

Inner Peace and Poverty¹

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Abstract

Skevington's (2009) study of dimensions of quality of life in poverty suggests that "nothing is peaceful in poverty". However, there is no evidence from an empirical study to support this suggestion. This paper aims to explore whether inner peace can be conceived regardless of income level. This question was explored by using primary data on 464 individuals collected in 2012 in Thailand. Participants were asked to self-rate themselves on their inner peace level and other related information. Samples were subsequently separated into two groups with respect to the 2012 Thai poverty line. The ordered choices model was used to analyse the observational data. The marginal effects of both groups were computed to interpret the effects of each significant covariate.

Results indicate similar averages of inner peace between the poor and non-poor groups. This implies that inner peace is not determined by income but any other social

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and personality factors instead. These results can fulfil the theoretical knowledge on quality of life and well-being.

Keywords: quality of life, Thailand, well-being, religiosity

Introduction

The empirical literature showed that spirituality is related to quality of life and poverty alleviation (Narayan et al., 2000; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; WHOQOL SRPB Group, 2006). It has been proven that spirituality should be used as a main dimension to measure people's well-being (Brady et al., 1999). Recently, the spirituality was accepted for use as a measure such as in GNH indicators of Bhutan (Ura, 2012), the Better Life Index of OECD (Index, 2012), World Health Organization's Quality of Life (WHOQOL) (WHOQoL Group, 1998), and so on.

Spirituality itself primarily has been based upon religion and belief. It captures the state of mind e.g., peacefulness, calmness and serenity (Lee et al, 2012). It is a present state of peace and harmony (Hungelmann et al., 1985) in which that harmony is greater-than-human source of meaning and value (Finnis, Boyle & Grisez, 1987 referred in Alkire, 2015). The concept of spiritual well-being was broadly defined in terms of a state of being reflecting positive feeling, behaviours, and cognitions of relationships with oneself, others, the transcendent and nature, which in turn provide the individual with a sense of identity, wholeness, satisfaction, joy, contentment, beauty, love, respect, positive attitudes, inner peace and harmony, and purpose and direction in life (Gomez and Fisher, 2003).

Thus, it could be implied that inner peace is related to poverty somehow. However, the evidence from Skevington's (2009) study on dimensions of quality of life in poverty states that "nothing is peaceful in poverty". It means those who are poor could not even have a chance to conceive peace of mind until they overcome poverty. This interpretation contrasts with the majority of previous studies about

spiritual well-being and quality of life. And if it is true how could the spiritual aspect of quality of life be improved. This question is the motivation of this study on how peace of mind contributes to the quality of life and also poverty reduction. To our knowledge, no study has analysed spiritual well-being focusing only on inner peace and other indicators of quality of life with respect to poverty reduction in case of Thailand. This study hypothesized whether inner peace could be conceived regardless of income level in the Buddhist country, Thailand. If so, how can inner peace be related to poverty?

What is inner peace?

There are many definitions of inner peace. However, this study employed the WHOQOL-SRPB¹ concept of inner peace.

The facet on inner peace, serenity and harmony is defined as.

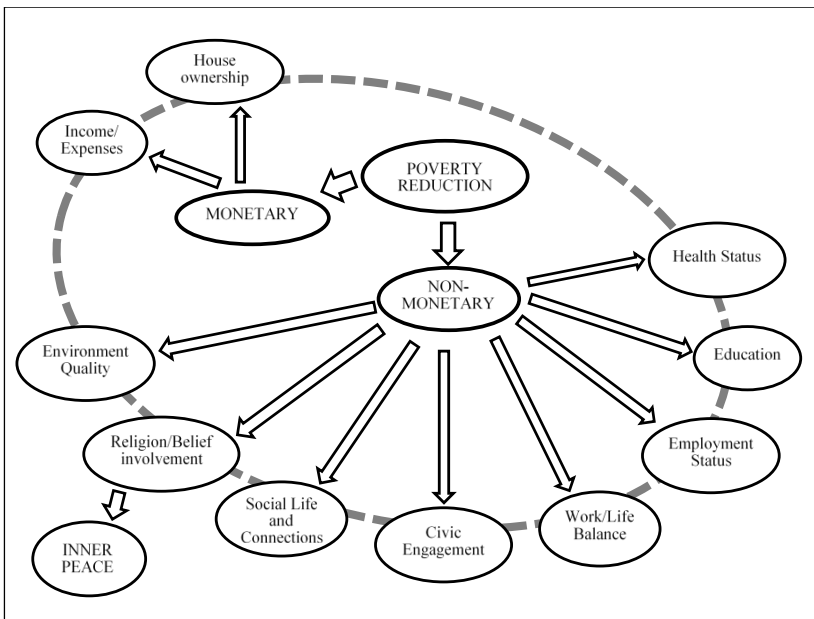
The extent to which people are at peace with themselves. The source of this peace comes from *within* the person and can be connected to a relationship the person will have with God, or it may be derived from their belief in a moral code or set of beliefs. The feeling is of serenity and calmness. Whenever things go wrong this inner peace helps you to cope. It is viewed as a highly desirable condition. (Fleck & Skevington, 2007).

There are four questions of inner peace/serenity/harmony facet of SRPB, which are: 1) To what extent do you feel peaceful within yourself? 2) To what extent do you have inner peace?, 3) How much are you able to feel peaceful when you need to?, and 4) To what extent do you feel a sense of harmony in your life?

¹ WHOQOL is the famous instrument for measuring quality of life initiated in 1991 by the World Health Organization. It is composed of six domains which are physical; psychological, independence, social, environmental and spirituality. The WHOQOL-SRPB is an expanded version which covering quality of life aspects related to spirituality, religiousness and personal beliefs. (WHO, 2012).

Poverty reduction, quality of life and inner peace relationship

Explicitly, better quality of life generally calls for less poverty (Mundial, 1991). This study applied quality of life domain from the OECD Better Life index which was the latest and covers both monetary and non-monetary aspects of poverty reduction. The relationship among inner peace and factors of poverty reduction is shown in Figure 1. This diagram proposed two aspects of poverty reduction which consists of ten dimensions of the independent variables.



Noted: - - - shown inter-relationships among factors; source: developed from OECD better life index.

Figure 1 Relationship between peace of mind (or inner peace) and others poverty reduction factors

The description of proposed variables both dependent and independent can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposed variables description

Dependent variable: Inner peace Independent Variables: <i>Material living condition</i> House ownership Annual income Yearly expenses Satisfaction in living standard Health status Satisfaction in overall health physical health status Mental health status <i>Education: years in schooling</i> <i>Employment status:</i> employed/unemployed Type of works: farmer, labourer, salaried, govt. <i>Work/life balance: work less than 50 hours a week</i> <i>Civic engagement: affecting from politic</i> <i>Religious/belief involvement</i> Time as religious prayer per week in minute(s) Reading sacred text/belief/doctrine time per week in minute(s) Annual money donated to religious institutions/beliefs <i>Satisfaction with life overall</i>	<i>Environment quality</i> Satisfaction in community Feeling own community is nice Satisfaction in facility providing at community Feeling as one with nature feeling that developing harmony with the environment reflects my personal experience most of the time. <i>Social life/ social connection</i> Degree of loneliness experiences Time caring for others per week Volunteering time per week Time spending for community as leader Time spending for community as member Annual charitable money for public or community <i>Socio-Demographics variables</i> age gender Marital status Number of children Rurality: urban, rural, semi-urban Number of household member
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1. Method

The survey was conducted in 2012 in two purposively selected provinces in Thailand to include urban and rural in diverse geographical regions. One is the capital city, Bangkok in the Central and the other is Chiang Mai in the North. Household units were randomly selected and respondents were purposively chosen by interviewers to be a representative of all household members. By using a face-to-face interview and a questionnaire, participants were asked to self-rate themselves on their inner peace level and other related information.

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The total sample comprised 464 people. There were 162 males and 302 females. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years with a mean of 41.92 (SD 11.98). Average annual income was 5,183 USD. Additional characteristics of the sample can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 Characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Total	Characteristics	Total
respondents % (n)	100 (464)	Educational attainment %	
Gender %(n)		Not in school	1.1
male	34.9(162)	Primary school	34.3
female	65.1(302)	Secondary school	13.8
Age %(n)		High school	11.4
16-24	6.3 (29)	Diploma	5
25-59	85.3(396)	Bachelor	28.4
>60	8.4 (39)	Master	5.8
<i>Average age of respondents</i>	42.61	Average years in school	10.98
marital status %		Time-use	
single	34	Average working hours (per week)	47.47
married	59	working less than 50 hours/week (% of respondents)	69
Divorce/widowed/separated	7	Sleeping (hours/day)	7.85
Employment status		housework (mins/day)	72
<i>Unemployed</i>	3.9	leisure (hours/day)	3.61
retired	1.3	Commuting to work (mins/weekday)	42.54
housewife	2.4	Caring for others (mins/week)	90.65
<i>employed</i>	96.1	Volunteering (mins/week)	5.63
farmer	10.6	Community involvement as a leader (mins/week)	9.5

Unskilled labour	33	Community involvement as a member (mins/week)	21.12
Employee in private sector	19.2	<i>Exercises and sports</i>	
Civil service officer	12.1	As a spectator (mins/week)	39.93
self-employed	18.6	As a player in team (mins/week)	72.04
art and handicraft	1.1	Alone (mins/week)	42.83
Average household size (person)	3.4	<i>Religion activities</i>	
Average annual income (in Baht)	165,864	praying (mins/week)	51.18
Average of allcharity (in Baht)	2,711	Doing meditation (mins/week)	25.26
Mean score of life satisfaction	4.06	Reading sacred text (mins/week)	19.25
Mean score of inner peace	3.91		

Source: own survey (2012)

Samples were subsequently separated into two groups based on Thailand's 2012 poverty line which was about 880 USD per year (NESDB, 2012). There were 428 participants in non-poor group, who had the annual income higher than the poverty line, and 35 participants in poor group, who was the lower one.

Empirical Model of Inner Peace

The empirical model on determinants of inner peace (peace) of individual i could be constructed as the following.

Inner peace or peace,

$$peace = x'\beta + \varepsilon$$

where x represents the vectors of explanatory variables; $peace_i$ represents observed subjective well-being level. The β represents the coefficient vectors that we would like to estimate, whereas ε_i is an error term.

Further suppose that while we cannot observe $peace$, we instead can only observe the categories of response:

$$peace = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } 0 < peace \leq \mu_1, \\ 2 & \text{if } \mu_1 < peace \leq \mu_2, \\ \vdots & \\ N & \text{if } \mu_{N-1} < peace \end{cases}$$

Then the ordered logit technique used the observations on y , which are a form of censored data on peace, to fit the parameter vector β .

Estimation Results

By using ordered response model, the estimated coefficient provided only the direction of an effect but not the magnitude. All participants were included to estimate first, then followed by the separated ordered logited regression by two groups (poor and non-poor) reported as Table 3 and 4.

Table 3, the results showed inner peace in Thailand significantly depend upon age. For those who living in rural area has a positive effect on inner peace. Also, community satisfaction in a sense of living in the nice community is significant in positive way. Within spirituality, time spending on reading sacred text has a positive effect. This finding confirmed the inextricable linked between inner peace and religiosity. But, there is no statistically significant on the annual donation money to religion institution. It may imply that the amount of donation money cannot buy your peacefulness. In term of social participation, there are the positive effect on time spending for community with a statistically significant when people participate as member, but not as the leader. Finally, the result is in line with the earlier studies that the higher level of life satisfaction, the more inner peace.

Even no statistically significant for the following variables but their directions of the relationships are worth noting. Feeling the effects of government policy has a significantly negative effect. Good deed doer such like who spend time more on volunteer or caring for others tend to have more peace of mind.

Table 4 summarized the mean score of significant variables and the marginal effect estimations of poor and non-poor groups. The result showed the probability of having inner peace at level 4 for poor and non-poor (and all participants) are about 60% (varied from 62% to 64%) when given all predictors are set to their mean value.

Table 3 Estimates of parameters of inner peace using ordered logit model

peace	Coef.	Std.	Odds Ratio	z	P> z
age	0.0167*	0.01	1.0169	1.66	0.10
Marital status: single	0.0123	0.24	1.0124	0.05	0.96
rural	0.5593*	0.31	1.7495	1.80	0.07
Household member	-0.0902	0.06	0.9138	-1.46	0.14
Yearly expenses	0.0000	0.00	1.0000	1.01	0.31
Religious reading time	0.0027*	0.00	1.0028	1.87	0.06
Annual money donated to religious institution	0.0000	0.00	1.0000	0.66	0.51
Affecting of politic to life	-0.0571	0.04	0.9445	-1.50	0.13
Nice community	0.2085***	0.07	1.2318	2.92	0.00
Time as community leader	0.0046	0.00	1.0046	1.61	0.11
Time as community member	0.0032**	0.00	1.0032	2.35	0.02
Time caring others	0.0003	0.00	1.0003	1.27	0.20
Volunteering time	0.0024	0.00	1.0024	0.65	0.52
Life satisfaction	0.3150***	0.08	1.3702	4.01	0.00

Table 4 Mean score and marginal effect of inner peace using order logit model

Mean score/ Marginal Effect	All participants	Non-poor	Poor
income	174,301.7	187,513.4	122,63.65
age	42.42	41.77	50.38
Marital status: single	0.34	0.36	0.09
rural	0.23	0.21	0.5
Household member	3.41	3.36	4.06
Yearly expenses	100,455	103,454	63,679
Religious reading time	19.60	20.07	13.76
Annual money donated to religious institution	2,149	1,979	4,240
Affecting of politic to life	3.93	4.05	2.53
Nice community	7.81	7.80	7.88
Time as community leader	9.63	10.27	1.76
Time as community member	21.30	22.45	7.06
Time caring others	86.34	53.33	442.24
Volunteering time	5.60	6.06	0
Life satisfaction	7.70	7.74	7.21
Marginal effect			
Pr(peace=1)	0.003	0.003	-
Pr(peace=2)	0.022	0.023	-
Pr(peace=3)	0.178	0.169	0.207
Pr(peace=4)	0.621	0.635	0.643
Pr(peace=5)	0.175	0.171	0.15

Conclusion

This paper has argued that no matter rich or poor, people can find their inner peace which the results from this study affirm this statement is true. Taken together the above results, this study has shown that inner peace statistically depends upon life satisfaction, age, living in the rural area, religion involvements as reading sacred texts, community quality and social participation as a member. In contrast, monetary factors both income and expenses do not statistically significant on inner peace. These results provide insights for policy makers that it is not necessary to separate policy to enhance inner peace, in other words spiritual well-being, which is a part of people well-being and quality of life. The

evidence about donation money may be used as a reference to against the Buddhist commercial which grow up heavily in Thailand this time.

These findings have significant implications for the understanding of how inner peace relate to poverty reduction and quality of life. This research will serve as a base for future studies and it would be interesting to assess the affecting from area differences.

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