

Happiness Approach in an Award-winning Community

Abstract

The objective of this research is to study the influence of knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy affecting individual's happiness. The sample group consisted of 123 dwellers in Naongkratum village, which was awarded as 2005 best Sufficiency Economy village. The philosophy of 'Sufficiency Economy' bestowed by His Majesty the King is a philosophy that stresses the middle path as the overriding principle for appropriate conduct and way of life by the populace at the level of individual, family, and community, while providing a choice of balanced development strategy for the nation so as to develop in line with the forces of globalization, and shielding against inevitable shocks and excesses that may arise. The data obtained were analysed by using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation and the analysis of covariance: ANCOVA. The result showed that the practice of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy had a significant impact on individual's happiness ($p < 0.01$). Future research directions are discussed and policy implications are provided.

Introduction

'Sufficiency Economy' (Ampol Senanarong, pp.2 - 8) is a philosophy that His Majesty the King has expressed in his speech as a guideline for the Thai people to lead their lives for more than 25 years before the economic crisis in the late 1990s. This was reflected in an excerpt from His speech given on July 18, 1974. He pointed out the importance of step-by-step development of the nation because once a firm foundation have been laid, the people could have their basic necessities and then could enjoy higher levels of economic growth.

(“...Development of the nation must be carried out in stages, starting with the laying of the foundation by ensuring the majority of the people have their basic necessities through the use of economical means and equipment in accordance with theoretical principles. Once a reasonably firm foundation has been laid and in effect, higher levels of economic growth and development should be promoted...”)

Later, His Majesty the King added in the royal speech given on the occasion of His Birthday Anniversary on December 4, 1974 that it is not important whether Thailand would be accused of being old-fashioned; what is important is the fact that we have enough to live and to eat.

(“...no matter what others say – whether they will accuse Thailand of being old-fashioned or obscurantist. So long as we have enough to live on and live for- and this should be the wish and

determination of all of us – without aiming for the apex of prosperity, we shall already be considered as the top in comparison with other countries in the present world...”)

According to the royal speeches given in 1974, it is obvious that His Majesty the King has placed importance on step-by-step development on the basis of self-reliance, having enough to live and to eat, moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. Also, His Majesty the King’s royal statement significantly raised consciousness of Thai people to be prudent, to realize steps of development which are academically correct, and to adhere to morals for every conduct of life. These all are known as “Sufficiency Economy.”

Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that stresses appropriate conduct and way of life while incorporating moderation, due consideration in all modes of conduct, and the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks. It requires the application of accurate knowledge, care and giving, mutual assistance, and collaboration. The aim is to create bonds which closely link people from all sectors together and boost positive creative force in order to lead to unity, balanced and sustainable development as well as readiness to cope appropriately with critical challenges occurring as a result of globalization.

It is obvious that the crisis caused by external factors that struck Thailand in the late 1990s had severely affected the way of living of the people of all levels due to a lack of “self-immunity”. The people had been obsessed with over-investment while they could not stand on their own securely. Once His Majesty said that to be a tiger is not important. The important thing is to have a self-supporting economy.

(“...to be a tiger is not important. The important thing for us is to have a self-supporting economy. A self-supporting economy means to have enough to survive.”)

The development in accordance with the philosophy of sufficiency economy is thus the development of oneself which extends to the level of the families, communities as well as the level of nation. His Majesty stresses that development must be done step by step starting from building a good basis for the people to enable them to have enough to live on and enough to eat and then to become self-reliant.

Sufficiency Economy: Application

His majesty’s philosophy of sufficiency economy serves as guidelines for conducting daily life for the people of all levels from the family level, the community level to the national level. At the family or individual level, each individual must have conscience in their daily conduct, and lead a happy, joyful and moderate life. One should be engaged in a proper career to raise oneself and his family at a sufficient level and refrain from taking advantages of other people while being generous to them. At the community level, the people must join hands in their activities, participate in the decision-making process in the community, develop mutual learning process, and appropriately apply the uncomplicated technology in the development of the community. At the national level, a holistic development process should be promoted to create

balance. The social, economic, and resource capitals should be taken into consideration. Importantly, all merchandises produced should first meet the demands in the country before being exported. Low risks should be encouraged and we should not over-invest because such act will lead to debts.

The country should also have careful planning, keep pace with changes in the world and be able to use the natural resources in a worthwhile manner while conserving and preserving the environment. In addition, social capitals such as the educational system and the local wisdom should be developed in order to uplift the country's capability in creating innovation and technology which is appropriate to the country as well as cost-saving and simple. The purpose is to reduce imports of technology and dependence on other countries.

To fulfil His Majesty's initiative on development, the National Economic and Social Development Board humbly applies the philosophy of sufficiency economy as the guideline for the development and administration of the country by incorporating it in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan which covers the period from 2002 to 2006. Based on the concept and principle of sufficiency economy, a balanced development framework in all important aspects: human, social, economic and environmental, is stressed. The middle path is followed as the main guiding light to free the country from crises as well as to ensure its secure, balanced and sustainable development. Thus, the objective of this research is to examine the influence of knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy affecting individual's happiness.

Review literature

Richard Layard concluded his findings about sources of happiness (pp.225 – 231) as follows.

- Humans are deeply social beings. Most people prefer to be in company most of the time. Friendship and marriage make people happier. Unemployment causes misery that goes far beyond the effect of losing income, because it breaks a social tie define our personal identity and give meaning to our life. So it is a deep fallacy of many economists to think of human interaction as mainly a means to an end, rather than also an end in itself. This applies also to the political process. Many economists complain that people care about processes and not simply about 'outcomes'. But if people are like that, who are we to say they should be different?

- As social beings, we want to trust each other. The average happiness in one country compared with other can be largely explained by six key factors (and so can the suicide rate). These are: the proportion of people who say that other people can be trusted; the proportion who belong to social organisations; the divorce rate; the unemployment rate; the quality of government; and religious belief. Unhappily, over the last forty years levels of trust have fallen drastically in Britain and America, though not in continental Europe. In the United States and Britain today the percentage of adults who think that most people can be trusted is half that of the 1950s. Policies that encourage trust are thus extremely important.

These include moral education in schools, and policies to build stable families, communities and workplaces.

We do not want high turnovers in jobs, in housing or in marriages, except where clear advantages outweigh the human and other costs. Nor do we want our firms and public services to be repeatedly restructured, with massive loss of trust at every stage. Unfortunately, political leaders in the United States and Britain have elevated 'flexibility' and 'change' to the same level as motherhood and apple pie. But there are huge advantages to inflexibility and predictability, as continental Europeans appreciate. The evidence shows that continuous re-optimisation is not the best route to happiness: you are more likely to be happy if you settle for what is 'good enough' than if you feel you must always have the most.

People also want to be trusted and respected themselves. This requires that they have some autonomy. Most of us like to feel we are working well or helping others because we could not expect to be respected otherwise. That is a key element in the motivation to work – the satisfaction of the professional norm. Yet in recent years employers have used more and more financial incentives to motivate people; performance-related pay has been creeping in everywhere, including the public services.

Those who favour it believe that if they add an extra incentive, people are bound to work harder. They assume that all other incentives will retain their existing force. Yet that is not how people are. If they pay people for something, they stop feeling that you automatically expect it of them. In consequence they may even work less. So introducing targets and paying people to achieve them may not be the best way to revolutionise the public services.

- People are also deeply attached to the status quo. They hate loss of any kind, and they care less about gains than about losses. Researches typically find that an income loss of 100 hurts twice as much as an income gain of 100 helps. This is not an inconvenience to be ignored, but a fact to be respected. Yet rationalisers happily recognise things without weighing properly the cost to happiness from breaking up a settled order.

More generally, people like what is familiar to them. Crime and mental illness are higher in transient or mixed communities, other things being equal. This is an important cost of high mobility. Anglo-American economists may preach to Europeans that they should move house more often. This would surely increase productivity, but it is not desirable unless the gains from high productivity would outweigh the costs of greater crime and family instability. Happiness, not dynamism, should be the goal of public policy.

- Human beings are also status conscious. Natural selection has planted in us the desire to do better than other people, or at least to keep up with them. This is what causes the rat race. In any race there is a fixed number of winners. For every winner there is a loser: it is a zero-sum game. This is equally true of the race for status, since the total amount of status in a society is fixed. That is one major reason why as a society we have not grown happier.

So what can we do? If a person works harder and earns more, he may himself gain by increasing his income compared with other people. But the other people lose because their income now falls relative to his. He does not care that he is polluting other people in this way, so we must provide him with an automatic incentive to do so. Taxation provides exactly this incentive. If we make taxes commensurate to the damage that an individual does to others when he earns more, then he will only work harder if there is a true net benefit to society as a whole. It is efficient to discourage work effort that makes society worse off. Thus taxation is a way of containing the rat race, and we should stop apologising for its 'dreadful' disincentive effects. If taxcutters think people should work still harder, they need to explain why.

There is also another tactic for limiting the rat race: education. We are past the period of evolution when only the fittest can survive. So we should teach our young to give less value to status and more value to helping other people. This idea is not new, but it is taking a real beating in the current era of unrestrained individualism. It can only win the backing of solid intellectual argument.

- Humans beings are also very adaptable. Like other animals, our feeling adapt to our experience, so that when things change, our initial reactions eventually diminish and we revert towards our initial state of feeling. If things get better, we after a while take them for granted. If they get worse, we also eventually largely accept them. This is another reason why economic growth has not increased welfare as much as we expected. The number of people who are dissatisfied with their financial position is still as high as it was thirty years ago, although people are many times richer.

In other words, income is addictive. Suppose my income and spending rise this year: next year I will need more income still in order to achieve a given level of happiness. In fact to a large extent it is the change in income rather than income itself that affects happiness – unless you are very poor. In this respect income is very different from, say, friendship, because if I make more friends this year, that has permanent effects on my happiness – I do not take them for granted and need still more friends in the year that follows. We habituate more rapidly to things that money can buy than to things it cannot buy – more to goods than to relationships.

Since most people do not foresee the addictive effects of income and spending, taxation has again a useful role, just as it has with other forms of addiction like smoking. Taxes discourage us from overwork, from running on a treadmill that brings less advance in happiness than we expected. If combine this habituation argument with the one about status-seeking we can argue strongly that up to some level taxes are not inefficient, as is so often alleged. Rather, we need the tax on income from work in order to maintain a tolerable work-life balance. By contrast, tax cut would of course increase production, but would they improve the quality of our lives?

- In any case extra income increases happiness less and less as people get richer. This was the traditional argument for redistributive taxation, and modern happiness research confirms it. The argument applies both within countries and across countries. In poor countries extra income increases happiness much

more than in rich countries, and that is why helping the Third World should be one of the major ethical goals for Western society. Moreover, policies that will certainly increase misery, like easier laws on gambling, can never be justified by the income they would generate. Income is not everything.

- In fact happiness depends on your inner life as much as on your outer circumstances. Through education and practice, it is possible to improve your inner life – to accept yourself better and to feel more for others. In most of us there is a deep positive force, which can be liberated if we can overcome our negative thoughts. To develop this inner strength of character should be a major goal of education. For adults there is a range of spiritual practices that help to bring peace of mind, from Buddhist meditation to positive psychology. For those who are struggling, cognitive therapy has a good record of success. For those in the extremes of misery, psychiatric drugs and cognitive therapy have probably helped more than any other changes in the last fifty years, and we can expect further major advances.

- Public policy can more easily remove misery than augment happiness. This is because the causes of misery are the more obvious, especially when we look beyond the family circle. It is also morally right to give extra weight to removing misery. So that should be a major focus for public policy. In the West the most miserable group of people are the mentally ill. We know how to help most of them, but only about a quarter are currently in treatment. We owe them better.

New Economic Foundation (pp.10) conducted a new well-being sustainable index called 'HPI index'. The HPI is a measure of the *ecological efficiency of delivering human well-being*. It reflects the average years of happy life produced by the given society, nation or group of nations, per unit of planetary resources consumed. Put another way, it represents the efficiency with which countries convert the earth's finite resources into well-being experienced by their citizens. The HPI incorporates three separate indicators: ecological footprint, self-reported life satisfaction, and life expectancy. As a result, Thailand was given the medium range of HPI index at 55.4 resulting from the calculations of life satisfaction, life expectancy, and ecological footprint figures (6.5, 70.0, and 1.6 respectively).

Daniel nettle (pp.16-21) classified happiness into one of three increasingly inclusive senses. The most immediate and direct senses of happiness involve an emotion or feeling, something like joy or pleasure. These feelings are transient and have an unmistakable and particular phenomenology – that is to say, paraphrasing Thomas Nagel, there is something which joy feels like. The feeling is brought on by a desired state being (perhaps unexpectedly) attained, and there is not much cognition involved, beyond the recognition that the desired thing has happened. With apologies for the barbaric terminology, we will henceforth call this sense of happiness 'level one happiness'.

When people say that they are happy with their lives, they do not usually mean that they are literally joyful, or experiencing pleasure, all of the time. They mean that, upon reflection on the balance sheet of pleasures and pains, they feel the balance to be reasonably positive over the long term. This is happiness in the sense usually studied by psychologists. It concerns not so much feelings, as judgements about the balance of feelings. Thus it is a hybrid of emotion, and judgement about emotion. Its synonyms are things like contentment and life satisfaction. This is 'level two happiness'. It is clear that when Bentham talked about the greatest happiness to the greatest number being the foundation of morals and legislation, he meant happiness in a level two sense; the long-term balance of positive and negative emotions across time and individuals.

Level two happiness, though, is not calculated by a simple summing up of all the positive moments and a subtraction of the negative ones. It also involves more complex cognitive processes, such as comparison with alternative possible outcomes. There are yet broader senses of happiness. Aristotle's ideal of the good life, *eudaimonia*, is sometimes translated as 'happiness'. However, what is meant by *eudaimonia* is a life in which the person flourishes, or fulfils their true potential. Though such a life could include many positive emotional experiences, it is not actually part of its definition that it need do so. Contemporary psychologists and philosophers have sometimes talked of happiness when they really mean the good life or *eudaimonia*. When they do so, we shall call this usage a level three sense of the term happiness. Note that 'level three happiness' has no characteristic phenomenology since it is not an emotional state. There is no single thing that it feels like to achieve *eudaimonia*, since everyone's potential is different. Indeed, one of the problems of *eudaimonia* and related constructs is that it is not clear who is to be the judge of what one's full potential is. If the judge is the subject herself then the concept is a properly psychological one, and useful in our discussion of happiness. If the judge is a psychologist, or society, imposing some external standard of what one should do with life, then the concept has become a moralizing one; an ideology, in fact. But, at least within any liberal tradition of thought, happiness should not be moralized. As long as people do not harm each other, then it is their inalienable right to construe their own potential in any way they like. To find a definition of happiness that is broad enough to capture the full range of human goods, but does not become an ideological position, is an extremely hard balance to strike.

Research hypotheses

(i) Research questions and purposes

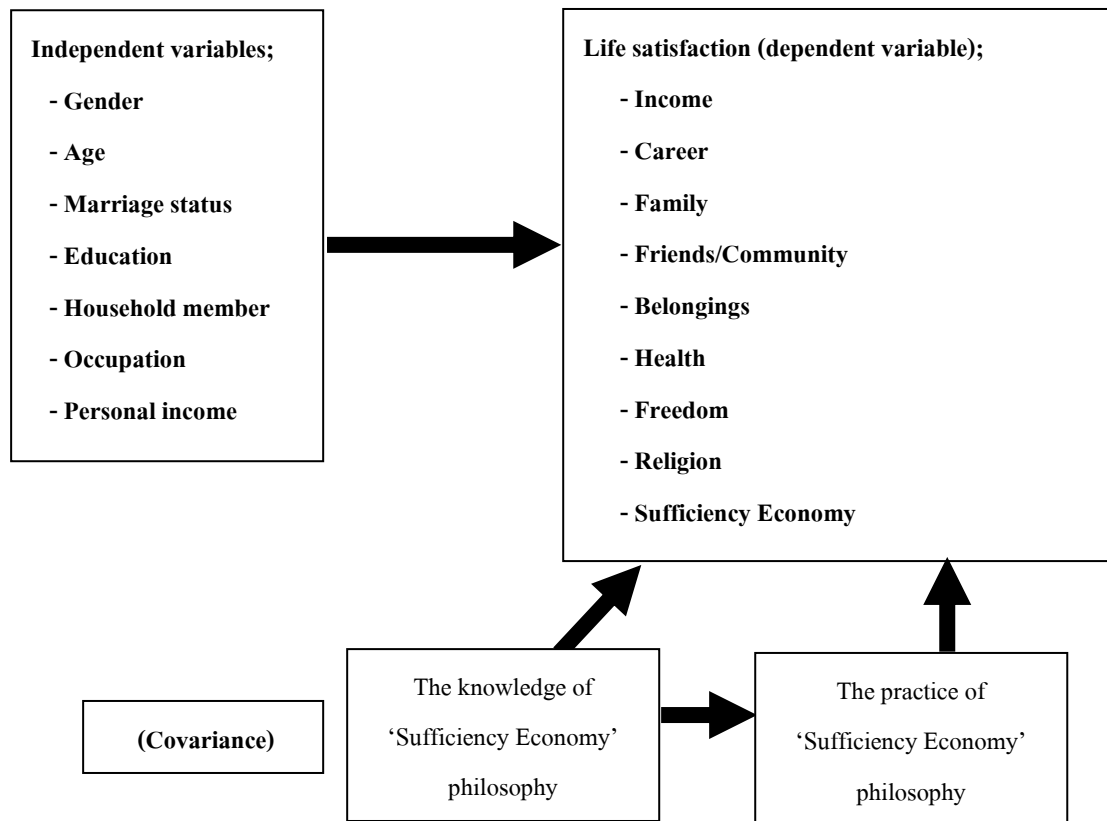
This study was conducted to examine the influence of knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy affecting individual's happiness. Therefore, the data were collected from Naongkratum village which was awarded to be the best Sufficiency Economy village in 2005.

(ii) Hypothesized framework

Besides the knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy, there are also many factors affecting individual's happiness such as gender age status education occupation. Thus, the

hypothesized framework of this study was proposed as follows by using ANCOVA in order to avoid the effects of those factors.

Figure 1 Hypothesized framework using the ANCOVA test



Research method

(i) Sample and population

This research collected data from 123 dwellers in Naongkratum village by survey. This figure resulted from $N/(Ne^2+1) = 308/(308*0.1^2+1) = 75.4901 = 76$ samples, which is the minimum sample, where the total population was 308 and $e = 0.1$. Demographic characteristics of respondents are listed as follows;

Figure 2 Samples classified by gender in percentage

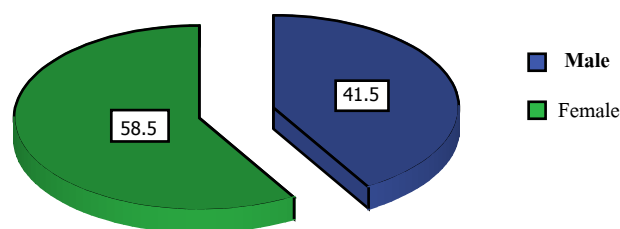


Figure 3 Samples classified by age in percentage

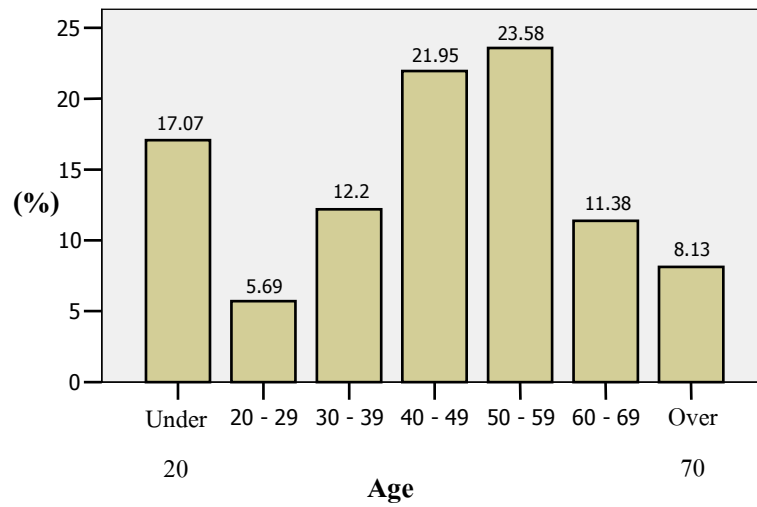


Figure 4 Samples classified by marriage status in percentage

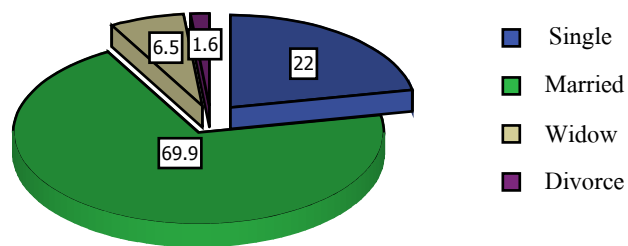


Figure 5 Samples classified by education in percentage

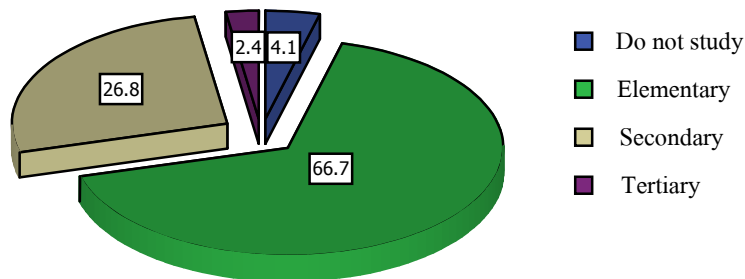


Figure 6 Samples classified by household member in percentage

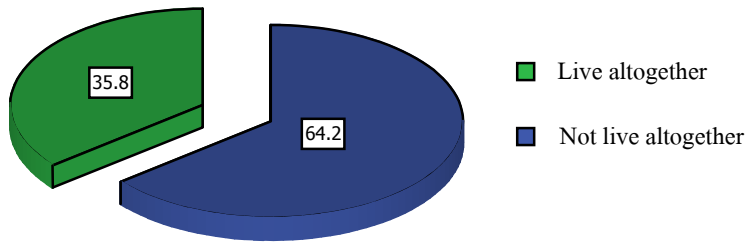


Figure 7 Samples classified by occupation in percentage

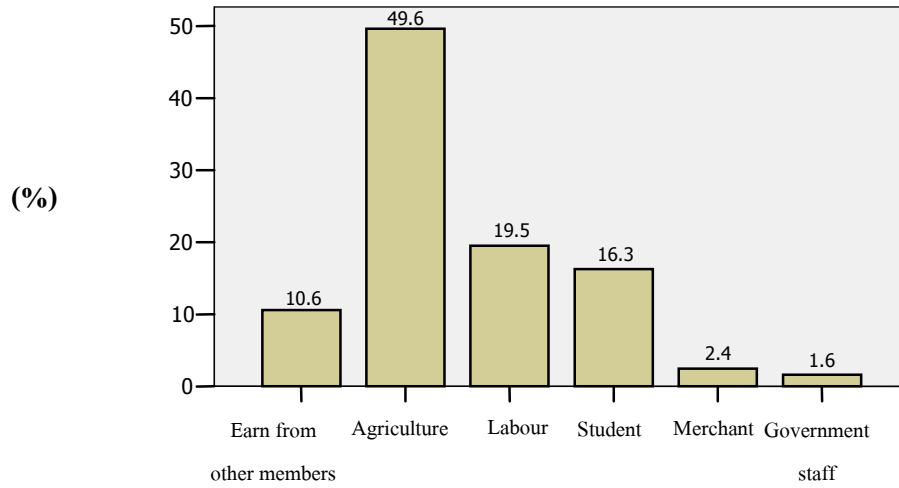
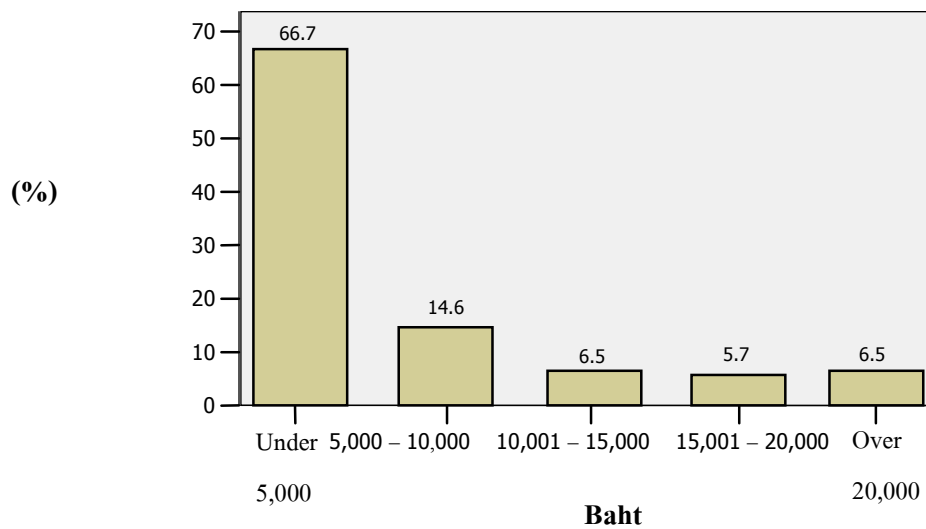


Figure 8 Samples classified by personal income in percentage



(ii) Instruments

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part contains personal data such as gender, age, marriage status, education, occupation and so forth. The second part is designed to test the knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy. Finally, the third part comprises the level of life satisfaction ranging from 1 to 5 in different aspects including income, career, family, belongings, friends/community, health, freedom, religion, and sufficiency economy.

(iii) Procedure

The data was collected by one-on-one interview between the staff and sample dweller. When the sample dweller replied, the staff filled in all answers in the questionnaire. In addition, in one household, the samples were asked in different ages and gender in order to represent their level of life satisfaction. Finally, the interview commenced in the evening for two days resulting from the main occupation of samples as farmers.

Results & discussion

(i) Analysis on testing the knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy

The result showed that sample dwellers understood the knowledge of Sufficiency Economy philosophy more than 70 percent. In addition, some mistakes occurred from the samples was due to some incomplete understanding of the philosophy. As for the test of practices, sample dwellers followed the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy more than 80 percent including recording monthly total revenues and expenditures, monthly saving, controlling household costs such as telephone and electricity, and so forth. Therefore, this finding was to ensure the considerable level of knowledge and practices of Sufficiency Economy philosophy of the samples.

(ii) Analysis on using ANCOVA to measure the influence of knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy affecting individual's happiness.

The result as showed below indicated that, at 95% confidence interval, the knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy significantly influenced sample dwellers' happiness at 0.0049. In addition, this finding was compatible with the level of life satisfaction which showed the highest level of following Sufficient Economy philosophy at 4.84 out of the total of 5.00. The explanation behind this finding may derive from the fact that Sufficiency Economy philosophy is quite close to the middle path of living in Buddhism. This will in turn result in happiness and peace for those who follow.

Table 1 Analysis by using the ANCOVA test**Dependent Variable: overall life satisfaction**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	5.1758	25	0.2070	1.3792	0.1352
Intercept	16.3471	1	16.3471	108.9006	0.0000
Gender	0.0975	1	0.0975	0.6493	0.4223
Age	1.0161	6	0.1693	1.1281	0.3518
Status	1.0734	3	0.3578	2.3836	0.0740
Education	0.3658	3	0.1219	0.8122	0.4901
Member	0.1533	1	0.1533	1.0216	0.3147
Occupation	0.3263	5	0.0653	0.4347	0.8233
Personal Income	0.6814	4	0.1703	1.1348	0.3448
Knowledge	0.0168	1	0.0168	0.1120	0.7386
Practice	1.2452	1	1.2452	8.2954	0.0049
Error	14.5607	97	0.1501		
Total	2466.1852	123			
Corrected Total	19.7364	122			

a. R Squared = .262 (Adjusted R Squared = .072)**Table 2 The level of life satisfaction in different aspects**

Life satisfaction index	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Income	4.13	1.02
2. Career	4.24	0.94
3. Family	4.65	0.67
4. Friends/Community	4.73	0.48
5. Belongings	4.20	0.98
6. Physical health	3.95	1.27
7. Freedom	4.72	0.58
8. Religion	4.67	0.55
9. The practice of Sufficiency Economy philosophy	4.84	0.37
Overall	4.46	0.40

Conclusion

This research examines the influence of knowledge and practices of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy affecting individual's happiness. The samples were 123 dwellers in Naongkratum village, which was awarded as 2005 best Sufficiency Economy village. The result showed a considerable level of knowledge and practices of Sufficiency Economy philosophy (71 and 80 percent respectively). Also, the result using the ANCOVA test indicated high significance on the practice of 'Sufficiency Economy' philosophy influencing upon samples' happiness at 0.0049. Also, since the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is quite compatible to the Buddhism teaching, it ensures the occurrence of happiness and peace in life for those who follow.

Future research directions

This research was conducted to study only the influence of Sufficient Economy philosophy affecting individual's happiness. Future research should focus upon other dimensions such as economic growth and environmental concerns. Moreover, limitation of sample size should be noticed for further study. Also, collecting data from different areas, such as urban and rural areas, may result in a more precise solution. Finally, if possible, future research should conduct the survey before and after the practices of Sufficiency Economy in order to compare the difference in the level of happiness.

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