

## Research Article

# THE STATE AND PROBLEMS OF PARENTS PROMOTING PRESCHOOLERS' EMOTIONAL WELLBEING: PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL

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## Abstract

The purposes of this research were to study 1) the state of parents in promoting preschoolers emotional wellbeing, 2) the problems and needs of parents in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers, and 3) emotional wellbeing of preschoolers. 133 parents of preschoolers in Grace Kindergarten (pseudonym) were selected as research samples. The 14 interviewees consisted of 2 school administrators, 6 class teachers, and 6 parents. The research tools consisted of a survey of community background, questionnaires, daily field notes, short notes, and interview form. All collected data was analyzed by using frequency, percentage, means, standard deviation, and statistical analysis. The research findings showed that 1) parents' promotion of preschoolers' emotional wellbeing was at a good level, 2) parents' problems and needs in promoting preschoolers' emotional wellbeing were lack of knowledge and understanding, unaware of their emotion were impacts to the child, and lack of skills in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers and, 3) overall preschoolers' emotional wellbeing was at a good level.

**Keywords:** Promoting Emotional Wellbeing, Parent, Preschoolers, Participation

## Introduction

Thailand's statistics of juvenile delinquency in 2020 has shown that the highest number of unlawful behaviors came from drug offenses, followed by offenses against property and offenses against life and body. The percentage of primary school-aged and secondary school-aged juvenile delinquents were higher than 2019. The number of juvenile delinquents from father-mother living together households also increased from 2019. (Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, 2020). The offenses mainly stemmed from 2 determinants: 1) Environment such as family, economy, community; and 2) Children and youth themselves such as heredity, mental or emotional impairments or experiences, and education levels (Wachirapraditporn, 2012). Most of the children and youth involved in unlawful actions come from separated families. However, it was found that children who either live solely with mother or living in a stay-together family but with an improper upbringing

could lack certain emotional regulations of stimuli are reported to have committed acts of violence at a higher rate than other groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that parental upbringing plays a great role in affecting children emotional wellbeing and if not properly addressed, can result in one of the causes of children improper behavioral expressions.

Based on the survey of children and women in Thailand 2019, 64% of children aged 1-4 years were found to be brought up with methods of violence. 58% of these methods can probably be corporal (physical) punishment and/or involve psychological violence. In addition, children aged 3-4 years had the highest probability of being brought up with violent methods. Those improper methods, inflicting on various parts of body, include shaking, jerking, or hitting children's body, slapping children's hands, arms, or legs, hitting buttocks or other body parts with hard materials, slapping, or hitting children's butts with bare hands, hitting or slapping faces, heads, or ears as severely and repeatedly as much as possible. In the aspect of psychological violence, there are many, ranging from shouting, yelling, blustering, or screaming at children, scolding with either "stupid" or other derogatory words. Psychological violence could be found mostly against children aged 5-9 years. In this context, 53% of caregivers believe that physical punishment is the most appropriate way for educating, caring, or teaching children (National Statistical Office of Thailand, 2020). Children in such distressing conditions were raised from parents who lack knowledge and ability to provide care, training, or protection for their children. In long-term, these children will be at greater risk of graver handicap than other groups of children. (Ministry of Public Health, 2018; National Statistical Office, 2017)

Childhood experience is a critical foundation in developing and learning of students in all levels of education. Heckman (2012) stated that investing in childhood education will yield 7 times in investment returns. The greater the investment in the early years of childhood, the greater the returns will be in the future, especially in the areas of emotional and social ability during childhood which will greatly influence the success of learning when the children enter school systems. At this point, Wilson et al. (2012) indicated the importance of enhancing emotional competence which will be a great help to children when in the future they find themselves in problematic of difficult situations. The emotion competence also relates to various skills, for example, emotional expressions, emotional awareness, managing emotions skills to handle various situations that can either lead to successful outcome or healthy wellbeing. Moreover, child-wellness enhancement and the protection of childhood from adverse effects are crucial to children and their families. Consequently, parents do need supports to be able to discipline the children's emotion correctly and properly.

Emotional wellbeing can be defined as an emotional stability that can perceive the feelings of others, empathetically understand the feelings of oneself and others, and appropriately self-manage both the positive and negative emotions (World Health Organization [WHO], 1998). Good emotional wellbeing of children has correlation with the parent's emotional expression behavior, which are 1) parents' responses to the children's emotions; 2) parent-to-child discussion concerning emotions in various forms and contexts; and 3) parents' emotional expressions. Several research studies clearly identified that parents' ability to strengthen children's emotional wellbeing affects children's emotional and social ability - that is the negative emotional expression

of parents will negatively affect children's emotions, thus leaving children with low emotional and social ability (Castro et al., 2015; Dunsmore et al., 2013; Eisenberg et al., 1998).

To successfully enhance and properly develop education in early years, it is vital to empower parents with parental training (Medizza & Pearce, 2004). Thus, parents should be encouraged to participate in trainings on various methods to bring up healthy children, for example, activities to provide up-to-date child-rearing knowledge and information, arranging parent-training programs for working parents, and providing consultation on raising children. This can be a roadway towards positive childhood development and ultimately a crucial key to successful adulthood.

Grace Kindergarten (a pseudonym), located in Nonthaburi Province, is a small private kindergarten offering preschool educational programs range from Pre-K to K3. The school comprises of parents with different and diverse backgrounds, careers, economic statuses, and educational levels. This diversity of characteristics can represent many groups of parents in general. In September 2019, the school received the Regional Best Practice Award from the Regional Education Office No. 2. With an integrated learning management system, Grace Kindergarten has focused on the preparedness of children's holistic development by learning through activities and practices. Concerning children's emotional development, the school has been encouraging teachers, staffs, and parents to use positive discipline and positive communication with children. The school administrators have collaborated and played an important role to the parents' participation in arranging their children's education and development. To this end, the school has set up different activities to encourage more participation from parents by organizing various events and promoting greater parents' role in their children development along with the school.

To improve parenting, parent-child relationship, and promoting preschoolers' emotional wellbeing, Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was used as a tool to empower parents who need support. It is an approach to advocate for community participation in solving problems together by opening the platform for the people in community to solve common problems, plan and make decisions for the solutions by themselves. This way, participants in the community can be with the whole research process starting from studying communities, analyzing the problems, planning, collecting data, and evaluating results. It will then form a new holistic knowledge by combining the information glean from researchers with onsite information from local community. Therefore, PAR is a practical and appropriate research approach to evaluating quality of parents' roles in their children emotional development (Larplai, 2017). However, the role of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) needs to be elaborated to properly assess parents' problem-solving methods in their children emotional management.

PRA is a tool to help people in the community learn the value of sharing knowledge, ideas, experiences, and to analyze and plan to reach a common understanding of how to address communities' needs. To this end, the researcher takes the role of a guide, various methods and techniques are utilized to ensure the participatory implementation process (Prabudhanitisarn, 2003). The results of the PRA analysis can facilitate understanding of community conditions, community's needs, basic information, community's

challenges, and hindrances, which will be beneficial to the understanding and planning for further implementation.

## **Objectives**

1. To study the state of teachers and parents in promoting preschoolers' emotional wellbeing.
2. To study the problems and needs of parents in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers.
3. To study the emotional wellbeing of preschoolers

## **Research Methodology**

This research based on Participatory Rural Appraisal tool (PRA). Grace Kindergarten was selected according to the following criteria: 1) a kindergarten is under the Office of the Private Education Commission, opening for kindergarten K.1 – K.3, and 2) Grace kindergarten administrators and staffs fully support and collaborate in this research.

Samples consisted of 3 groups: 1) 2 school administrators, 2) 6 class teachers range from K.1-K.3, and 3) 133 parents. The data collection period was 6 weeks from July - August 2019. Purposive sampling was used to select 14 interviewees comprised 2 school administrators, 6 class teachers, and 6 parents.

### **Research Instruments**

1. Research instrument to answer objectives 1 and 2 were as follows:

1.1 A questionnaire to evaluate parents' opinions on parental roles in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers comprised of 3 parts; Part 1 – General information of the parents with 9 questions of multiple choice answers; Part 2 – Parents' opinions on the roles in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers appeared in 40 questions of 5-level rating scales containing 3 components consist of emotional expression, creating atmosphere and environment, and being a role model; Part 3 – Additional comments/recommendations with 1 open-ended question. The Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index of the questionnaire was 0.93 which means the content validity is high.

1.2 A survey form to assess parents' problems and needs in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers was a narrative form comprised of 2 aspects: 3 questions of information about parenting and 7 questions of preschoolers' emotional wellbeing, 10 questions in total.

1.3 A field notes which was narrative.

1.4 An interview form which was semi-structure questions in 3 aspects: parent information, preschooler information, and parental understanding and attitude towards parenting.

2. Research instrument to answer objectives 3 was a questionnaire of teachers and parents' opinions towards emotional wellbeing of preschoolers appeared in 36 questions of 5-level rating scales containing 3 components which were: 1) self-concept, 2) emotional control, and 3) self-competence. The Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index of the questionnaire was 0.96 which means the content validity is high. In addition, field notes, short notes, and interview form were also used by the researcher.

### Data collection

In conducting the research, a data triangulation was applied through multiple methods of data collection, for example, a non-participatory observation, group interview, semi-structured interview, and other related-document studies. The data analysis was divided into 2 parts: 1) quantitative data being analyzed by using frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Return rate of questionnaire of parents' opinions on parental roles in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers from parents was 81.2%. While, return rate of questionnaire of teachers and parents' opinions towards emotional wellbeing of preschoolers from parents was 82% and from teachers was 99%, and 2) qualitative data being analyzed by using contents, concretely grouping topics of conclusion from repeatedly data, interpreting to create inductive conclusion through the research objective-based analysis.

### Research Findings

Demography of the parents showed that females were the majority of participants (78.9%) who was a mother of children (77.1%), aged between 31-40 years old (72.5%). A high percentage of parents lived together (91.7%) and had one child (53.2%). Most of the parents were company employees (45%). Parents did some activities with children in the weekend for 4-5 hours (67.9%) by providing the academic activities (9.2%), aesthetic activities such as art and music (19.3%), and co-operation activities and volunteering or religious ceremony (31.2%).

The data analysis of Grace Kindergarten can be presented in 3 parts:

#### 1. The state of teachers and parents in promoting preschoolers' emotional wellbeing

The data from the parents' opinions regarding to the role in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers found that they performed at a high level ( $M = 4.42$ ). Considering each aspect, creating atmosphere and environment ( $M = 4.48$ ) was the highest mean scores, followed by supporting emotional expression ( $M = 4.46$ ), and being a role model ( $M = 4.30$ ), respectively (Table 1).

**Table 1** The average of the state of school and parents in promoting preschoolers' emotional wellbeing

Item	Parents (n=108)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Result
1. being a role model	4.30	0.45	High
2. creating atmosphere and environment	4.48	0.40	High
3. supporting emotional expression	4.46	0.44	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.42</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>High</b>

1.1 In the aspect of creating atmosphere and environment, it was found that most of the parents showed children love and warmth ( $M = 4.88$ ) and gave consolation or encouragement when their child felt uncomfortable ( $M = 4.83$ ). While telling the story for children everyday ( $M=3.89$ ) and creating atmosphere to relax and calm the child while doing activities ( $M = 3.93$ ) were the least mean score.

However, it can be gleaned from the interview data from parents and the parents' additional comments from the questionnaire that the best practical approaches to enhance children emotional wellbeing by the parents include supplying electronic learning devices, preparing toys, setting suitable areas, showing expression of affection, giving appreciation for the children capability, and comforting children when they were in distress. There are many information and knowledges about appropriate childcare that parents can study, plus regularly, school also provide up-to-date childcare for parents. For this reason, parents are aware of an importance of children emotional wellness and act accordingly.

1.2 In the aspect of supporting emotional expression, it was found that most of the parents give children the opportunity to do something by their own ( $M = 4.78$ ) and encourage children to be try new activities ( $M = 4.71$ ). However, appropriate approaches for negative emotional expression, such as emotional control techniques ( $M = 4.04$ ), and teaching children how to deal with negative emotions ( $M = 4.19$ ) were not formally taught or trained

The data based on interviewing teachers, parents and the school documents found that the parent's support of children emotional expressions affects the emotional management in children. Naturally, children differently behave in different societies. For example, some children are more courageous to try new things when they are with their peers at school. Meanwhile, some children show negative behaviors and more aggressively at home than at school.

1.3 In the aspect of being a role model, most of the parents understand the difference in other by listening to different opinion ( $M = 4.64$ ). Also, parents showed respect to other ( $M = 4.61$ ). While parents' performance about taking care of physical wellbeing ( $M = 3.84$ ) and being an emotionally stable person ( $M = 3.89$ ) were done the lowest score.

The data from the interview and parents' comment from the questionnaire reveals that there are rarely practiced topics such as regular self-care, emotional stability, and talking with polite words with soft voice to everyone. Due to the workload and family care give parents less time to look after themselves leading to the fatigue and stress and finally to the difficulty in controlling their emotions. In the unpleasant situations or negative emotional states, it may then lead to inappropriate expressions to other people such as talking with harsh voice. Moreover, being role model of the parents needs a sense of maturity, self-cognitive, emotional self-awareness, and emotional awareness of others. This needs to be practiced very often and be careful not to get overly stress. It was found from additional information from the teachers' interview that being a good role model, parents have a great effect on the emotional wellbeing and self-control ability of the children. This is because, the children have their observation-based learning and behavioral imitation from people around them. Therefore, if the parents are good for a role mode, the children will learn and imitate the behavior to be used in school.

## **2. The problems and needs of parents in promoting emotional wellbeing for preschoolers**

2.1 Parents' problems of knowledge and understanding were lack of appropriate understanding and knowledge in promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers and fundamental of child development,

unaware of their emotion that impacts on preschoolers, and inconsistency of using the same practices among the family members.

2.2 Parents' problems of attitude and awareness were lack of awareness and perception of emotion, emotion control of parents, and disregard of parents' emotional wellbeing and sustaining their own emotion stability.

2.3 Parents' problems of practices were lack of experience and practice in following the guidelines of an appropriate promotion of emotional wellbeing of preschoolers as a role model, setting a conducive atmosphere and a facilitating environment, and supporting emotional expression for preschoolers.

Regarding to the above-mentioned problems, the researchers chaired a focus group discussion among the school administrators, teachers, and parents to identify the needs in effectively support preschoolers' emotional wellbeing were as follows:

1) Support in knowledge and understanding of fundamentals of child development with suitable approaches and practice by school experts and external experts e.g., executives, teachers, physicians, psychologists, and counselors.

2) Support in practice of appropriate guidelines for promoting emotional wellbeing for kindergarten students, for instance, in practice with school experts and parental joint practice (with children of a similar age).

3) Support in counseling and providing information in case parents had additional questions or require special needs, such as school psychiatrists and teachers with an expertise in promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers.

### 3. Emotional wellbeing of preschoolers

Data from questionnaires that parents and teachers mostly agreed that the preschoolers had a high level of emotional wellbeing ( $M = 4.26, 4.37$ ). When each aspect was taken into an account, the research found that parents and teachers opined that self-concept was at a very high level with at the highest mean score ( $M = 4.55, 4.49$ ), follow by self-competence ( $M = 4.29, 4.37$ ) and emotional control ( $M = 3.95, 4.24$ ) were at a high level (Table 2).

**Table 2** The average of the emotional wellbeing of preschoolers

Item	Parents' opinion (n=109)			Teachers' opinion (n=132)		
	M	SD	Result	M	SD	Result
1. self-concept	4.55	0.47	Very high	4.49	0.65	High
1.1 Having a good attitude towards themselves	4.57	0.50	Very high	4.46	0.65	High
1.2 Understanding of emotions of oneself and others	4.43	0.59	High	4.51	0.69	Very high
1.3 Recognition of one's own identity	4.66	0.51	Very high	4.49	0.74	High

Item	Parents' opinion (n=109)			Teachers' opinion (n=132)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Result	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Result
2. emotional control	3.95	0.64	High	4.24	0.75	High
2.1 Controlling and expressing emotion	3.84	0.71	High	4.18	0.85	High
2.2 Managing stress and fear	4.05	0.66	High	4.31	0.73	High
3. self-competence	4.29	0.52	High	4.37	0.64	High
3.1 Self-esteem	4.70	0.48	Very high	4.61	0.53	Very High
3.2 Motivation	4.03	0.69	High	4.26	0.78	High
3.3 Resilience	4.14	0.66	High	4.26	0.76	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.26</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>4.37</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>High</b>

The details of these aspects were described as follows:

1) In the area of self-concept, parents agreed that the preschoolers' behaviors were at a very high level ( $M = 4.55$ ). On the other hand, teachers opined at a high level ( $M = 4.49$ ). Considering each item, it was found that parents agreed that recognition of one's own identity and having a good attitude towards themselves of preschoolers were at a very high level ( $M = 4.66, 4.57$ ) while teachers rated a high level ( $M = 4.49, 4.46$ ). Moreover, teachers showed that the understanding of emotions of oneself and others of preschoolers was a very high level ( $M = 4.51$ ) while parents rated a high level ( $M = 4.43$ ).

The data collected from the interview reported that preschoolers had positive self-concept. The situation was partly stemmed from pedagogical factors of the school allowing preschoolers to engage in various activities and encourage these learners to select activities according to their interest, especially during the playtime. While the parents speculated that for a perception and understanding of emotions of oneself and others among preschoolers, these young learners often perceived their emotions according to the developmental stage. They believed that if the preschoolers were taught and trained, better perceptions can be achieved.

2) In the area of emotional control, opinion from parents and teachers towards preschoolers' behaviors were at a high level ( $M = 3.95, 4.24$ ). Considering each item, it was found that managing stress and fear ( $M = 4.05, 4.31$ ), and controlling and expressing emotion ( $M = 3.84, 4.18$ ) were at a high level.

The data collected from the interview reported that preschoolers manage stress and fear by requesting an assistance from adults, if necessary. Moreover, they can tell or describe events that stressed or scared them. However, status and relationship between preschoolers and adults, and adult attitude and response were the supporting factors that encouraged preschoolers to express such behaviors. For example, preschoolers tend to ask for help or tell stories to the teachers and parents they trusted and believed they were likely to receive help, more than adults who always complained or ignored their emotions. This factor had an impact on the preschoolers' capacities to control their emotions, including negative ones. For emotion

control and expression, teachers and parents stated that children who received teaching and experienced good role-models tend to deal with anger without resorting to violent methods.

3) In the area of self-competence, parents and teachers agreed that preschoolers expressed good behaviors was at a very high level ( $M = 4.29, 4.37$ ). Considering each item, it was found that self-esteem was a very high level ( $M = 4.70, 4.61$ ), while motivation ( $M = 4.03, 4.26$ ) and resilience ( $M = 4.14, 4.26$ ) were at a high level.

According to the interview data, regular encouragements from teachers and parents after the young learners achieved a task resulted in preschoolers being able to appreciate themselves positively and had higher self-esteem. Encouragement led to greater awareness of self-value and self-worth. Regarding mental strength and motivation, teachers and parents agreed that children need to be allowed 'trial and error' opportunities, encouragement, and good adult role models in develop such competencies. Preschoolers should be encouraged to solve problems. Parents and Teachers should encourage the children even when they make a mistake and support them to try new methods.

## Discussions

The results explicated the conditions and demonstrated problems of parents in promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers. The researchers presented discussion issues as follows:

1. Parents who are economically stable and well-educated had an impact in promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers.

The research results outlined that parents were aware that they had an important role in promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers at a high level ( $M = 4.42$ ). Three roles of adults were rated at a high level: Creating atmosphere and environment ( $M = 4.48$ ), supporting emotional expression ( $M = 4.46$ ), and being a role model ( $M = 4.30$ ) in descending order. When the researchers studied the parental background, it was found that generally parents were of moderate socioeconomic status and received a bachelor degree education. They spent spare times in weekends playing with children, and they focused on cooperative activities as well as being a volunteer and attending religious ceremonies. Furthermore, they prioritized early childhood preparation than literacy skill due to the parents choosing the kindergarten that emphasize on holistic child development and child development stages. Grace Kindergarten also provided opportunities for parental participation in classroom learning. The kindergarten also held regular sessions to provide parents with up-to-date child-rearing knowledge. Grace Kindergarten encouraged parents to engage with children at home and supported parental participation in various activities of the kindergarten. These initiatives had provided parents a role to promote emotional wellbeing for preschoolers at a high level. The results were consistent with National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016) which identified contexts related to the capacity of parents to promote the emotional wellbeing of preschoolers. These elements were knowledge and understanding, parental experience, beliefs, attitudes, and parents' background and parental practices.

2. Parenting affects the emotional wellbeing of preschoolers. The results showed that teachers and parents evaluated emotional wellbeing of preschoolers at a high level, which is similar to parental practice in

promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers was at a high level. The results illustrated the point that regular positive emotions were shown when parents complimented after preschoolers had accomplished tasks. The compliments impacted young learners, and they showed facial expressions or satisfaction when they accomplished a task by themselves. On the other hand, behaviors specified by parents as being difficult to implement and non-favorable were emotional perception, control of negative emotional expressions. These behaviors affected the emotional control of preschoolers at a lower level than other areas. These findings correlated with Laumka (2016) who explained that preschoolers live closely with parents, and their behaviors would manifest in accordance with parental support. When parents showed proper examples, followed recommendation, and set an atmosphere to facilitate the emotional practice of preschoolers. The preschoolers could therefore perceive good example that were likely to be mimicked. In addition, parental role model in keeping regular wellbeing to their physical health, emotional stability, and polite language (soft-spoken) to everyone were behaviors difficult to achieve. The cause of this occurrence was due to the fatigue from the daily workload and family care, which affected the practice of being a positive role model for preschoolers on emotion control.

3. Parents need knowledge and guidelines for promoting emotional wellbeing of preschoolers. Due to working hours of parents, they rarely spending time with their children during weekday and telling bedtime story for the child. As for being a role model on the area of emotional management of parents, the results showed that their stress from work affects the role of being calm, using soft tone of voice, and controlling emotions while dealing with their child. Parents also pointed out that these negative behaviors and unaware aggressiveness appeared more often at home rather than at school. Therefore, it can be assumed that parents require assistance from experts and fellow parent groups that experienced stress in parenting. It could be in the form of knowledge and emotional support, mental support, and counseling.

In order to enable parents to promote emotional-wellbeing of preschoolers, it requires elements that cover supporting knowledge and relevant skills provision, practice support, and counseling during the daily-life which is consistent with Okafor et al. (2014) who studied use of models and approach in promoting children wellbeing through provision of effective parenting education to parents, supporting knowledge dissemination among the parents alongside. Promoting children wellbeing could be done by assistance and encouragements among parental groups to create changes.

## **Recommendations**

The future research should involve designing a program to facilitate parents in order to promote emotional wellbeing in preschoolers by methods that are suitable with the nature of the parents as adults with life experience and daily life responsibilities to develop the body of knowledge and encourage knowledge to be utilized as sustainable practices. The learning objective should focus on supporting parents to acquire self-awareness and improve positive attitude toward themselves as a key person to emotional socialized the child.

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