

Thailand has invested huge resources to support children who have been abused.

Thai parents are assumed to have an innate ability to care for their children and to raise them to become healthy and productive citizens – without any need for parental training or education. However, the data shows that not only is this completely wrong, but we have collectively failed in our prevention work.

Our efforts to stop violence against children in the home are mostly REACTIVE as opposed to PROACTIVE.

We now know that most children in Thailand are treated violently by their parents. The latest national study shows that 54% of children across the country experience violence in the home from those who are meant to care for them.

Not only that, but each year there are over 50,000 school dropouts and over 12,000 children who commit crime. 90% are boys. We have Juvenile and Family Courts and Juvenile Observation and Protection Centers in every province (76 provinces). There are 20 Juvenile training centers around the country. There are 10,611 One Stop Crisis Centers to support victims of violence. All these centers have full-time staff, large facilities, with regular annual budgets going on for decades.

However, at the same time, we have NO parent training center in Thailand with full-time staff and a central budget allocation. This lags far behind the latest global evidence, which shows what parents and children need to live in violence-free homes. Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) is a series of evidence-based programs developed by the University of Oxford and others and supported by WHO and UNICEF. PLH is the culmination of five decades of research in parenting. Our randomized controlled trial in Thailand found it was 3 highly effective in preventing violence against children. It reduced parental violence by 61%, child behavior problems by 59%, and parental mental health problems by 42%.

In addition to being highly effective, evidence shows that Parenting for Lifelong Health has benefits well above the cost invested. Our research with Chulalongkorn University has shown that for every 1 Baht invested in the program, there would be up to 118 Baht in benefits. This is due to reduced child behavior problems, improved child physical and mental health, and improved adult labor productivity.

Myself, Dr McCoy, and partners from the University of Oxford, the Ministry of Public Health, and UNICEF Thailand initiated Parenting for Lifelong Health in Thailand 5 years ago. We are extremely grateful for the support of the World Childhood Foundation and the LEGO Foundation in our efforts.

So far, we have trained 262 facilitators who have delivered training to over 1,200 families in 6 northeastern provinces. These facilitators are all government health workers – mainly nurses and public health officers at the tambon level. We are about to expand our work in the northern region. We also have good cooperation with the Child Shield team, which supports systematic monitoring of service delivery and impact on families.

Unfortunately, many health worker facilitators struggle to deliver the program; some drop out. They lack an official government policy requiring that this service is provided. Sometimes, their supervisors do not see that their work as facilitators is important.

We need a national policy that demonstrates the Thai government's commitment to parenting education, as well as the integration of Parenting for Lifelong Health and other effective parenting programs into government services nationwide. Just like the Juvenile Observation and Protection Centers in every province, we should have 'Parent Training Centers' in every province. It is not only economically viable but socially imperative that we PROACTIVELY prevent violence against children by strengthening families. Doing so will allow Thai society to have vastly improved outcomes, as well as a stronger economic future, than what we have right now. Thank you.