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Influences of Insurgency on Service Delivery of Child Development Centers in the Three Southernmost Provinces of Thailand

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Abstract

The three southernmost provinces of Thailand are most disrupted by insurgency. However, there had been no empirical evidences which particularly addressed its influences on service delivery of child development centers in the area. This research aimed to investigate such influences on service delivery of child development centers in selected municipalities of the three provinces. The qualitative approach was utilized in interviewing nine key informants, derived from purposive sampling. The results revealed that the insurgency influenced the quality of learning and care by disrupting learning activities and process, interrupting process of providing care for children, and diminishing parents' trust and acceptance of service

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delivery. Insurgency also influenced the staff's potential by changing their behavior in delivering services, disrupting their opportunities in improving knowledge and skills. Accumulated fears caused the staff to lose motivation in delivering service to customers. Nevertheless, the study found that regarding the element of customer focus the insurgency did not hamper the interaction between the staff and parents. In fact, they developed better relationship and collaboration. According to most informants, the insurgency did not influence the centers' responses to the parents' needs and feedbacks. However, there were some problems pertaining to cultural sensitivity in the insurgent area. The study recommends that the Thai government and related organizations prepare alternative plans for carrying out learning activities and learning process, pay more attention to security of children and staff, focus on staff's career advancement and maintenance of workforce, as well as raise awareness of sensitive issues in the conflict zone.

Keywords: : child development centers, influences of insurgency, service delivery, three southernmost provinces of Thailand

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ผลกระทบของสถานการณ์ความไม่สงบ ต่อการให้บริการของศูนย์พัฒนาเด็กเล็ก ในพื้นที่สามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้

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บทคัดย่อ

สามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ของไทย ได้รับผลกระ
ทบจากสถานการณ์ความไม่สงบเป็นอย่างมาก แต่ยัง
ไม่มีการศึกษาเจาะจงผลกระทบของสถานการณ์ความ
ไม่สงบ ต่อการให้บริการของศูนย์พัฒนาเด็กเล็กในพื้นที่
งานวิจัยนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบของ
สถานการณ์ความไม่สงบ ต่อการให้บริการของศูนย์
พัฒนาเด็กเล็ก ในเทศบาลที่คัดสรร ในสามจังหวัด
ชายแดนภาคใต้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยสัมภาษณ์
ผู้ให้ข้อมูลหลัก จำนวน 9 คน คัดเลือกด้วยวิธีเจาะจง ผล
การวิจัย พบว่า สถานการณ์ความไม่สงบ ส่งผลต่อ
คุณภาพของการเรียนรู้และการดูแล โดยขัดขวาง

กระบวนการจัดการเรียนรู้และกิจกรรม สร้างอุปสรรคใน
กระบวนการดูแลเด็ก ลดความเชื่อถือและยอมรับใน
บริการ สถานการณ์ความไม่สงบ ส่งผลต่อศักยภาพของ
บุคลากร ต้องเปลี่ยนพฤติกรรมการให้บริการ ขัดขวาง
โอกาสพัฒนาความรู้และทักษะ สร้างความกลัวทำให้ขาด
แรงจูงใจ งานวิจัยนี้พบว่า ด้านการเน้นผู้รับบริการ
สถานการณ์ความไม่สงบไม่ได้ขัดขวางปฏิสัมพันธ์
ระหว่างบุคลากรและผู้ปกครอง ต่างสร้างสัมพันธ์ร่วมมือ
กันดี ผู้ให้ข้อมูลส่วนใหญ่ ชี้ว่าสถานการณ์ความไม่สงบ
ไม่ได้กระทบต่อการตอบสนองของศูนย์ ต่อความ
ต้องการและปฏิกิริยาตอบกลับของผู้รับบริการ มีเพียง
ปัญหาการตอบสนองต่อความอ่อนใหวทางวัฒนธรรม

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ความไม่สงบ, สามจังหวัดชายแดนภาค ใต้ของไทย, ศูนย์พัฒนาเด็กเล็ก

เท่านั้น งานวิจัยเสนอว่ารัฐบาลไทย และหน่วยงานที่ เกี่ยวข้อง ควรเตรียมแผนสำรองสำหรับจัดการเรียนรู้

และกิจกรรม ให้ความสำคัญในความปลอดภัยของเด็ก

และบุคลากร เน้นการพัฒนาและบำรุงรักษาบุคลากร

ตระหนักถึงประเด็นความอ่อนใหวทางวัฒนธรรมใน

Introduction

Service delivery of child development centers plays a significant role at both state and personal levels (Keiningham, Aksoy, Andreassen, and Estrin, 2006). Many researchers proved that service delivery of child development centers influenced children existence, growth, and development (Iram & Butt, 2004; Doherty, Forer, Lero, Goelman & LaGrange, 2006; Liu, Yeung & Farmer, 2001). Poolpat (2007) stated that local governments in Thailand play an important role concerning child development centers. However, Krueathep (2015) indicated that local governments in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwas had faced challenges pertaining to service delivery in child development centers as a result of insurgency. McCargo (2014) claimed that these three provinces were regarded as the zone where most serious insurgencies ever happened. This observation was consolidated by the report of Jitpiromsri and Panasnashe (2015) who revealed the total number of 6,543 deaths and 11,919 injuries. Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2010) disclosed that a total of 327 arsons took place at educational institutions, including child development centers. These incidents frightened public organizations, public staff, and child development centers and thus affected the service delivery of child development centers (Pimpa, 2008). In addition, Regional Education Office No.8 (2014) showed that a total number of educational staff 61 properties damaged, 161 injured and 173 died. Most of them worked at government organization including child development centers. The diverse forms of insurgency created challenges on service delivery of child development centers (Krueathep, 2015).

According to Human Rights Watch (2010), the insurgency in this

area affected many public organizations, including child development centers. Dina (2010) indicated that insurgency impeded the teaching process of child development centers. They could not carry it out in a regular way. The centers often had to close after the attack on educational institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The insurgency in the area affected the staff in child development centers. They had to live in fear and agony. The loss of their spirit and motivation to work adversely influenced their service delivery to customers (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Pimpa, 2008).

Hence, the insurgency which occurred almost daily had a powerful impact on child development centers as much as on municipalities which are directly responsible for the center services (Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, 2011). However, there has been a limited number of research which focus on service delivery in the insurgent area, particularly the service delivery of child development centers in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand. Therefore, this study tried to investigate intensively the influences of insurgency on service delivery of child development centers in selected municipalities in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand.

Literature Review

Key elements of service delivery of child development centers

There are various elements of service delivery of child development centers. However, it can be summarized from many studies that there are three essential elements of service delivery of child development centers, particularly in the conflict zone (Armon et al., 2004; Ciulla, Jennifer, Doris & Jennifer, 2002; Devkota, 2005; Eigemen, 2007; World

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Health Organization, 2006; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Smith, 2009; Upreti & Sony, 2014). Firstly, it is quality of learning and care, which refers to providing learning and care activities based on knowledge as well as customers' trust and acceptance of the services. Secondly, it is customer focus, which refers to the fact that customers are the crucial concerns of service providers. They have to concentrate on the requirements and reactions of customers as well as building good connection and collaboration between service providers and customers. Thirdly, it is potential of staff, which includes staff's proper behavior, adequate knowledge and skills, and motivation to work in the area.

Related works

Several studies on service delivery reveal various influences of the insurgency on key elements of service delivery as illustrated below.

Influences of insurgency on quality of learning and care

Abdulrasheed, Onuselogu and Obioma (2015) referred to the influences of insurgency on learning and teaching operation which cannot be undertaken in a normal pattern. Many researchers exposed the influences of insurgency on learning process. For example, Dina (2010) and Joda and Abdulrasheed (2015) pointed out that insurgency influenced the learning process which could not be run in a perfect way. Moreover, various studies reported that a number of schools in the insurgent area were closed for a long time, causing students to lose school days (Abdullahi, Kale & Kolo, 2016; Akintunde & Selzing-Musa, 2016; Narzary, 2014). Abdullahi et al. (2016) added that the loss for school days produced backwardness in education

Apr. 2018 of affected children. Furthermore, many researchers revealed that insurgency influenced the ability of service provider in providing quality service to customers in the unrest area (Commins, 2009; Mangang, 2014; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Smith, 2009). Upreti and Sony (2014) described the difficulties in delivering services to customers as a result of insurgency. In addition, Mangang (2014) and O'Malley (2010) disclosed that the insurgency diminished the people's trust in the service delivery provided by service agencies.

Influences of insurgency on customer focus

Some researchers pointed out that insurgency had caused the lack of support between service providers and customers in the area (Devkota, 2005), while other scholars indicated that insurgency created complications in collaborating with customers in the area (Commins, 2009).

Influences of insurgency on potential of staff

Many researchers revealed that insurgency undermined efficiency of service delivery of the staff at child development centers (Commins, 2009; Mangang, 2014; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Smith, 2009; Upreti & Sony, 2014). While, Devkota (2005) and Kraonual, Hattakit and Boonyasopun (2009) disclosed that insurgency generated limitation on staff's travelling in the area due to the fear of insurgency. Likewise, Ager et al. (2015) exposed that insurgency decreased attention of staff to delivery service to customers. Moreover, many studies showed that insurgency eroded the motivation of staff to work in the conflict zone (Armon et al., 2004; Devkota, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Kraonual et al., 2009; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Pimpa, 2008;

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Methodology

Rodjanahatsadin, 2013; Smith, 2009; Upreti & Sony, 2014).

This research applied qualitative approach in attempt to understand influences of insurgency on service delivery of child development centers. The main reason is that qualitative research is useful for research problems which have never been addressed by particular researchers (Creswell, 2014), especially in the context of child development centers in three southernmost provinces of Thailand.

The locations of the study were child development centers in selected municipalities in the insurgent area which were Taluban, Takbai, and Betong Municipalities. They are located in Pattani, Narathiwas, and Yala provinces respectively. There were two main reasons in selecting these locations. First, the three municipalities were located in the area where insurgency occurred frequently, causing people to live in dread and horror. Secondly, all selected municipalities were parts of multi-cultural societies which populations consisted of Thai, Malay and Chinese ethnic groups (Future Urban Development, 2014).

The purposive sampling technique was utilized for choosing respondents to answer questions in details. The researchers specified nine key informants, consisting of three directors and six caregivers of the child development centers, who were regarded as formal leaders and insiders, respectively. They were considered the most relevant persons based on their roles at the institutions, experiences, and insight knowledge related to the issues that this study attempted to investigate. These qualifications enabled them to provide the researchers with details and in-depth information.

The researchers were initially developed interview guide in English and translated into Thai for better understanding of respondents. The responses in Thai were then translated back into English for the process of interpretation. The interview guide comprised of two sections. The first section explored the background of respondents consisted six items about current position, age, education, working experiences and religions. The second section asked the respondents regarding influences of insurgency on service delivery of child development centers composed of eight core questions including three essential elements of service delivery of child development centers.

The process of data collection was carried out from November to December 2016. A pilot study was conducted prior to carrying out the actual key informant interviews for the reason of pretesting research instrument and testing the data collection process. The study employed content analysis method to classify and group information gained from key informants into themes and sub-themes in order to understand and interpret the respondents' points of view.

Results and Discussion

The profile information of key informants showed that the majority of the key informants were caregivers aged between 40 - 49 years old. They obtained bachelor's degree in early childhood education and had working experiences between six to ten years. Most of them believed in Islam. The influences of insurgency on service delivery of the child development centers can be categorized into three essential elements which are quality of learning and care, customer focus, and potential of staff.

Influences of insurgency on quality of learning and care

The three major themes of influences of insurgency on quality of learning and care are learning activities and learning process, process of providing care for children, and trust and acceptance of customers in service delivery.

Learning activities and learning process

The results showed that the insurgency influenced learning activities and learning process in many ways. To start with, outsideclassroom activities could not be carried out as planned. This finding conformed to that of Abdulrasheed et al. (2015). Such kind of disruption caused the children to lose a chance to learn new things and therefore had limited experiences about their environment which was crucial for enhancing children's development in early age. The other influence was building anxiety among staff concerning security of children in learning outside. In addition, insurgency also interrupted learning process of child development centers as confirmed by the studies of Dina (2010) and Joda and Abdulrasheed (2015). Most key informants described the problems in two situations. First, they could not follow the planned learning process continuously and efficiently because some parents would come to pick up their children when insurgency occurred. Second, they stopped sending their children to study for a long time. These resulted in children's loss of school days as many studies revealed (Abdullahi et al., 2016; Akintunde & Selzing-Musa, 2016; Narzary, 2014). All these delayed enhancement of children's development (Abdullahi et al., 2016).

Process of providing care for children

This research illustrated two main influences of insurgency on the process of providing care for children. Firstly, it built up anxiety among staff about the capability of child development centers in providing care for children. Many key informants stated that they were worried about the capability of child development centers in taking care of children while they stayed at the child development centers during insurgents attacked. This finding conformed to the studies by many researchers (Commins, 2009; Mangang, 2014; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Smith. 2009). Secondly, the insurgency generated complications in providing care for children which included the staff's increased responsibility in keeping an eye on everything around the child development centers, the need of more careful attention to the process of receiving and sending children back home safely, the difficulties in finding a suitable way to provide care for children, and the problems in explaining in simple language about the insurgency to make understanding easier to children. These findings concur with the studies of Upreti and Sony (2014) who proved that insurgency inflicted difficulties on service providers in doing their duties.

Trust and acceptance of customers in service delivery

Most key informants viewed that insurgency degraded the trust and acceptance of parents in service delivery as well as in protection for children. It was interesting that the child development centers which did not receive parents' trust and acceptance were the ones which did not provide security guards to protect children. This led some parents to transfer their children to another child development center. The result corresponded with the studies by Mangang (2014)

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and O'Malley (2010) which confirmed that the insurgency degraded the parents' trust and acceptance in providing services and protections. However, key informants surprisingly revealed that even though some parents lost certain trust in child development centers, they still sent their children to child development centers in the insurgency area. It might be due to the fact that they did not have other people to look after their children during daytime when they went to work in order to improve their quality of life (Aidanazima, 2015).

Influences of insurgency on customer focus

There were two essential issues which child development centers had to consider seriously concerning customer focus in delivering services to customers: interactions between child development centers and parents, and responses to the needs and feedbacks of parents.

Interactions between child development centers and parents

All key informants asserted that they did not have to confront with the problems pertaining to interactions between child development centers and parents as a result of insurgency. Conversely, they had good and close relationships and obtained more support from parents. There were three important reasons why they did not face with such problems. First, parents understood difficult obligations of staff in providing services to children in the unrest situation. As Worzel (2017) stated, if parents really understood what teachers had to do during the day, the parents would have good interactions with teachers. Second, they had positive characteristics such as friendliness, generosity, and sense of respect for staff. Last, both parents and staff

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attempted to collaborate for improving service delivery. This finding in the insurgent area of Thailand was contrary to the study of Devkota (2005) who pointed out that insurgency resulted in the poor support from customers. Likewise, Commins (2009) exposed that insurgency imposed complications in coordinating and collaborating between the staff and customers in the conflict areas of Indonesia, Cambodia, and Nepal.

Responses to the needs and feedbacks from parents

The study revealed that most key informants viewed that the insurgency did not influence the responses of child development centers to the needs and feedbacks from parents because the centers still provided services grounded on the needs of parents and provided opportunities for parents to communicate their needs. However, some key informants referred to the problems related to cultural sensitivity. For example, some parents who strictly observe Malay culture questioned why their children had to salute their caregivers in Thai tradition. On this point the caregivers were required to respond gracefully according to the rule set by child development centers in order to train children how to practice obeisance in different cultures. This training was necessary due to the fact that in this area there were many distinct cultures which included Thai, Malay, and Chinese.

Influences of insurgency on potential of staff

There are three main issues relating to potential of staff, namely their behavior, knowledge and skills, and motivation to work.

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Behavior of staff

The study showed that the insurgency influenced the behavior of staff in three major aspects. Firstly, it disrupted the staff's prompt delivery of services to customers in many ways including changing their means of transportation or routes to go to work due to the fear of insecurity, going to work later than usual, and leaving their work place earlier. The stress from insurgency also led them to develop negative behaviors such as shouting at children. This led to the staff's inability to provide prompt delivery of service to customers. The discovery of this influence of insurgency agreed with many studies which revealed that insurgency reduces prompt delivery of service providers (Commins, 2009; Mangang, 2014; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Smith, 2009; Upreti & Sony, 2014). It was interesting that some key informants cited a reason of going to work late and leaving work places early that it was because they waited for police or soldiers who provided security for government staff moving out from their ways to work. In fact, they observed that police or soldiers were also the target of insurgents. The fear of insecurity from commuting to work reflected the studies of Devkota (2005) and Kraonual et al. (2009) which pointed out that insurgency put limitation on staff's travelling in the area. Secondly, the insurgency reduced the concentration of staff on their work, leading to their difficulty in performing duty to their full capability. Therefore, the children could not learn properly. This impact conformed to the study by Ager et al. (2015). Thirdly, the insurgence stimulated awareness of potential danger among the staff. It created enthusiasm of staff in providing best security for children. Most of them paid more attention to unusual things around their work places. This change in staff's

performance was contrary to those mentioned earlier. It was the only

positive influence of insurgency on behavior of staff.

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Knowledge and skills of staff

The finding showed that the insurgency created two crucial problems concerning knowledge and skills of staff. Firstly, it created fear among experts who specialize in service delivery of child development centers and prevented those from other parts of Thailand to come to train the staffs of child development center in the area. As Isara News Agency (2013) revealed, most experts from other parts of Thailand were fearful to go to the areas of insurgency in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand. Secondly, it impeded training programs during insurgency as staff had to focus on the security of children under their control. This effect led to the staff's lack of opportunities in learning and updating their knowledge and skills in delivering services to customers.

Motivation of staff

The study found that insurgency influenced the motivation of staff by creating fear in delivering services to customers. This impact was also common in the studies of many researchers (Armon et al., 2004; Devkota, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Kraonual et al., 2009; O'Malley, 2010; OEDC, 2008; Pimpa, 2008; Rodjanahatsadin, 2013; Smith, 2009; Upreti & Sony, 2014). This fear caused some staff members to lose motivation in providing services to customers. They were reluctant to go to work and contemplated resigning from their work places and seeking for new jobs in other safer zones. However,

it was surprising that after reconsidering on the frustrating issues, they decided to remain working at their child development centers. The main reason was that they felt responsible for their duty in providing services to children in the area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the influences of insurgency on three essential elements of service delivery of child development centers in the insurgent area of Thailand which included quality of learning and care, customer focus, and potential of staff.

The study found that in reference to the element of quality of learning and care, the insurgency had negative impacts on learning activities and learning process in disrupting outside-classroom activities, creating anxiety among staff about the security of children in learning outdoors, interrupting learning process to the point that the staff could not follow their plans. The insurgency also influenced the process of providing care for children by generating anxiety about the ability of child development centers in providing care for children and constructing obstacles in providing quality care. Moreover, the insurgency reduced trust and acceptance of parents in service delivery. All these influences of insurgency on the three aspects of quality learning and care should receive serious attention from relevant organizations. It is also crucial that the child development centers prepare alternative plans for carrying out learning activities and learning process. Concerning the issue of trust and acceptance of parents, it can be noted that if the child development centers provide security guards and pay more attention to the safety of children, the parents

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may increase confidence in the child development centers in protecting their children in the unrest situation

Nevertheless, regarding the elements of customer focus, this study found that the insurgency did not hamper the interactions between the child development centers and parents. On the opposite, they had better relationship. Furthermore, the majority of key informants viewed that the insurgency did not reduce the responses of child development centers to the needs and feedbacks of the parents. However, some key informants mentioned problems regarding cultural sensitivity which the staff should respond politely. It is important to underscore that the child development centers should concentrate on this issue carefully in order to set proper regulations with customers.

As for the element of potential of staff, the insurgency affected behaviors of the staff by disrupting their prompt delivery, reducing concentration on their job, and creating enthusiasm in providing security to children. The insurgency also influenced the knowledge and skills of the staff by generating fear among trainers from other parts of Thailand who intended to come to train the staff of the child development centers in the area and by disrupting training programs during insurgent situations. Consequently, the staff lost opportunities for enhancing knowledge and skills in delivering services to customers. Moreover, the insurgency influenced the motivation of staff by generating fear in delivering services, causing the staff to lack motivation in their job performance. It is crucial that related organizations pay attention to the staff's career advancement and workforce maintenance by providing appropriate training required by the staff as much as possible because the staff of child development centers are valuable resources in the conflict zone.

It is expected that the results of this study will attract the attention of related municipalities, the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior, and the Thai government. It is hoped that the responsible authorities will focus on the problems of service delivery of the child development centers under insurgent circumstances and react accordingly. They should pay attention to security of the staff and children of the child development centers in the area. The study also wants to draw attention of relevant organizations in order to support and motivate the staff to continue delivering services to their customers. Moreover, this study provided crucial information about the influences of the insurgency on service delivery of the child development centers in the unrest area, other researchers can use its findings as bases of empirical evidences. Future studies may want to investigate how child development centers in the conflict zone can find innovations in delivering services to customers efficiently.

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