Overall training program

All the participants rated satisfactory or very satisfactory the structure of the program. The overall training program was considered beneficial to the participants. According to the evaluation, the workshop was particularly beneficial for improving their understanding of qualitative research and proposal writing with more than 80 percent rating these aspects as

very satisfactory. Generally participants were satisfied with the improvement in their understanding of life course concepts. Overall almost two-thirds indicated that they were very satisfied that the workshop experience would be relevant to their work. The materials distributed, staff assistance, accommodation and daily transportation arrangements all received high marks.

A number of suggestions for improving the workshop overall were provided. Two participants mentioned that the length of the entire workshop was too long. But this view seems to be in contrast to the much more common ones suggesting more time be devoted to one topic or another. Several participants mentioned that the training would have benefited from additional sessions on quantitative research methods and statistical techniques. One common suggestion was the need to schedule more time for to work on the development of their proposal. As such, providing participants greater access to computer and library facilities would have been appreciated. Overall, the workshop seems to have been regarded as a good and very interesting opportunity for the young scientists who attended. This is reflected in the following comments made with regard to the overall training program:

“Very useful to my work and I learned so much more than I expected. Speakers very helpful, approachable.”

“The overall training program has proved very beneficial to me... Excellent coordination in every way.”

“The overall course was very much interesting, and useful for young social scientist like me.”

Some Reflections

Overall, we believe the workshop was quite successful, especially given that it was the first workshop of its kind and that it had to be rescheduled with the consequence that we needed to replace half of the original key resource persons within a short period of time. We believe the decision to largely fill gaps created by the withdrawal of these persons by adding a series of special topic seminars was the most practical one we could take at the time and reasonably successful. Under these circumstances, the integration of presentations could not be as tight as it would have been under the original program but nevertheless most of the special topic sessions went reasonably well.

One lesson that we believe emerges from the comments and suggestions made by the the participants is that it would probably be better to concentrate on a somewhat smaller number of topics but include more extensive applied exercises for each in the course of the training. Responses to exercises that were incorporated into the current workshop were quite favorable. In addition, if another workshop were to focus on proposal writing in combination with some substantive theme (such as the current workshop), it might be useful to provide the participants with more time to prepare the proposals and to provide more individual feedback at earlier stages of the process from resource persons. To make both of these changes possible, however, the substantive topics covered would need to be reduced and some reallocation of the resource persons time from substantive training to consultation would be required. One potential problem with such an approach would be that the universe of potential participants might be reduced if we narrowed the substantive area on which the workshop focused. For the current workshop we purposely defined the area broadly so it

would incorporate a wide range of interests. We feel this was successful in drawing applicants from a reasonably wide pool.

Another lesson is that it is important to clearly and fully state the goals and content of the workshop in advance and communicated them to the participants in order to create more realistic expectations and reduce the probability that disappointment will arise because of false expectations. We note that only one participant provided fairly consistent negative comments in the evaluation form and this seemed to arise because of a misunderstanding that the workshop would involve considerable training in quantitative analysis. In part this reflects the change in the content of the workshop that resulted from the need to restructure it after the postponement due to the SARs epidemic. Nevertheless, in retrospect we probably could have made this clearer before the start of the workshop.

Finally, it was encouraging that many of the proposals incorporated material that was covered in the substantive and methodological sessions including material drawn from several of the special topic seminars. Thus there was a reasonable degree of integration of the different workshop components for a number of participants. We note, however, that the quality of the proposals that were presented at the end of the workshop varied considerably. Probably only a handful were far enough along that, with only modest additional work, they could be submitted to some funding organization. It is unrealistic to expect that most participants at this junior level can develop truly adequate proposals during a five week workshop that involves considerable substantive and methodological training as well. Still we feel that even if most participants did not leave the workshop with something close to a final draft of a fundable proposal, they at least left with a much better and more realistic understanding of what a fundable proposal should look like that they had prior to the workshop.

Appendix 1

Topics covered:

- Proposal writing training
- Life course & transition to adulthood
- Methodology (Qualitative, mixed methods & secondary data analysis)
- Population aging & health

Philip Guest
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Content – Main Modules

(N=18)

	Not satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory	Total (percent)
Proposal writing	-	11.1	88.9	100.0
Life course etc.	5.6	77.8	16.7	100.0
Methodology	-	5.6	94.4	100.0
Population aging & health	-	38.9	61.1	100.0

Method of Teaching – Main Modules

(N=17)

	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total (percent)
Proposal writing	5.9	29.4	64.7	100.0
Life course etc.	5.9	52.9	41.2	100.0
Methodology	-	29.4	70.6	100.0
Population aging & health	-	17.6	82.4	100.0

Material/documents – Main Modules

(N=17)

	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total (percent)
Proposal writing	5.9	11.8	82.4	100.0
Life course etc.	-	52.9	47.1	100.0
Methodology	-	17.6	82.4	100.0
Population aging & health	-	23.5	76.5	100.0

Participation of participants – Main Modules

(N=17)

	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total (percent)
Proposal writing	11.8	29.4	58.8	100.0
Life course etc.	5.9	41.2	52.9	100.0
Methodology	5.9	23.5	70.6	100.0
Population aging & health	-	58.8	41.2	100.0

Time – Main Modules

(N=18)

	Too short	About right	Too long	Total (percent)
Proposal writing	33.3	55.6	11.1	100.0
Life course etc.	5.6	61.1	33.3	100.0
Methodology	33.3	66.7	-	100.0
Population aging & health	23.5	76.5	-	100.0

*Note: N=17

Single Seminar on Special Topics

(N=18)

	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total (percent)
Psychological well-being	-	55.6	44.4	100.0
Environmental health impacts	11.1	61.1	27.8	100.0
Children health and well-being	-	55.6	44.4	100.0
Research on reproductive health issues	5.6	50.0	44.4	100.0
Research on sexual behavior of adults related to AIDS	11.1	55.6	33.3	100.0
Evolutionary perspective on adult sexual behavior	5.6	83.3	11.1	100.0
Participatory research	5.6	61.1	33.3	100.0
Ethics and dealing with IRBs	38.9	27.8	33.3	100.0
Communicating with policy makers/media	5.6	50.0	44.4	100.0
Participation of participants	5.6	66.7	27.8	100.0

Field Trip

(N=18)

	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total (percent)
Transportation	5.6	27.8	66.7	100.0
Visit to elderly club and women project	11.1	22.2	66.7	100.0
Hmong project	22.2	33.3	44.4	100.0
PPAT field trip	16.7	44.4	38.9	100.0
PHPT(AIDS project)	-	27.8	72.2	100.0
Participatory research exercise*	17.6	41.2	41.2	100.0
Discussion session*	5.9	41.2	52.9	100.0
Accommodation*	-	17.6	82.4	100.0
	Too short	About right	Too long	Total (percent)
Time	5.6	88.9	5.6	100.0

* Note: N=17

Overall Training Program

(N=17)

	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Total (percent)
Over rating of the program structure	-	47.1	52.9	100.0
How well did content of sessions meet the needs of participant?	5.9	52.9	41.2	100.0
Improvement in the understanding of life course concepts	-	52.9	47.1	100.0
Improvement in the understanding of qualitative research	-	17.6	82.4	100.0
Improvement in the understanding of quantitative research	11.8	41.2	47.1	100.0
Improvement in the understanding of research proposal development/writing	5.9	11.8	82.4	100.0
Materials distributed during the workshop	-	17.6	82.4	100.0
Expectation of the application of workshop experience to participant's work	5.9	29.4	64.7	100.0
Weekend field trip	11.8	41.2	47.1	100.0
Staff assistance	-	11.8	88.2	100.0
Accommodation	-	17.6	82.4	100.0
Daily transportation	-	17.6	82.4	100.0
Food	-	29.4	70.6	100.0
Overall rating of the conference room, setting, facilities/equipment	-	23.5	76.5	100.0
	Too short	About right	Too long	Total (percent)
Time	5.9	76.5	17.6	100.0

Appendix 2

Day-to-day schedule
Health and Well being over the Life Course
January 12 to February 13, 2004

<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Morning session</i>	<i>Afternoon session</i>
		09:00 – 10:30 am <i>Lecture</i>	01:00 – 02:30 pm <i>Lecture</i>
		10:30 – 10:45 am <i>Coffee break</i>	02:30 – 02:45 pm <i>Coffee break</i>
		10:45 – 12:00 pm <i>Lecture</i>	02:45 – 04:00 pm <i>Lecture</i>
Sun	January 11	Arrival	
Mon	January 12	VP Opening NC Overview of the workshop RJ Life course perspective, overview	PG Overview of proposal writing; framing research questions
Tue	January 13	RJ The life course and its determinants	CPS staff Introduction to libraries; PG consult on research questions
Wed	January 14	RJ Theories and themes in life course studies	Free time for proposal development <i>Evening social event: welcoming dinner</i>
Thu	January 15	JK Qualitative data collection	Free time for proposal development
Fri	January 16	RJ Adolescence and transition to adulthood	PG Review and discussion of participants work on research questions
Sat	January 17	<i>Day trip to visit Patthaya – departure from hotel: 07:30 am</i>	
Sun	January 18	Free time	
Mon	January 19	RJ Adolescence and transition to adulthood – continued	PG Conducting literature reviews and developing conceptual frameworks
Tue	January 20	JKY Computer workshop: research resources on the internet	Free time for proposal development
Wed	January 21	JK Qualitative data analysis	JK Computer workshop on qualitative analysis
Thu	January 22	JK Combining qualitative and quantitative data methods	PG Review and discussion of progress on research proposals
Fri	January 23	CS & JR Psychological well-being	PG Developing a research design for a proposal
Sat	January 24	<i>Field trip to Kanchanaburi to visit IPSR research site – departure: 07:30 am</i>	
Sun	January 25	Free time to work on proposals etc.	
Mon	January 26	NV Issues of environmental health - impact on different age groups RC Environmental health impacts – continued	SA Children health and well-being
Tue	January 27	PG Research on reproductive health issues	JK Secondary data analysis practicum
Wed	January 28	Wassana Im-em Research on sexual behavior of adults related to AIDS	Free time for proposal development
Thu	January 29	Bobbi Low Evolutionary perspective on adult sexual behavior	PG Review and discussion of participants work on research design

Fri	January 30	NA Participatory research	NC + CS Briefing on field trip
Sat	January 31	Depart for Fieldtrip (07:00 am) Travel to Chainat	Visit HelpAge project in Chainat Overnight in Sukhothai
Sun	February 1	Sight seeing in Sukhothai	Travel to Chiang Mai
Mon	February 2	Presentation by team studying adult health and pesticides among Hmong (PK and others)	Visit to field site of Hmong health study
Tue	February 3	PPAT project	Visit Doi Suthep
Wed	February 4	UD Participatory research on HIV/AIDS	SL Introduction and visit to data processing lab of research on AIDS
Thu	February 5	Discussion: Lessons from field trip re participatory vs. conventional academic research (JK,NC,VP,&CS)	Leave Chiang Mai; Overnight in Phitsanulok
Fri	February 6	Sightseeing in Phitsanulok	Return to Bangkok
Sat	February 7	Free time to work on proposals	
Sun	February 8	Free time in Bangkok.	
Mon	February 9	ZZ Introduction to demography of health and aging; Population aging in global perspective	SP Developing timelines and budgets; ethics; dealing with IRBs
Tue	February 10	ZZ Historical issues in health & aging; Measuring health -general issues	JH Communicating with policy makers / mass media
Wed	February 11	ZZ Measuring health at individual level; Gender and health; Longitudinal vs. cross-sectional approaches to studying health and aging	Consultation re proposals (ZZ,NC,JK, JH)
Thu	February 12	ZZ Measuring health at global level; Life span and compression of morbidity	Consultation re proposals (ZZ,NC,JK)
Fri	February 13	Presentation of proposals (ZZ, JK, VP, NC)	Presentation of proposal (ZZ,JK,VP,NC) Closing ceremony; presentation of certificates of attendance
Sat	February 14	Depart for home	

Abbreviations:

CS = Chanpen Saengtienchai	NC = Napaporn Chayovan	SA = Stephen Atwood
JK = John Knodel	NV = Nuntavarn Vichit-Vadakan	SL = Sophie Le Coeur
JKY = Ja Kyung Yoo	PG = Philip Guest	SP = Samlee Plianbangchang
JH = Jerry Huguet	PK = Peter Kunstadter	UD = Usa Duangsaa
JR = Jiraporn Kespichayawattana	RC = Robert Chapman	VP = Vipap Prachuabmoh
NA = Narumon Arunotai	RJ = Rukmalie Jayakody	ZZ = Zak Zimmer

Field trip: