

8. THE MENTALLY RETARDED PERSONS

IN

THAILAND

THAILAND'S COUNTRY REPORT

FOR

GROUP TRAINING COURSE

IN

MENTAL RETARDATION

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BY

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## The Mentally Retarded Persons in Thailand

### SITUATION

The recent research report namely "Epidemiology of Disable persons and Elderly in Thailand : 1982 " by the research group leaded by Dr. Banlu Siripanich told that:

There were 161.9 mentally retarded persons per 100,000 Thai people. Male:Female = 1.45:1. Most of the mentally retarded person were in school - age (7-14 years old) and youth (15 - 24 years old) , so they were single (more than 90%) Approximately 3/4 of all mentally retarded person were damaged when they were newborn and 20% were disabled later. The cause of impairment is illness(13%). Ninety percent still depended on their kinsman. Nearly 1/5 of all went to special school for the mentally retarded person.

Only in Bangkok , the capital of Thailand there were 533.2 mentally retarded persons per 100,000 people. Male : Female = 1.35 : 1 . Most of them were in school-age (7 - 14 years old) and 90% were single. Seventy percent were disabled when they were newborn. The rest was crippled later which the cause was illness. Ninety percent depended on their kinsman. Nearly 1/5 (20%) of all went to special school.

The number of the mentally retarded person in the countryside who went to school and one in Bangkok who is in the same manner are equal because of establishment . Increasing special school for the mentally retarded person in the rural.

## PHILOSOPHY ON EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL WELFARE

### 1. Government Policies on Special Education

The government has recognized that disadvantaged children should be given equal educational opportunities and that the State should be responsible for the management of special education. It is stated in the National Education Scheme of 1977 that "The State shall endeavour to make education accessible to the poor, the physically, mentally and socially handicapped children as well as the educationally disadvantaged" (Section 2, Article 15) and

"Special education is provided for those who have special character traits, or who are physically, intellectually or mentally disnormal. It may be given in special institutions or in ordinary schools as appropriate" (Section 3, Article 38)

The present administration has included this policy statement made to the Parliament. "The government will promote full development of all children and youth in accordance with their conditions and individual differences. It will provide assistance and remediation for children with special problem physically, mentally and emotionally....."

It is evident (from thus various statements) that the government of Thailand has definite goals to provide special education services for the disabled. These goals are specified into particular objectives which form the basis of special education organization as follow:

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- To provide equal educational opportunities for exceptional children, who have been exempted from the Compulsory Education Act, in accordance with their abilities either in state owned institutions or in cooperation with a private sector from the primary up to the secondary levels.

- To offer individual programmes tailored to the type of disabilities and the stages of impairment so that each exceptional child may develop his/her own potential at own speed and eventually fit into community life as a fully, integrated member.

- To ensure the efficiency and cost - effectiveness of special education programmes which should not only develop full potential of exceptional children but also benefit able-bodied children at the same time.

## 3. THE CURRICULUM FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED.

The curriculum of special education in Thailand is based on 5 guiding principles:- type of disabilities, limitation of individual abilities, promotion and rehabilitation, intellectual and mental development, and necessary vocational skills. At present the curriculum for the mentally retarded has been developed and officially enforced. It is adapted from one for the able - bodied with necessary modifications, particularly for the educable is simplified to suit their learning abilities. The Department of General Education is aware that not all kinds of exceptional children are currently being provided with fully developed curricula, and is consequently devoting its efforts to filling this vital gap.

#### 4. TYPE OF PROGRAMME AND ITS ADMINISTRATION FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED.

There are two schools in Bangkok for the mentally retarded children in Thailand, identified by an I.Q. lower than 50. One is run by a hospital for the mentally retarded and the other by a foundation under the royal patronage of Her Majesty the Queen.

#### 5. TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME

Two types of training programmes are available in Thailand. The first one is the in-service training organized by the Department of General Education, the Ministry of Education for regular classroom teachers who completely have no prior preparation in special education. These teachers will get 5-6 week-training in broad-field special education in all areas. The second programme is the pre-service training in four levels, namely, higher certificate, bachelor's graduate diploma and master's levels. The first two levels are organized by a teachers college (Suandusit Teachers College) while the last 2 levels are made available by two universities (Srinakharinwirot and Mahidol University). All pre-service programmes are offered only in the area of education for the hearing impaired.

There are close cooperation among higher institutions which provide advanced training in special education. For instance graduate students at Srinakharinwirot University can take courses at Mahidol University.

(and vice versa). This cooperation does not only provide wider experiences for student of both universities but also helps reduce costs in administration, instruction and equipments.

WELFARE SERVICE FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED.

Thailand is probably unique in that its health, education and welfare services are under the responsibility of four separate ministries, namely - the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education, University Bureau and the Ministry of the Interior. Consequently, the responsibility for special education for the mentally retarded children is shared by agencies concerned with health, education and welfare of the population and another Ministry-the Ministry of Justice. The responsibility of the

Ministry of Public Health is for concentration on detection and remediation and runs a school for the mentally retarded

The Ministry of the Interior through its Public Welfare Department takes care of the destitute and abandoned mentally retarded children and provides both academic and vocational training in its residential centers. The Ministry of Justice runs a control Observation and Protection Centre for juvenile delinquents.

The University Bureau through Special Education Department in the Faculty of Education at Srinakarinwirot University provides a teacher training program at master's level and offering educational and child care counselling services including other related problems, such as psychological, vocational and personnel problems. The Ministry of Education through its Special Education Division responds directly to provide education for all kinds of handicapped children which is limited only to the lower secondary cycle or up to grade 9.



Besides, disabled children including the mentally retarded are exempted from the Compulsory Education Act which normally requires all children from 7-15 to attend primary schools provided free of charge by the State.

The private sector also plays a significant role, side by side with the government sector, in providing assistance and funds through foundations and charitable organizations and cooperates with the government sector in organizing special schools and receives assistance in terms of personnel, training and teaching aids and materials which the main responsibility is the Ministry of Education.

The important private institution for the mentally retarded person is The Foundation for the Welfare of the Mentally Retarded under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen who runs Punyawudhikorn School for educable mentally retarded children (I.Q. 50-75), provides funds from public donations for the school's capital and operation costs as well as for a school lunch programme and a sheltered workshop, give cooperation to and coordinate efforts with government agencies and other organizations in Thailand and abroad in promotion of activities beneficial to the mentally retarded and foster the study of and research into deficiencies of the mind and intelligence of children for educational and medical purposes.

REPORTER OWN VIEWS.

Like any other developing countries, Thailand's efforts in organizing education for children with special needs are plagued with constraints in terms of resources and personnel. The negative argument that "where there are no schools for able-bodied children, how can there be schools for the disabled" is still uppermost in the mind of educational planners in Thailand. Coupled with the fact that special education is comparatively costly, it is hardly surprising to find that this type of education is a low priority item on national budget allocation plans. Of the about 6750 million baht budgets (U.S.\$ 293 million) allocated of the Department of General Education, for this fiscal 1985, special education organization for the disabled received only about 156 million baht (U.S.\$ 6 million) or 2.3 % of the Department's total budget.

From the point of view of personnel, the existing resource is badly in need of further strengthening. The seemingly healthy Pupil/Teacher ratio of 10:1, compared to the national ratio of 20:1 for the primary and 17:1 for lower secondary levels, may be quickly dismissed when one realizes that only 35% of these 300 or so teachers are qualified in special education or have had some in-service training. The rest of them still have to rely on annual on-the-job training during the summer vacation.

Early education programme for exceptional children has not yet been in existence in spite of the fact that specialists recognize the philosophy of special education and its urgency

in providing early education. This is because the country lacks facilities in early detection, service centres and information centres. One university has started early education programme but it is still on experimental basis and the service is still limited.

In addition, there are no post secondary education programmes for the handicapped. High school graduates find it is almost impossible to attend programmes offered in higher institution. Vocational trainings are available only for the mentally retarded and the blind but are operated on only limited basis.

Generally speaking, poor services in special education are concisely resulted from the lack of budget, qualified personnel which are all the major factors obstructing the development of education for exceptional children.

In our society public buildings, facilities and public services are not conventionally designed for the handicapped people who may thus find it impossible to, for example, use public telephone, stair cases etc.

Apart from these technical problems, the main obstacle to the success of special education organization is our cultural background. By tradition and temperament, Thai people have been generally noted for their humanitarian action. Our religious beliefs reinforce this national characteristic to the extent that Thai people have always stoically accepted disabilities in their children as manifestation of their own wrongful deeds, either in this life or in the previous cycle of incarnation. Their sense of responsibility and guilt compels them, however poor they are, to shelter disabled children as

much as possible from any interference from the outside world. Such an attitude makes it very difficult for the State to extend a helping hand to the disabled.

Moreover, the stigma of institutionalized life or living of charity has always been keenly felt among the rural poor. Needless to say, this prejudice is even more prevalent among the better-off and educated classes, who could have provided impetus to the development of special education if their immediate families had been born disabled. Against this background, it is difficult to implement any effective remediation or rehabilitation programmes for the disabled who have always expected protection and assistance from the able-bodied.

Finally, there is as yet no reliable system of data-collection or statistics compilation for the disabled. This makes it very difficult for educational planning on a national scale, the process of which involves enrolment projection and budget planning. From the legal point of view, there is at present no provision to force disabled children to come forward for remediation and rehabilitation. If anything, the law favours further isolation of disabled children by exempting them <sup>from</sup> compulsory education. There is clearly an urgent need to amend the law and to set up legal machinery to ensure that every disabled child is registered as such.

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From.

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