



Living Conditions and the Path to Healing Victim's Families after Violence in Southern Thailand: A Case Study in Pattani Province

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the living conditions of victims' families from the unrest in Pattani, Thailand, and to evaluate the success of the "healing victims' project". A total of 284 victim families in Pattani province were interviewed during January to October 2007. The informants were most commonly the victims' wife (73%), were on average 42.2 ± 12.8 years of age. The majority of victims were male (95.8%), were the head of the family (84.5%), of working age (45.9 ± 12.4). 51.4% were Muslim. Most were married (85.9%) and 88.5% of the victims had children. The most common educational level was primary (48.8%) and the most common occupation was agriculture (19%). Most were shot (88%) and 65.1% died. Of all victims, 19.4% incurred asset damage. There were a median of 3 (0 - 9) dependents per family. Aspects of family life that deteriorated most severely after the assault were their sense of personal security and total value of their assets (70.4%) followed by stress (66.6%) and financial problems (65.9%). Aid was received from either government or private sectors by 96.5% of families but 64.1% reported that it fell short of needs. The most urgent need for aid was financial (40.6%), scholarship for children (22.6%) and personal security and assets (16.6%). In practice the most frequent aid received was financial (92.7%). There were 732 children from 284 victim families. The average age was 17.1 ± 10.4 years and 54.2 % were female. Although most of victims' families received some aid, there is a need to monitor system and comprehensive and swift assistance for those affected.

Keywords: Victims' families compensation, Southern border provinces of Thailand, Southern Thailand relief

1. Introduction

Social unrest has led to violence in southernmost of Thailand: Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat province for a long time. This serious problem is the rift between the majority Muslim and minority Buddhist populations in the area. However, the violence problem has more than one cause - poverty, politics, illicit drugs trafficking, smuggling and nationalist separatists, not only religion or cultural reasons (Moawad, 2005). In the past these events were not numerous and most of the victims were policemen, soldiers or government officers (Yusuf, 2006). The violence has spread ever since the January 4th, 2004 raid by suspected insurgents on an Army base in Narathiwat, that made off rifles and other ammunition (Melvin, 2007). This incident quickly escalated into large scale violence both in number and continued to cover all areas in the three provinces and some districts in Songkhla province (Wikipedia, 2007). Over time violent events have increased in complexity, frequency and severity. Deaths occur daily, the victims include government officers, ordinary persons and terrorists. A majority of deaths are of males and they tend to be the heads of their family. Not only are the widows and their children faced with emotional distress from their loss but they are also faced with the difficulty of providing for themselves and their families. Most of women who lost their husbands, son(s) or parent(s) are responsible for caring for family members, including those who were disabled in the event. Some families have chosen to move to living in other areas, due to fears for their personal safety and/or mistrust of their neighbors (Sakee, 2006). The emotional distress of the victims and victims' families is significant and complex. Fortunately there are many organizations able to provide a variety of forms of aid to the victims such as Mental Health Centre 15, Prince of Songkhla University, Family Network Foundation, Youth Volunteer, Healing Fund, Reconciliation Fund, Government organization, and the private sector (Department of Mental Health, 2007).

Currently, the aid system from many organizations covers almost all of the victims' families. However there are gaps in the aid available, for example the discontinuation of the system in which aid workers visited affected families resulted in a lack of information on the condition of victims' families and a lack of follow-up and evaluation of the aid system. Therefore, the question of performance of aid organizations in term of duration, satisfaction and adequacy of aid needs to be investigated and feedback from victims' families needs to be obtained. This information will be useful for developing the effectiveness of the healing system in both short and long term. In addition this it is hoped that the project findings will encourages the public to perceive the living conditions of victims' families. The objective of this study was to investigate the living conditions of victims' families from the unrest in Pattani, one of three southernmost provinces of Thailand, and to evaluate the performance of the "healing victims' project".

2. Material and methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted in Pattani province. A total of 284 victims' families were visited by the researchers and health volunteers during January to October 2007 from all 12 districts in Pattani province (Figure 1). The numbers of victims' families assaulted; 48, 79, 125 and 32 from January 2004, 2005, 2006 to April 2007, respectively, were investigated in this study. Structured questionnaires were used in informant interviews. Data on the victims' and their spouses' demographics, living conditions, their children, and aid from various organizations were collected in a standardized format. The data entry was undertaken using EpiData. Results are reported as percentages, mean \pm standard deviation or median (range). All statistical analysis, graphs and maps were performed using the R software (R Development Core Team, 2007).

3. Results

284 respondents from victim families in Pattani province were interviewed during January to October 2007. Of these, 55 (19.4%) were the victims themselves and 229 (80.6%) were the victims' relatives. In this study, excluding the victims the informants were most commonly the victims' wife, average 42.2 ± 12.8 years of age. 54% were Muslim. 76.4%, 16.2% and 7.4% were widowed, married and single, respectively. 49.8% of the informants had a primary educational level followed by secondary educational level (27.7%) and illiterate (8.7%). The most common occupation was working in government sector (25.8%), agriculture (21.4%), laborer (14.9%) and unemployed (12.7%). Among widowed wives whose husband passed away from the assault, 4.1% were re-married within an average of 23.6 ± 11.9 months.

Table 1 provides the information on the victims' demographic characteristics and the nature of the violent event. The age range of victims was from 8 to 80 years old. The majority were male, the head of the family and of working age. 51.4% were Muslim. Most were married and had children. About 50% of victims were working for the government: government officers and government employees. The remainders were farmers (19%), laborers (14.8%) and merchants or business persons (7%). Most were shot, 65.1% died and 2.8% were left with a physical disability. Of all victims, 19.4% incurred asset damage and 26.8% were accompanied by a family member during the assault.

Table 2 shows the living conditions of the victims' families. Most of them owned their own house. After the assault, 57% had a family income of 3,000-5,000 Baht per month. This study found that the debt of family before assaulting was

62.3% and decreased to 56% after the assault. There were a median of 3 (0 - 9) dependents per family. After the assault there were 13.4% of the family members who moved to live in other places. Concerning the livelihood in the living area, decline of family security and their assets (70.4%) was the most deteriorated after the assault, followed by mental stress (66.6%) and financial problems (65.9%) (Figure 2).

Aid was received from both government and private sectors together by 96.5% of the families, but 64.1% complained that the aid was inadequate. The most urgent need for aid was financial support (40.6%), scholarship for their children (22.6%) and family security and assets (16.6%). More than half (57.4%) had relatives to support them. In practice, the most common aid was financial (92.7%) followed by mental health (62.6 %) and support from neighbors (55.7 %). In addition, among 184 families with their children currently in school, 74 families (40.2%) reported receiving aid of scholarships for their children (Figure 3).

As a whole, there were 732 children from 284 victim families. The average age was 17.1 ± 10.4 years, 54.2 % were female. Victims' children were most commonly studying (61.3%), working (21.7%) and only 2.3% were unemployed.

4. Discussion

For five years, Thailand's predominantly local Muslim southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and some parts of Songkhla have been the scene of unprecedented violence and brutality. The sudden return of violence took many observers by surprise. Although there had been a gradual increase in the number of violent incidents in the region from 2001, the January 4th raid was the major turning point. Social unrest in southern Thailand has led to increasing levels and severity of violence against members of the public (Melvin, 2007). The impact of this violence on communities is tremendous. Schools have often been shut down in entire provinces and districts after teachers were killed or schools set ablaze. Attacks on public health centers and medical personnel have had a dramatic impact on health service availability. Public transportation has occasionally been halted, and communications and electricity supplies have been disrupted when separatist militants attacked mobile phone networks and the power supply infrastructure, causing communication and power blackouts over wide areas. Fear is rampant (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

From the finding of our study, it indicated that the majority of victims were male, married, had the burden to look after their children and 53% of the total worked in the low level position of the government sector. As we already know some assaults also appear to be primarily intended to spread panic among the civilian population. Separatist militants see civilian employees of the Thai authorities, both Buddhist and Muslim, as legitimate targets because they represent the occupation of Patani Darulsalam by infidels (Human Right Watch, 2007). However, our discussion to evaluate the success of the healing victims' family of violence situations in Pattani province can be stated as below:

Economics: The results of this study showed that 57% of the victims have average earnings of 3,000 to 5,000 Baht per month (approximately 86 to 143 US Dollar per month) and 21.2% less than 3,000 Baht. Even though, there are many organizations providing aid to the victims' families and aid coverage was 96.5%, the most urgent need for aid remains financial. The inadequate level of financial aid is impacting negatively on their living conditions and the aid was generally short term aid. This may have been exacerbated by many of the widows and their children being unemployed. This result agrees with the finding by Punnara and Petcharat (2006) who reported that most widows had financial problems due to low income as they have to take care of their children and extended family (average 3 persons). Earnings in that income range are insufficient to lift a single-parent family of three above the poverty line. Whereas the aid from the government authority and publics was concentrated in short term, only day by day subsistence. As above reasons, all victims' families complained that most of aids that they received were inadequate. This study suggests that sustainable aid must be given to widowed wives to have a permanent affect so they can support their families.

Education: The second need for aid is for the education of victims' children. This is supported by the finding that 77% of victims' children were of school age. Therefore aid for supporting scholarships for victims' children should be easily and promptly available. This aid will provide for the children's long term future and will benefit the country as a whole. This also indicates that the victims' families perceive education to be important for their children. The finding supports the finding by Pitakkumpol (2006) who found that educated family members in this area tend to move to or work in other places.

Sense of personal security and the value of personal assets: The unrest has had a profound effect on the people of the area. In this area people had been mutually supportive. An obvious consequence of violence to oneself or to a loved one is emotional distress and possible effects on mental health. Guaranteeing a sense of personal security and to protect personal assets is one path to recover their mental health and their normal living condition. This result supports the suggestion by Mahorabout et al. (2007) who reported that the unrest had spread to a nearby district. Strategies to solve the social problem(s) should be implemented promptly together with healing strategies for the victims' families.

Social: Aid from relatives and neighbors appears to be important in supporting victims' and their families' mental health. After the assaults most relationships between their siblings (80.3%) and neighbors (83.1%) were the same as

beforehand. Aid from friends and neighbors was the third most common source of assistance. This indicates that supporting each other by relatives and neighbors is a sustainable form of assistance and the government should do what it can to facilitate citizens providing mutual support, such as the creation of volunteer agencies.

In conclusion, although most of victims' families received some aid, there is a need to monitor system and comprehensive and swift assistance for those affected. Compensation claims for victims and their families must be handled promptly in terms of both financial aid and mental health in both the short and long term. This research was limited by security concerns for the families of the victims and eyewitnesses in what is a dangerous and hot-blooded region. This study clearly shows that the Thai government should establish necessary measures, such as an emergency fund, to ensure that those affected by insurgent attacks may safely continue to have access to education, healthcare, and other public services. Local participations must be included.

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Table 1. Summary of the victims' demographic characteristics and the nature of the violent event

Demographic factors	No. (n=284)	Percent
Age (mean \pm SD)	45.9 \pm 12.4	
Gender		
Male	272	95.8
Female	12	4.2
Religion		
Buddhist	138	48.6
Muslim	146	51.4
Marital status		
Single	31	10.9
Married	244	85.9
Widowed	8	2.8
Separated	1	0.4
Family status		
Head of family	239	84.5
Family member	44	15.6
Educational level		
Illiterate	8	2.8
Primary school	138	48.8
Secondary school	97	34.3
Vocation	23	8.13
Bachelor's degree	16	5.65
Postgraduate/Graduate degree	1	0.35
Occupation		
Agriculture	54	19.0
Government employee	49	17.3
Laborer	42	14.8
Village security volunteer	24	8.5
Government officer	21	7.4
Merchant/business person	20	7.0
Village head	19	6.7
Policeman	15	5.3
Business person	11	3.9
Soldier	5	1.8
District administrative member	5	1.8
Teacher	4	1.4
Student	4	1.4
Health volunteer	4	1.4
Unemployed	3	1.1
Not specified	4	1.4
Having children		
No	33	11.6
Yes (≥ 1)	239	84.2
Not specified	12	4.3
Children in school		
Yes	184	77.0
No	55	23.0

Type of event		
Shooting	245	88.1
Explosion	16	5.8
Stabbing	6	2.2
Other	11	4.0
Outcome		
No injury	7	2.5
Injured	84	29.6
Died	185	65.1
Disability	8	2.8
Personal assets damaged		
Yes	55	19.4
No	229	80.6
Accompanied by a family member during the assault		
Yes	76	26.8
No	208	73.2

Table 2. Living conditions

Living conditions	No. (n=284)	Percent
House ownership		
Own house	258	90.9
Rent	26	9.2
Income		
≤ 3000 Baht/month	60	21.2
3001 – 5000 Baht/month	162	57.2
>5000 Baht/month	61	21.6
Number of family members: Median (min-max)	4 (1 - 16)	
Number of unemployed family members: Median (min-max)	2 (0 - 9)	
Number of children: Median (min-max)	2 (0 - 10)	
Number of dependants: Median (min-max)	3 (0 - 9)	
Debt before event		
Yes	177	62.3
No	107	37.7
Amount of debt in Baht: Median (min-max)	60,000 (4,000 - 2,000,000)	
Debt after event		
Yes	159	56.0
No	125	44.0
Amount of debt in Baht: Median (min-max)	60,000 (2,000 - 5,000,000)	
Member in family moved out of area		
Yes	38	13.4
No	246	86.6

Table 3. Aid from government and private organizations

Aid	No. (n=284)	Percent
Received aid		
Yes	273	96.5
No	10	3.5
The most urgent need for aid		
Financial	115	40.6
Scholarship	64	22.6
Personal security and asset	47	16.6
Occupation	37	13.1
House/move to other place	11	3.9
Mental health	4	1.4
Other	5	1.8
Was the aid received adequate?		
Yes	102	35.9
No	182	64.1
Relative provided aid?		
Yes	163	57.4
No	121	42.6

Table 4. Children of victims' information

Demographic factors	No. (n = 732)	Percent
Age: mean \pm SD	17.1 \pm 10.4	
0 – 5 years	80	10.9
6 – 10 years	135	18.4
11 – 15 years	127	17.4
16 – 25 years	201	27.5
26 – 35 years	96	13.1
> 36 years	40	5.5
Not specified	53	7.2
Gender		
Male	332	45.7
Female	395	54.3
Victims children status		
Studying	449	61.3
Pre-school	37	8.2
Kindergarten	65	14.5
Primary school	144	32.1
Secondary school	110	24.5
Vocation	24	5.3
Bachelor or higher	35	7.8
Not specified	34	15.7
Working	159	21.7
Government officer	26	16.4
Government employee	37	23.3
Agriculture	16	10.1
Merchant/business person	10	6.3

Laborer	53	33.3
Housewife	11	6.9
Other	6	3.8
Unemployed	17	2.3
Other/unknown	107	14.6

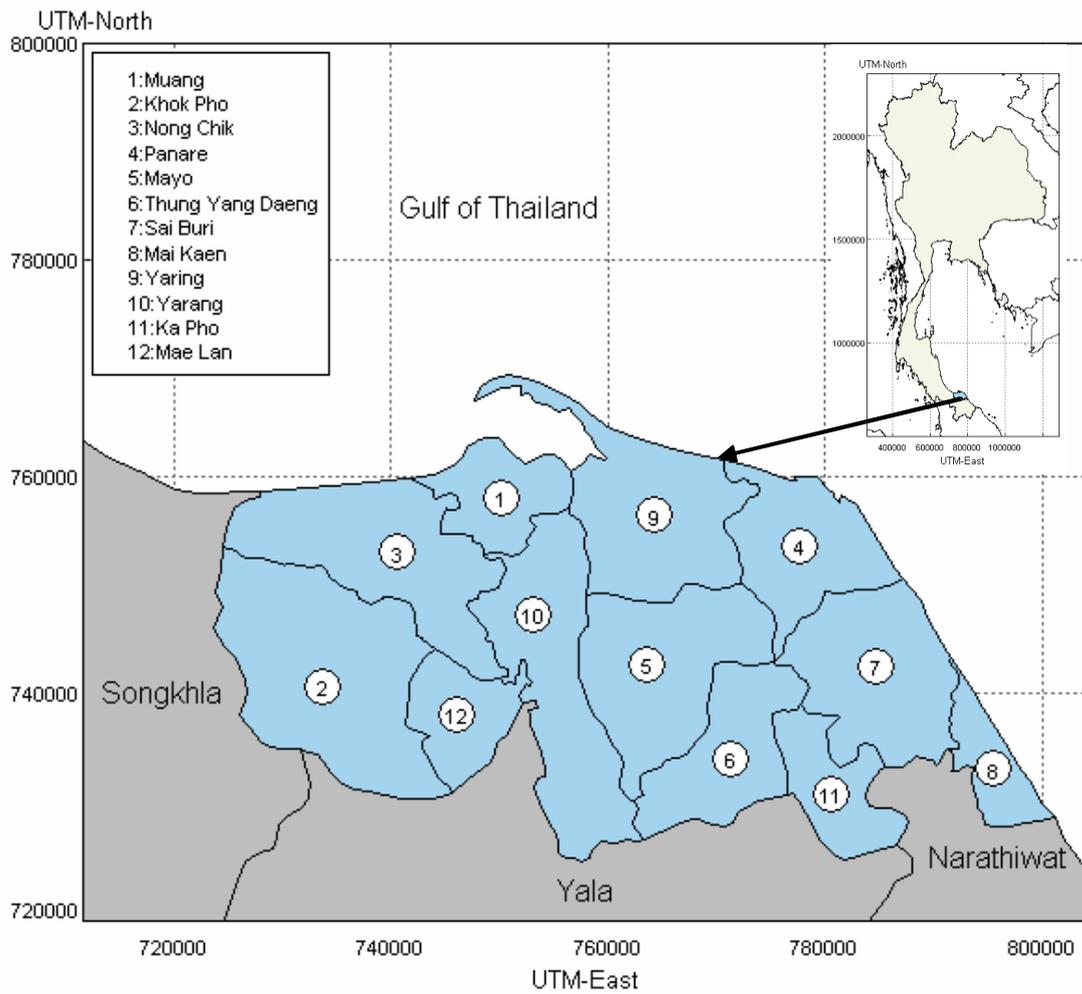


Figure 1. Map of Pattani province with 12 districts

Deteriorating living conditions

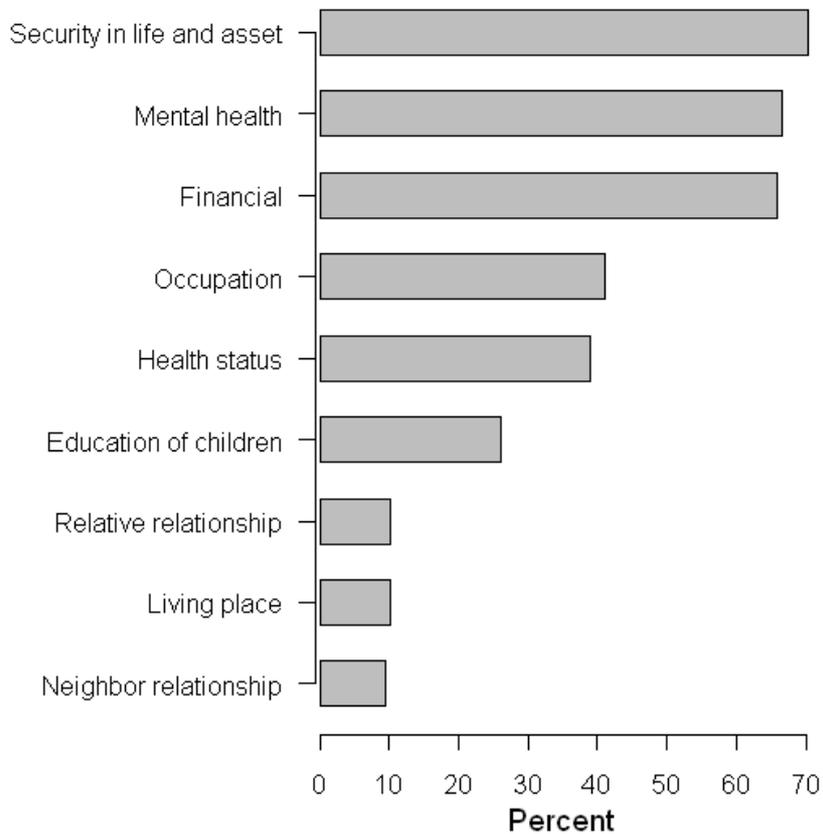


Figure 2. Percent of deteriorating living conditions of the victims' families

Receiving aid

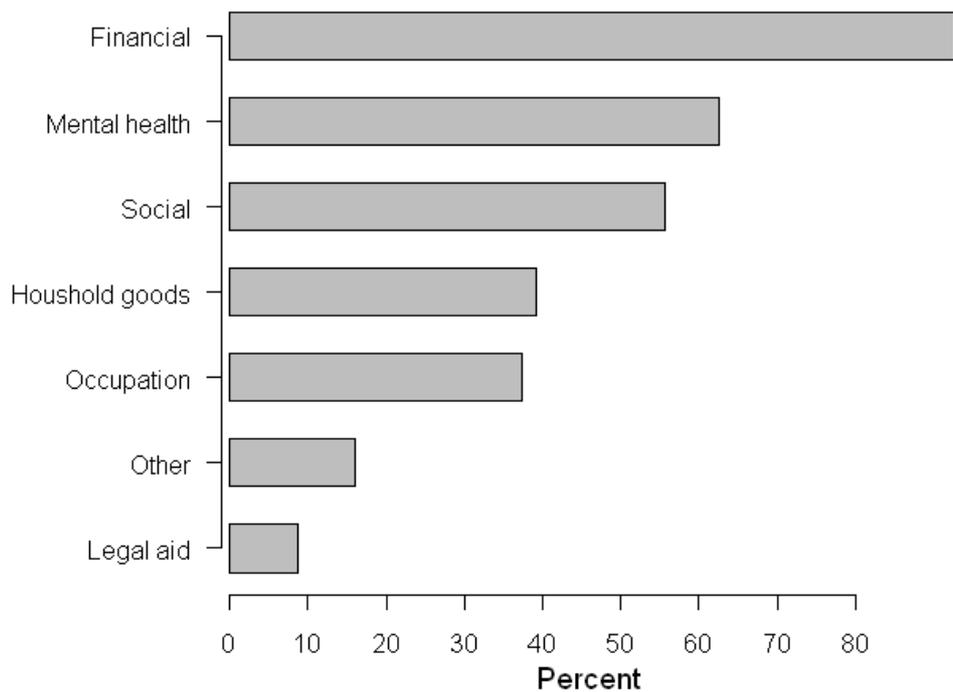


Figure 3. Percent of aid received by the victims' families