

Symposium | Local minority : [Symposium 45] Bridges of Hope: Uniting for Mental Health Care in East and Southeast Asia

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[Symposium 45] Bridges of Hope: Uniting for Mental Health Care in East and Southeast Asia

Moderator: Shailendra Raj ADHIKARI (Beautiful Mind Institute of Psychiatry, Chitwan), Harry Minas (The University of Melbourne)

[SY-45-01] A Scoping Review on the Mental Health Needs of Thai Village Health Volunteers: Seeking International Support

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Keywords : Village Health Volunteers, Mental Health, Primary Healthcare, Community-Based Training, International Collaboration

Background: Village health volunteers (VHVs) play a crucial role in primary healthcare across many low- and middle-income countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Laos, where there is a shortage of healthcare professionals. Earlier research on their roles has been more general and has not explicitly addressed their mental health practices. In 2019, Thailand implemented a policy promoting a recovery-oriented approach to mental health care. Nevertheless, the support they require from academic institutions and international partnerships has not been thoroughly investigated.

Method: The Scopus and PubMed databases were explored for published studies related to "Village Health Volunteer," "Thailand," and "Mental Health," focusing on research themes, clinical practices, and policies or interventions in mental health following the pandemic (2023-2025). The authors examined their responsibilities and assessed the support needed from both international and national academic institutions and professional organizations.

Results: Most studies indicated that Thai Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) expressed concerns about the lack of community-based training for mental health practices, particularly regarding severe mental illnesses, such as the rehabilitation of schizophrenia patients. Some online screening tools and brief interventions, particularly for alcohol addiction, have been developed by higher education institutions. While health literacy was encouraged among the VHVs, no studies have reported on their mental health literacy.

Conclusion: The establishment of Thai Village Health Volunteers by the government during the Cold War illustrates a complex relationship between health and politics, aimed at promoting community health initiatives and countering communist influences. As a result, a conflict of paradigms has arisen regarding international collaboration for the practical implementation of VHVs, particularly in mental health care. Nonetheless, during this time, VHVs have become a cornerstone of the Thai health system, and they require additional support in training for severe mental illnesses and addiction from both national and international academic institutions and organizations.