

Using Games and Simulated Scenarios to Develop Mechanisms for Refusing Smoking and Substance Use Among Thai Youth

The Problem of Smoking in Thailand

Smoking in Thailand has become increasingly severe, with the age of new smokers declining and the overall number of smokers rising. It is well known that smoking poses serious health risks and has broad economic and social impacts, being a leading cause of illness and premature death. This situation places a significant financial burden on the state due to healthcare costs. The Tobacco Control Foundation also highlights the effects of "secondhand smoke," where non-smokers nearby are exposed to the smoke exhaled by smokers, leading to heart disease. Inhaling secondhand smoke for just 30 minutes can damage the blood vessel lining and reduce blood flow to the heart. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), each year 2,615 Thais die from heart and stroke-related diseases, with a total of 6,500 deaths annually attributed to secondhand smoke. A 2017 survey by the National Statistical Office found that 17.3 million Thais are exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes. Moreover, the rise of e-cigarettes is concerning. Reports worldwide confirm that e-cigarettes are harmful and, in many ways, even more dangerous than traditional cigarettes. The high heat vapor from e-cigarettes can damage respiratory tract cells. The WHO has announced that e-cigarettes are "not" an alternative to quitting smoking.

In Thailand, the situation with e-cigarettes is alarming, particularly among new smokers; 13.1% of youth aged 15-24 believe that e-cigarettes are less harmful than traditional cigarettes, influencing their decision to try them. A 2021 survey on population health behavior by the National Statistical Office found that "adolescents and young adults" aged 15-24 were most likely to have seen cigarette packs displayed in stores, compared to working adults and the elderly. Additionally, the highest prevalence of smoking is in the southern region, at 22.4%. E-cigarettes have been found to have severe health impacts. American doctors have noted that e-cigarettes can cause long-term illness for up to 12 years. The Faculty of Medicine, Ramathibodi Hospital, reported that over 95% of e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which constricts blood vessels in the brain and includes carcinogenic solvents, as well as flavoring agents that damage bronchial linings.

The government has launched campaigns targeting students as the future of the nation, aiming to raise awareness of the harms of smoking and alcohol consumption to reduce and eliminate

these behaviors. Campaigns encourage everyone to care for their own health as well as that of those around them. However, the number of smokers and drinkers continues to rise. Walailak University, located in the upper southern region of Thailand and responsible for development across seven provinces, operates under a mission to "be a model of good governance, a regional leader, and excel globally." In fulfilling the role of "regional leader," the university has established units to provide academic services to the community (aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals) to support local communities in all aspects. This aligns with the policy of the Office of the Higher Education Commission, which emphasizes the role of universities across Thailand. Faculty and staff apply their knowledge, expertise, and technology to effectively and tangibly serve the community and local area.

Given the continued increase in smoking-related issues, which remain a significant cause of preventable deaths among Thais, efforts are focused on helping smokers quit and preventing or reducing the number of new smokers. The School of Multilingual and General Education, led by Assistant Professor Piyanooch Khunsawat, has previously implemented the "New Smoker Prevention Project" from 2019 to 2020 for students in grades 7 to 9 across 10 schools in Krabi and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces. In the fiscal year 2024, the project will continue to campaign and disseminate knowledge to prevent and deter middle school and upper primary school students—who are at risk of becoming new smokers due to advertising influences and community environments—from getting involved with smoking and drugs. Efforts will focus on raising awareness of the dangers of smoking among students at Pathumanukul School and Bannaithung School in Tha Sala District, Nakhon Si Thammarat. The campaign aims to instill awareness of the dangers of smoking and drugs among Thai students and youth, and to build a network within communities to enforce smoking bans. This approach has prompted students, teachers, and school administrators to recognize the importance of prevention campaigns, aligning with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation's development plan, which emphasizes expanding access to lifelong education and encouraging all sectors to participate in education management. The goal is to develop people who will lead the country towards "security, prosperity, and sustainability" in accordance with the 20-year National Strategy (2017-2036), enabling individuals to utilize knowledge to strengthen themselves and serve society in the future.



Project Objectives

1. To raise awareness among students about the dangers of smoking, e-cigarettes, and drugs.
2. To prevent the emergence of new smokers among target school students.
3. To motivate mechanisms for refusing smoking and drug use.
4. To establish a network of leaders disseminating knowledge about smoking and various drugs.

Project Implementation Steps and Format

1. Promote the project and coordinate with relevant agencies.
2. Conduct workshops to disseminate knowledge about the dangers of smoking and drugs through recreational games and simulated scenarios for students at Pathumanukul School and Bannaithung School in Tha Sala District, Nakhon Si Thammarat.
3. Create campaign materials and stimulative media to promote anti-smoking measures in the community and society, and test students' knowledge.
4. Conduct follow-up meetings to summarize and evaluate the project in the long term after its conclusion.



Recreational activities to keep students interested.



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Simulation that makes students feel grateful and feel guilty In the case where students have previously tried smoking



After completing the training, the students promised teachers that they would not get involved with cigarettes and drugs.



Recent evaluations at Bannaithung School and Pathumanukul School, along with feedback from school administrators, have shown a reduction in students' involvement with smoking. Families of students have become more involved in monitoring their children's behavior.

