

# Stay Active, Do Not Retire: Strategies for Older Persons to Remain in the Workforce in Community Enterprise in Thailand

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## Abstract

Given the societal transition towards a more inclusive society of older persons, encouraging job opportunities is another mechanism to address challenges associated with this shrinking workforce and strengthen active aging, leading to the value of older persons. This study introduces a framework for older persons based on community enterprises to bridge the gaps in previous research. It sheds more light on sustainable improvement in the older person's quality of life. Another objective is to explore supportive methods for older persons' well-being and job security. Based on a qualitative approach, the study adopted semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and observational methods from 20 older people. The findings indicate that older persons transform resources, encompassing social, cultural, human, economic, and psychological capital, which are utilized in strategies for aging well. Regarding work-related strategy, the employment status of older persons is closely tied to their membership status. Furthermore, this study reveals that older persons' job security is associated with meaningful use of leisure time and the development of diverse skills.

## Keywords

Community enterprise; completed-aged society; human capital; older workers; Thailand

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## Introduction

Thailand is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a political and economic union that shares a regional awareness of the rapidly increasing older population. This concern is reflected in the signing of the Brunei Darussalam Declaration on strengthening the family institution and the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on aging, focusing on healthcare, economic competitiveness, and supportive environments suitable for older persons. Thailand is experiencing a 'second demographic transition' with the third-largest elderly population in ASEAN, following Indonesia and Vietnam. This transition is influenced by birth rates, migration, and population planning mechanisms (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023a, 2023b; Prasartkul et al., 2019).

This societal transition towards an aging society is characterized by the structural relationships among the older persons, working-age, and child populations, intertwining with rationalization based on Max Weber's paradigm (Cockerham et al., 1993). The process of becoming an aging society is, therefore, governed by legal institutions that produce cause-and-effect through the mechanism of rational-legal domination, which facilitates the management of public policies by the modern state. An aging society, defined by a significantly older population, signifies a shift in population distribution towards older age groups, often characterized by a higher life expectancy and a declining birth rate. The concept reflects the challenges and opportunities of healthcare, social welfare, and economic considerations.

According to Thailand's Act on the Elderly of 2003, individuals aged 60 years and above are considered older persons. As of December 2022, the older population reached nearly 13 million individuals (Department of Provincial Administration, 2023). This demographic shift impacts social welfare policies, including pension eligibility.

Entering a fully-fledged aging society, Thailand faces challenges across various dimensions, including healthcare, economic disparities, technology utilization, and infrastructure development for the well-being of older persons. Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 13 (2023-2027) addresses older persons development in two main groups: those with economic stimulation potential, including both Thai and foreign older tourists, and those to creating social and economic value by transforming older citizens into valuable members of society capable of working, possessing diverse knowledge, and contributing to the economic value chain (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2022).

The Thai government implements policies for older persons through the Old-Age Allowance (OAA), health insurance coverage, lifelong learning through older persons schools, and promoting the utilization of the older persons' capabilities in the workforce by extending the retirement age. Additionally, efforts have been made to generate employment opportunities for people of all ages through the Thai-style soft power strategy under the One Family One Soft Power (OFOS) mechanism and the Thailand Creative Content Agency (THACCA). This initiative aims to foster human capital development through skill development in 11 main areas, including food and tourism, which allow older individuals to participate based on their abilities and interests (Boonyo, 2023; Knodel et al., 2000; Royal Thai Government, 2023; Sakunphanit & Suwanrada, 2011).

However, older persons are strongly correlated with the lifecycle deficit (LCD), indicating an income deficit at different stages of life due to having lower income than consumption needs, which may result in a net transfer of resources primarily through state assistance. Therefore, older persons' working ability would contribute to economic self-reliance if the government provided supportive development in human capital (Chamchan et al., 2019).

Our research integrates the development of human capital among older persons with livelihood strategies and supports the employment of older persons in communities. Livelihood strategies focus on subsistence in the local context, connected to the global context, weaving the dynamics of life strategies through various components such as human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital. These capitals reflect actors' relationships in livelihood strategies with social structures, resulting in different outcomes for individuals (Ayuttacorn, 2019; Chamaratana et al., 2018; Natarajan et al., 2022). However, the proposals for livelihood strategies also reflect the differences in capital in transitioning to a strategy for better living beyond what is presented above. For example, further emphasis is given to separate components of livelihood strategies, such as the legal component, recognizing that laws influence life strategies through legal decision-making processes.

Similarly, psychological capital highlights the importance of mental strength in aiding the transformation and adaptation of livelihood strategies at individual and community levels (Walke et al., 2001). Thus, livelihood strategies play a crucial role in economic growth and poverty reduction by enhancing individual capacities and promoting well-being through the intensive integration of various capitals (Scoones, 1998). Examining the livelihood strategies of older persons in society, encompassing the aforementioned capital components, reveals that older Thai persons face vulnerabilities in accessing the labor market, particularly those who wish to participate economically post-retirement. This includes declining work capacity and skills and disparities in accessing resources that rely on social capital (Lloyd-Sherlock, 2006).

In 2022, older individuals constituted 36.1% of Thailand's total population. These employments primarily included labor in agriculture and fisheries, service work, product vending, and skilled craftsmanship. The average monthly income was approximately 12,106 Thai Baht, which varied depending on the living area. However, those residing in Bangkok tended to receive higher wages than their counterparts in other areas. Additionally, a significant portion of the older workforce operated outside the formal employment system is likely to lack social protection under labor law (National Statistical Office, 2023).

In this regard, the desire of older persons to work after transitioning into retirement is associated with diverse social and economic factors such as age, educational level, property ownership, health status, marital status, gender, and location (Kantachote & Wiroonsri, 2023). This can be viewed through Max Weber's concept of lifestyles, which comprises two key components: life conduct [*Lebensführung*], referring to 'the choices people have in their selection of lifestyles, and life chances [*Lebenschancen*], which is 'the probability of realizing these choices' (Cockerham et al., 1993). This illustrates the interdependent relationship between structure and social action. The lifestyles of elderly individuals play a critical role in life chances and are relevant to one's social status (Katz, 2013). The occupations undertaken by older adults are partly dependent on societal structures and the regulatory frameworks of organizations that offer employment opportunities for older persons.

Drawing on Chaowatthanakun and Chaowatthanakun (2020), the relationship between elderly work and community economic growth faces challenges due to knowledge in finance, technology, and health, which are primary issues affecting their ability to work. The study also indicates that community enterprises serve as a crucial mechanism for developing various skills that can be utilized in business operations. Moreover, four significant factors enabling sustained and robust entrepreneurial activities for older persons are identified. Firstly, skill development can be achieved by forming online networks for mutual assistance among older persons. Secondly, older persons should engage in diverse and creative activities alongside work, such as health development. Thirdly, collaboration between older and younger generations is crucial, as it integrates older persons' expertise with youths' technological proficiency. The fourth factor is the capability to access sources of information.

The researchers suggest that community enterprises provide a platform for older persons to apply creativity and contribute accumulated wisdom to the community, fostering mutual learning and knowledge exchange. This may result in developing an organizational culture conducive to the work of older persons.

To advance our understanding of older persons' employment opportunities in Thai society, studying and exploring the livelihood and work strategies of older persons, particularly those employed in community enterprises, is crucial. These individuals can work independently according to their capabilities, and their work is closely tied to the social and cultural context. Moreover, community enterprises primarily involve skills in agriculture and cultural knowledge, making them well-suited for older individuals. Working in community enterprises enhances the quality of life for older persons beyond the economic dimension, fostering social and cultural values. The study selects Wat Dong Takhop Community Enterprise in Phichit province as a case study, as it is an area of interest for promoting older persons' employment and serves as a model ethical community. This study contributes to developing the potential of older persons, aligning with the National Economic and Social Development Plan Version 13.

## Methods

This qualitative study received approval from the Ethics Committee for Human Research, Srinakharinwirot University (SWUEC-070/2566E). The research adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report. Participants were older individuals aged 60 years and above, in good physical health, and capable of communication in their daily lives.

The researchers gained access to crucial information providers through introductions facilitated by the community development committee of Wat Dong Takhop. Before conducting interviews, detailed information about the research participation process was provided, and informed consent was obtained through written consent forms. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and no personal information of the participants was disclosed. To ensure privacy and mitigate potential risks, content analysis was employed, avoiding linking interview content to the identities of information providers. The research site's disclosure was done with the consent of the community development committee of Wat Dong Takhop, aiming to foster knowledge advancement and dissemination suitable for positive research outcomes.

## Research site

This study focuses on the community enterprise at Wat Dong Takhop in the Taphan Hin district, Phichit province, as a case study. Phichit province is in the lower northern region of Thailand. The community enterprise at Wat Dong Takhop is a central hub for establishing community enterprises that have emerged from the collaboration of community members. This reflects a good relationship between the community, the temple, and society. Additionally, it functions as a prototype network with the primary objective of elevating income for community members.

The motivation for acquiring knowledge is rooted in the aim of enhancing both social and economic well-being. Local wisdom is essential for tackling issues or improving the quality of life within the cultural framework, beliefs, lifestyle, environmental systems, and daily practices. The characteristics of local wisdom lie in its transmission and adaptation to the community's environmental anthropology. Self-preservation of local knowledge in the form of community products creates employment opportunities.

The Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO) promotes economic, social, cultural, and environmental development within its legal jurisdiction. One of the critical roles of the SAO lies in its ability to comprehensively improve the quality of life for older persons at the local level through integrated cooperation from relevant sectors. Although local authorities appear to have a considerable degree of autonomy, managing older persons requires multilevel governance that spans government actors, the private sector, civil society, and other sectors. Additionally, there is a complexity in managing the development of the quality of life for older persons, which is tied to the national strategy, the National Economic and Social Development Plan, and other frameworks related to older persons development (Daniell & Kay, 2017; Khongsatjaviwat & Routray, 2015; Thongsawang et al., 2024).

This research was conducted under the jurisdiction of the Dong Takhop Subdistrict Administrative Organization, which supports the role of community enterprises in promoting the livelihood strategies of the older persons in the area. The development strategy of the Dong Takhop SAO aims to enhance the quality of life for older persons, who number 747, comprising 327 men and 420 women. The main goal of the local administrative organization is to ensure that older persons have a good quality of life, good health, and employment (Dong Takhop Subdistrict Administrative Organization, 2024; Taphan Hin Town Municipality, 2021). This research focuses on the Dong Takhop community enterprise, emphasizing analyzing and presenting livelihood strategies for older persons.

In this enterprise, local wisdom has been transferred and developed in handicrafts, specifically bamboo products for household use. The temple area becomes a vital public space for product creation and knowledge exchange by passing on local wisdom to community members. A charismatic leader, in this case, the abbot of Wat Dong Takhop, plays a crucial role in supporting the conservation and transmission of wisdom among community members. This collaborative effort leads to income-generating activities using local knowledge, which leverage the activities conducted (Field Notes May 25, 2023).

## Participants

In Thai society, the status of older persons is transitioned through a Rite of Passage when entering the age of 60 and beyond. This transition often involves retirement from work, with opportunities to receive pensions or retirement benefits based on employment status during their working years. The older persons are generally categorized into three main groups: young old (aged 60–69), middle old (aged 70–80), and very old (aged 80 and above). For this research, participants were selected from the older population actively engaged in community enterprise activities at Wat Dong Takhop during their early and middle ages. A total of 20 participants, primarily females in their early old age, were purposively sampled. These individuals demonstrated skills in various crafts and culinary arts, choosing to work in the community enterprise during their leisure time alongside other members. They continued enhancing their existing professional skills, contributing to increased economic value. The older participants willingly provided significant information for this research.

## Data collection and data analysis

This research article employed a data collection approach utilizing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of the working characteristics of older persons in community enterprises. Field notes were recorded to gather information regarding the livelihood strategies and work activities of older persons in community enterprises.

**Table 1:** Interview Questions Used for the Group of Participants

Questions for all participants
1) What is your experience working in community enterprises?
2) Why did you choose to work in a community enterprise until now?
3) What are your primary responsibilities in community enterprises?
4) What skills are essential to working in your community enterprise?
5) Currently, the government wants older persons to return to work. What do you think?
6) If you have to go back to work. What kind of work would you like to do?

*Note: The questions were queried in Thai*

Upon obtaining data through these research techniques, the research team transcribed the interview content for content analysis. The analysis involves identifying main and sub-themes to establish connections between the information and the research objectives. Additionally, random ideas and previous research findings are incorporated to comprehensively understand the issues discovered through the research process.

## Results

The work of older persons differs from other population groups and is closely related to economic status and well-being (Chamchan & Jatatsit, 2020; Kantachote & Wiroonsri, 2023). The older persons in the community enterprise of Wat Dong Takhop come together to find happiness in their work and have a strong bond with Wat Dong Takhop. Working within the temple premises fosters mutual assistance and a sense of community. Most activities carried out in the community enterprise are closely tied to the Buddhist beliefs held by the older

community members. Buddhism plays a significant role in creating a balanced life, promoting gratitude, and emphasizing the enduring nature of life, guided by the concept of Samsāra (Fox, 2005; Ratanakul, 2012). The involvement of older persons in work focuses on finding happiness in their tasks, giving importance to equal benefit-sharing, and setting aside conflicts. Wat Dong Takhop's community enterprise can be called a 'happy community enterprise.'

Transitioning towards an older society has led to diverse social phenomena, such as the return migration of retirees after working in their destination, challenges in managing poverty and discrimination, and healthcare needs. These changes have turned community enterprises into extensive sharing and mutual benefits covering economic, cultural, and health dimensions.

A distinctive feature of the Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise in responding comprehensively to the needs of an aging society is enabling members to divide tasks based on their skills and capabilities. These tasks often involve traditional handicrafts, such as weaving and local culinary arts. The primary motivation for seniors to participate in community enterprises is to avoid boredom when alone at home. They believe they can work as long as their health is good. Older persons consistently follow the fundamental principle of having sufficient food, necessities, and happiness. Their involvement in community enterprises typically entails temporary work, where they take on tasks based on their preferences and work whenever they choose to. This community enterprise is well-prepared to cater to the specified work preferences of older persons.

## **Do it our way: Livelihood strategies for older persons**

Livelihood strategies for older persons can be understood using the framework of capital assets, which may be transformed into actions to earn a living after retirement under the concept of 'living moderately, feeling happy' through social capital, cultural capital, human capital, and economic capital (Ayuttacorn, 2019; Bourdieu, 1986; Chamaratana et al., 2018). These capital assets help create a work pattern for older persons in different communities depending on their social and cultural contexts. The older persons who work in community enterprises are people of working age who are rational (Wilk & Cliggett, 2007), creative, and can choose to work in jobs that match their interests. The older persons in the Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise exhibit characteristics of creative entrepreneurship, primarily influenced by social and cultural dimensions, with the economy playing a supportive role. Consequently, the research team has conceptualized livelihood strategies for older persons based on their work patterns in this community as follows:

**1) Social Capital Assets:** A community enterprise is a gathering place for various social groups. Older people who work in temple community enterprises also have groups or networks with which they are closely connected. The networks have different internal activities according to their aptitudes and abilities. Thus, older people working in community enterprises are not role-less due to their retirement, as Hooyman and Kiyak (1992) stated. Still, they have maintained their roles from adulthood through working inside such social networks.

These older persons' networks are closely connected to the Buddhist institution with Phra Khru Pariyatti Waropas, Abbot of Wat Dong Takhop, at the helm. The abbot possesses charismatic leadership, earning him the status of a leader of faith and belief for the people and trust from his devotion and sacrifice (Adair-Toteff, 2005). The connections among these social

capital assets have fostered and maintained the existence of the older persons' social networks under what is called "the right livelihood." This is formed from the skills of the older persons in the area, leading to the establishment of "Wat Dong Takhop Learning Center," a learning space supported by the Thai Sangha's Sub-district Training Center, and engagement from the government and the private sector. The center also receives an influx of external social capital in the form of "Faith" to help create and maintain the livelihood strategies of the older persons, showing that said social capital is helpful in the context of livelihood strategies for the older persons (Thongsawang & Rehbein, 2023).

The assets that form social capital for older persons are also expanded into the digital world. The Facebook page "*Wat Dong Takhop, Tambon Takhop, Amphur Taphan Hin*" is a platform for selling products made by the elders, such as Krayasat sweets. The public relations slogan is, "Feel full and be filled with merit with Wat Dong Takhop Krayasat." Hence, livelihood strategies in networks exist not only in the physical world but also in the digital world.

**2) Cultural and Human Capital Assets:** The older persons' cultural knowledge, creativity, and substantial human capital are considered essential assets expressed through various skills in making the right livelihood. In addition to Krayasat, which requires techniques and methods that the older persons have already accumulated, bamboo weaving is also an attractive cultural capital asset for them. Creating community products from bamboo weaving calls for dividing tasks based on aptitudes and gendered characteristics contributing to social roles. Older people who display masculinity are assigned tasks related to preparing bamboo as raw materials, e.g., cutting, sharpening, etc., since these tasks are done in large numbers and require physical strength.

On the other hand, those with the characteristics of femininity are primarily tasked with work requiring meticulousness and delicacy, such as weaving bags and baskets and painting on woven products, which suit them better. Nevertheless, there is a sub-division of labor among the feminine older persons. To make one bag, various parts, such as the handle, lining, body, and zipper, are assigned separately to the older female persons before being assembled. As such, the cultural capital assets of older persons are primarily involved with masculinity and femininity. However, when mass production is concerned, the skills may be exchanged between male and female elders, creating an interchange between femininity and masculinity to achieve a livelihood strategy, transcending the attachment to physical characteristics alone (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this regard, cultural and human capital assets are connected to social capital assets.

Moreover, woven products have been developed to incorporate creativity to respond to the lifestyles of modern consumers. The process involves collaboration with the new generation and communication on online platforms, which has helped stimulate the desire to consume everyday items that still contain the uniqueness of community living. The older persons in community enterprises are, then, like entrepreneurs who have creativity and wish to inject new social values, norms, and standards into cultural products (Verver & Koning, 2023). The older persons in this community enterprise also agree that "learning is never-ending" and wish to learn more about the digital world, which will provide them with digital literacy and a new digital market platform.

**3) Economic Capital Assets:** Older people have created economic value by dividing labor according to skills and aptitudes. The economic capital for the older persons in Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise is classified into two categories. One is the economic capital to start economic activities, which comes from the mutual sourcing of funds from the members



of the community enterprise to convert such economic capital into community products using cultural and human capital. Another is post-conversion economic capital, managed through a committee that systematically keeps a ledger of income and expenses by the older persons skilled in the matter. Methods to pay dividends are specified in the mutually established regulations, and the dividends are paid to the members fairly when it is time. Furthermore, part of the economic capital received after capital conversion will be used as the cost of procuring raw materials to make community products; this process is done based on the trust of every network member (Putnam, 1993).

**4) Psychological Capital Assets:** Psychological capital, discovered in field studies, is closely related to the livelihood strategies of older persons. Psychological capital is associated with perceptions of one's abilities, confidence in working successfully, optimism, flexibility in life, and well-being (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015).

The older persons in the community enterprise have learned Buddhist principles from the monks in Wat Dong Takhop, both directly and indirectly, for them to interpret. The Buddhist teaching that circulates within the community enterprise keeps them optimistic by helping them realize the uncertainty of life and encouraging them to enjoy the present as much as possible. The concept that the older persons consistently adhere to is *Yonisomanasikāra*, which refers to subtle mental actions using methodical thinking (*Upayamanasikāra*), systematic thinking (*Pathamanasikāra*), logical thinking (*Karanamanasikāra*), and beneficial thinking (*Uppathakamanasikāra*) (Phra Phrom Kunaporn [P.A. Payutto], 2013). This dharma principle enables older persons to remain positive in their thinking.

The findings above show that the livelihood strategies of the older people in Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise are inextricably linked to social, cultural, human, economic, and psychological capital assets. Older people are, therefore, rational individuals who can devise their livelihood strategies based on appropriateness, moderation, and humility, as well as placing importance on happiness alongside social, cultural, and economic values.

## **We never retire: Work strategies of older persons**

Government efforts to promote livelihood among older persons often target strategies designed in uniformity that do not consider the variety of work skills of the older persons. However, the older persons working in community enterprises have interesting work strategies as follows:

**1) Work status is tied to membership status.** The work status of the older persons working in the Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise is linked to their membership status. Whether permanent or temporary members, their status affirms the ability to work as implied in Community Enterprise Promotion Act B.E. 2548 (2005) and various Community Enterprise Promotion Board regulations, which define community enterprise as "a place of business" that can generate income and stimulate community economy for self-sufficiency. Such regulations also affect the power relations in micromanagement. A community enterprise steering committee is led by the president, who can systematically regulate its members' works to suit their aptitude (Kantachote, 2023).

Nevertheless, in Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise, the regulation of members' work is not entirely controlled. In contrast, public space is offered in the meetings for the older persons to express their wishes regarding the work they would like to do. The older persons

can choose their work and maintain their autonomy under the assembly's consent. The community enterprise president has the characteristics of 'an employer' who facilitates rather than a boss. As such, community enterprises can be considered a flat organization where all members have equal roles, demonstrating micro negotiation in a different practice than what the Community Enterprise Promotion Board designates, i.e., having a clear operation structure, including a community enterprise president, a community enterprise vice president, and other members divided into roles like secretary and treasurer, etc. Such negotiations are an essential tool that allows older persons to work happily, regard themselves as entrepreneurs, freely exercise their creativity, and exchange their opinions with each other. These work strategies make older persons realize their social and economic value.

**2) Working is leisure.** The older persons working in Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise agree that they have decided to work here because they do not want to remain idle at home. Coming to work fulfills their wish to meet other elders in their cohorts. It also allows them to use specific skills and learn skills from others as every elder in the place is not "possessive of their knowledge"; they are always ready to pass on their knowledge and skills to others. Additionally, the social network mechanism led by the Abbot of Wat Dong Takhop helps involve the academic sector in training and enhancing knowledge, especially vocational institutes that have young people with skills, such as making Thai desserts in trendy shapes and developing packaging to be attractive and create added value, etc. Working is thus seen as leisure in the form of intermediary activities to build skills or fulfill something for the individual, as asserted by Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (Malcolm et al., 2013). Older people's leisure time working is also linked to their physical and mental well-being (Ryu & Heo, 2018).

Therefore, working in community enterprises is working under the desire to spend leisure time rather than returning to the rhythms of working in an industrial system with fixed clock-in and clock-out times, which are related to productivity represented in numbers. The work in a community enterprise is slow-paced and independent, and one only produces as one can, allowing the older persons to manage the timing of their social life and choose what to do or not do based on their ability.

**3) Working helps develop soft skills.** For older persons, soft skills are essential for constantly developing themselves. Soft skills are not technical but allow them to socialize and handle emotions, communicate with others, use creativity, and live their lives (Thianthai & Suthamchai, 2022).

The older persons in the Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise focus on teamwork, essential to working with others and helps reduce stress by providing support and complementing each other. The older persons also have empathy; if an elder who is the main hand cannot work on mixing Krayasat due to an illness, others will step in as a team and show sympathy. They will visit the sick elder as a group when the work is completed. Empathy is born out of collective consciousness, strong-tie relationships, and social interactions, which refer to shared emotional responses toward others' situations in a caring culture (Ruiz-Junco, 2017). In Buddhism, this is referred to as Brahmavihara, consisting of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Phra Brahmaganabhorn [P. A. Payutto], 2021).

At the same time, the older persons who work in community enterprises also wish to achieve life-long learning by making themselves the center of knowledge dissemination at "Wat Dong Takhop Learning Center" where the older persons and youth both within and outside the area

are allowed to exchange knowledge to be expanded further. This learning center is visited by many people willing to share their experiences, allowing older persons to develop themselves through listening. In addition, older persons regularly use their creativity to develop products to exercise their brains and do practical work. This is how they expand cultural capital to achieve 'creative capital.' Thus, the soft skills of the older persons working at Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise result from working together.

## **How to help older persons work happily and sustainably: Feedback for policy**

The policy recommendations obtained from the lessons learned in observing the work of the older persons in the Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise will be presented as an applied empathy map. This technique helps develop policy recommendations based on understanding others' perspectives, which are related to the target group's experience and what the researchers have observed from the target group.

**1) Let the community care for older persons.** Most older people enjoy a close bond with the community. Thus, the community should care for the older persons through a social circle, with the community as the base for them to live happily and choose to do what they want. The older persons can join community networks in various ways. Nonetheless, a key challenge in letting the community care for older persons lies in the infrastructure needed for a suitable life. Many communities differ in their readiness to support older persons. Such infrastructure does not refer to physical structures. Still, social structures also serve as a safety net for protecting older persons, such as having a watchful neighborhood to monitor potential dangers that may occur, having a social space for them to meet, having a network of healthcare, etc. Additionally, communities must upgrade to become learning spaces to support older persons' social circle.

In terms of work, allowing older persons to work in the community is a mark in promoting their ability to create social and economic value, which is based on the idea that the community economy creates more ability for the older persons to be self-sufficient. The older persons can also appropriately use the skills in their cultural repertoire in their work. Keeping the older persons in the community happily promotes quality of life along the concept of Aging in Place, which takes an older persons-centered approach by designing an older persons-friendly place of living, building a supporting social network, and giving the older persons freedom to choose their livelihood (Prasartkul & Satchanawakul, 2021).

**2) The educational institution is a supporting mechanism.** Old age does not mark the end of learning but allows for constant access to education. Older people also wish to develop the necessary skills to survive in a constantly changing society. As social institutions accumulate cultural capital through wisdom and knowledge, educational institutions can support the older persons working in the community. Older people desire to develop their products and allow themselves to enter the online market creatively. The skills that educational institutions can provide can be in the form of "RUN," namely Re-skill, enhancing existing skills for a change in the work methods, Up-skill, adding new skills that the older persons never had, and New-skill, learning to create new skills. Educational institutions are needed to help promote sustainable employment for older persons and fulfill their desires. For example, the older members of the Wat Dong Takhop community enterprise who wish to access the online market will need to learn about the advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of the online market, and they need to be taught in a practical rather than a theoretical way. They also want

to improve the existing community products, which, in the case of food, requires knowledge of food and culinary technologies.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study aims to reflect on older persons' livelihood and work strategies using community enterprises as a basis of understanding. It shows a positive relationship between older persons and community enterprises, as evident in the older persons with a wealth of capital assets. In the dimension of social capital, that is, social networks, despite a body of work suggesting that social capital should be carefully considered separately from social networks, the findings show that social networks and social capital are closely linked when viewed through the livelihood strategies of older persons, which connect to other social networks for both direct and indirect benefits, held together with trust (Putnam, 1993).

Coleman (1988) viewed social capital as relationships among different actors, forming a social structure that creates human capital, which arises from the exchange of skills and abilities within networks. On the other hand, Fine (2007) illustrated social capital through concepts like 'participation' and 'empowerment,' which is evident through the development of local and global economic networks, potentially leading to changes in economic capital. Social capital is intertwined with social networks, trust, and ties that are dense and strong. Substantial social capital is a network with a high level of social trust and robust social relations resulting from the actions and participation of group members (An & Phuong, 2021).

Cultural and human capital refers to the skills older persons already have and learn after retirement. This distinct cultural capital and human capital lead to a division of labor based on their skills and aptitude. These two types of capital create economic capital by developing community products for older persons. In addition, the research team discovered that psychological capital is another asset that needs to be considered to fill the gap in the studies on Active Aging and livelihood and work strategies. This is because psychological capital is an essential factor in the older persons's comprehensive well-being as it considers the mental dimension and goes beyond regarding the older persons in only the physical dimension. This well-being relates to the social structures, be it education, health, family life, or social justice (Promphakping, 2012). This work fills the research gap in the studies of the older persons's Active Aging that values their engagement both in social and economic dimensions (Kantachote & Wiroonsri, 2023), which transcends the ageism that turns the older persons into a marginalized group and defines them through special rights and privileges (Marshall, 2007).

Developing the potential of older persons and promoting employment for older persons should be done based on the principles of good health and well-being. Employment promotion must focus on older persons with knowledge and expertise through accumulated wisdom. Energetic older persons are a significant option in promoting employment as a social activity, which requires social networks—a capital already existing in the area—to be sustainably implemented (Jearajit, 2022). The strength of social networks is also evident as they play an essential role in the decision-making to take social action through assistance and support, a powerful mechanism in the employment promotion of older persons (Chaowatthanakun & Chaowatthanakun, 2020). Moreover, how the older persons working within the community enterprise manage their resources shows their ability to convert capital into sustainable livelihood (Chamaratana et al., 2018) after retiring, which reflects that they

are rational in making economic choices based on cultural behavior and patterns (Wilk & Cliggett, 2007).

The limitations of this research are the specific study area, which only provides case-specific data. Such limitations can be overcome with future research that uses integrated methods within sustainable livelihood strategies for older persons working in various organizations, whether private, public, or community enterprises. Quantitative research will provide the big picture that aligns with livelihood strategies. Then, qualitative research can be conducted to find the connections between older persons' sustainable livelihood strategies and various factors. The research can also be extended into participant action research (PAR), in which the older persons are taught to develop skills based on their interests and then allowed to exercise these skills at work; the lessons learned from the research can subsequently be extracted.

## Ethics statement

The research involving humans was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Srinakharinwirot University (Certification ID: SWUEC-070/2566E).

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