



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Strategic Proposals for the Development of Professional Community Health Communicators of Muslim Women Village Health Volunteers in the Southern Border Provinces, Thailand

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Aug 19, 2024	<p>This research aimed to develop and evaluate strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators of Muslim women village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. The research was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 was a study to develop strategic proposals, which was conducted using two methods: 1) a literature review, and 2) a stakeholder workshop with 25 qualified experts to obtain a draft of the strategic proposals. Phase 2 involved the examination of the strategic proposals. The research instrument was a strategic proposal evaluation form, which was used by 30 qualified experts to evaluate the appropriateness, feasibility, and usefulness of the proposals. The research results showed that the strategic proposals in terms of vision, mission, goals, objectives, strategies, and practices, in accordance with the framework for the development of professional community health communicators, consisted of 1) cross-cultural communication, 2) community health communication competence, 3) community health knowledge, and 4) communication psychology, which were found to be at the highest levels of appropriateness, feasibility, and usefulness.</p>
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### INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, healthcare trends are garnering significant attention, particularly in light of the COVID-19 viral outbreak. This pandemic has heightened societal awareness regarding health maintenance, encompassing dietary habits, physical activity, and diverse ailments, with the ultimate objective of fostering self-awareness and enabling individuals to engage in rudimentary self-care practices. The COVID-19 pandemic's ramifications extend beyond physical well-being, impacting the mental health of the populace. These psychological repercussions manifest in various forms, including heightened fear, anxiety, and susceptibility to infection. Such outcomes stem from a deficiency in knowledge and comprehension of appropriate conduct, coupled with limited access to accurate information. Furthermore, there exists a lack of trust in the efficacy of treatment protocols, compounded by the economic downturn that has resulted in diminished incomes or job losses. Consequently, the dissemination of precise community health information assumes paramount importance. (Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, 2020).

An examination of research on community health communication reveals that the issues that arise can be categorized into two primary groups. The first group, particularly in rural areas, is that the

public hardly receives any health information through the media.<sup>2</sup> The second group is that Thai people tend to prefer sharing health information with online communities and friends. Health information shared on social media is often abbreviated and simplified for ease of reading, yet it is important for making health decisions. This can lead to increased risk of receiving distorted or incorrect health information, as well as beliefs that increase the risk of receiving distorted or incorrect health information. (Wongkitrungruang, W., & Kularb, P., 2023) Therefore, community health communication from credible community members is essential for providing information and creating understanding on various issues, including health issues that are relevant to everyone. (Maneesridej, S., & Boonchutima, S., 2016); (Nomsiri, A., & Kaewthep, K., 2010) It is important for everyone to be aware of and pay attention to these issues, so there must be individuals in the community who act as intermediaries to provide accurate information. When the public receives accurate information, it will affect their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors or actions in accordance with what the media conveys through village health volunteers (VHVs). (Rimal, R. N., & Lapinski, M. K., 2009) ; (Roonkaseam, N., & Pankhao, O., 2018; Kiliçarslan et al., 2024)

Particularly in the context of the multicultural society in the southern border provinces, Muslim VHV women are considered key leaders in health promotion who are respected and trusted by the public to help create well-being and be effective community health communicators who integrate religious practices. This is in line with the development of potential in accordance with the era of the economy, society, culture, and health problems that are constantly changing. Therefore, Muslim VHV women need to be continuously developed. From the synthesis of spatial data, it was found that there is still a lack of reliable empirical academic data on strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators of Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. This is in-depth and specific enough to identify strategic proposals to be used as guidelines for driving development towards tangible success. (Public Health Support Division., 2021; Yu et al., 2024)

Considering the aforementioned problems, it can be seen that if strategic proposals for development arise from the participation of genuine stakeholders, they can be used as guidelines to solve the above problems in a more tangible way. The researcher is therefore interested in developing strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators and examining strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim women village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. This is to provide guidelines for stakeholders to use the research results to develop professional community health communicators, which will ultimately lead to maximum efficiency for public health in the area.

## METHODS

This research employs a policy research methodology, which was developed from the conceptual frameworks School of (Wirot S., 2005( ; Oaks )Oaks MM., 2003( and )Tashakkori & Teddlie.. 1998(. It adheres to the principles of mixed methods research to obtain data for drafting policy proposals from multiple sources, following the principles of triangulation and participation from stakeholders at the grassroots level (Grounded/Grass Root Stakeholders), in order to develop a strategy for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim women village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. The research process consists of two phases, as follows:

**Phase 1:** Development of strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. This phase involves two research methods:

1) Document study on the development of professional community health communicators, based on the concepts of 4. Nomsiri, A., & Kaewthep, K. (2010)., Roonkaseam, N., & Pankhao, O. (2018)., 11. Berlo, D. K. (1960), Phimsawat O. (2023), Kositpipat O. (2020), and 14. Nuchanart N.

(2018). The synthesis of these concepts resulted in four components: (1) Cross-cultural communication, (2) Community health communication competence, (3) Community health knowledge, and (4) Communication psychology.

2) Drafting of strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. This involves a stakeholder workshop to develop a draft of strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces, which will serve as a guideline for implementation in a strategic plan for a 5-year period (2025-2030). The draft will be based on brainstorming sessions with stakeholders involved in the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. This research phase includes representatives from the executive board or staff of the provincial public health office in the southern border provinces, representatives of village health volunteers, and representatives of the community. The target group for this phase was selected using purposive sampling, with a total of 25 participants. The result is a draft of strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces that is comprehensive and appropriate. This draft will be analyzed using content analysis to develop a final draft of the strategic proposals.

**Phase 2:** Examination of strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim women village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. This phase involves a purposive sample of 30 experts with knowledge and experience in strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces. The experts will be asked to confirm and finalize the strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces.

The research instrument used is a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, which assesses the appropriateness, feasibility, and utility of the proposals. The data will be analyzed using basic statistics, including mean scores. The interpretation of the mean scores will be based on the following criteria:

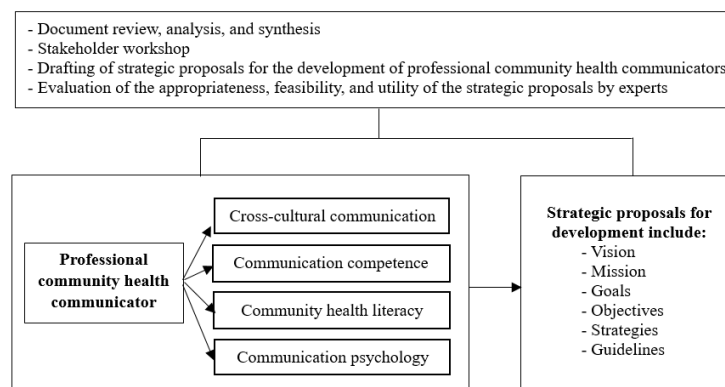
4.51-5.00: Most appropriate/feasible/useful

3.51-4.50: Very appropriate/feasible/useful

2.51-3.50: Moderately appropriate/feasible/useful

1.51-2.50: Slightly appropriate/feasible/useful

1.00-1.50: Least appropriate/feasible/useful



**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**

## RESULTS

### Research Objective 1: Results of Developing Strategic Proposals for the Development of Professional Community Health Communicators for Muslim Village Health Volunteers

The results of the research from interviewing experts to collect data through observation and interviews with key informants found that the strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces, the researcher summarized the research results as follows:

**Vision:** "Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces move towards becoming professional community health communicators, focusing on cross-cultural communication, community health communication competence, community health knowledge, and communication psychology in an integrated manner." The evaluation results for all three aspects were at the highest level.

**Mission:** (1) Develop knowledge and skills in cross-cultural communication in a connected manner. (2) Develop knowledge and competence in community health communication according to the context of the area. (3) Develop knowledge and skills that promote community health literacy. (4) Develop knowledge and skills in using communication psychology in an integrated manner. The evaluation results for all three aspects were at the highest level.

**Goal:** Muslim women village health volunteers move towards becoming professional community health communicators according to the components in a holistic manner, able to apply knowledge and skills to maximize benefits for creating well-being in the community. The evaluation results for all three aspects were at the highest level.

**Objectives:** (1) To develop knowledge and skills in cross-cultural communication in a connected manner. (2) To develop knowledge and competence in community health communication according to the context of the area. (3) To develop knowledge and skills that promote community health literacy. (4) To develop knowledge and skills in using communication psychology in an integrated manner. The evaluation results for all three aspects were at the highest level.

**Strategies:** (1) Create a network of cooperation in cross-cultural communication between the health system and the religious system according to the way of life of a multicultural society. (2) Promote and support community health communication competence through a platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences into practice. (3) Promote activities for developing community health literacy in a holistic manner. (4) Promote activities to enhance the use of communication psychology in an integrated manner and believe in one's own abilities. The evaluation results for all three aspects were at the highest level.

**Guidelines:** (1) Prepare a memorandum of understanding on the development of community health communicators with relevant agencies to create good models, beliefs, and values in organizations or communities, allowing Muslim VSVs to participate in development with a spirit of camaraderie. (2) Organize a workshop on community health communication competence in the form of mentoring between VSVs/officers/network partners/civil society organizations, providing a platform for exchanging knowledge and learning with continuous competence assessment. (3) Organize activities to develop community health literacy in a holistic manner in line with the vision and objectives by brainstorming and expressing opinions creatively. (4) Organize activities to promote the use of communication psychology in an integrated manner and believe in one's own abilities, with a stage to honor VSVs. The evaluation results for all three aspects were at the highest level.

**Research Objective 2: Results of the examination of strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim women Village Health Volunteers** The

researcher conducted an evaluation of the strategic proposals in terms of appropriateness, feasibility, and usefulness. The research results found that the strategic proposals:

- In terms of vision, the appropriateness was at the highest level (mean = 4.53), the feasibility was at the highest level (mean = 4.64), and the usefulness was at the highest level (mean = 4.63).
- In terms of mission, the appropriateness was at the highest level (mean = 4.57), the feasibility was at the highest level (mean = 4.53), and the usefulness was at the highest level (mean = 4.63).
- In terms of goals, the appropriateness was at the highest level (mean = 4.60), the feasibility was at the highest level (mean = 4.61), and the usefulness was at the highest level (mean = 4.65).
- In terms of objectives, the appropriateness was at the highest level (mean = 4.65), the feasibility was at the highest level (mean = 4.73), and the usefulness was at the highest level (mean = 4.69).
- In terms of strategies, the appropriateness was at a high level (mean = 4.72), the feasibility was at the highest level (mean = 4.75), and the usefulness was at the highest level (mean = 4.75).
- In terms of guidelines, the appropriateness was at the highest level (mean = 4.74), the feasibility was at the highest level (mean = 4.70), and the usefulness was at the highest level (mean = 4.76). The data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Results of the evaluation of the appropriateness, Feasibility, and Usefulness of Strategic Proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim women Village Health Volunteers in the Southern Border Provinces.**

Strategic Proposals for the Development of Professional Community Health Communicators for Muslim women Village Health Volunteers	Most appropriate		Most feasible		Most useful	
	mean	level	mean	level	mean	level
Vision	4.53	most	4.64	most	4.63	most
Mission	4.57	most	4.53	most	4.63	most
Goals	4.60	most	4.61	most	4.65	most
Objectives	4.65	most	4.73	most	4.69	most
Strategies	4.72	most	4.75	most	4.75	most
Guidelines	4.74	most	4.70	most	4.76	most

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the research, which resulted in strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim women village health volunteers in the southern border provinces, are consistent with all items on the evaluation list. The appropriateness, feasibility, and usefulness of the vision, mission, goals, strategies, and guidelines are at the highest level. This is consistent with the study by Nattaya<sup>14</sup>, which found that the development of village health volunteer competence should have clear goals and strategies to create community involvement. Cooperation in providing cooperation to VSVs will lead to quality development and service provision. The use of appropriate technology, VSVs using data and online, allows them to receive information, news, and events on public health developments within their community. This leads to improvements in the public health service system, the organization of service systems that still need to be developed continuously, the duties that all parties are carrying out and improving all the time, the integration of public health work with relevant agencies, and there is also interesting information from Jiwchinda C. (2019) who found that the model for the development of village health volunteers (VSVs) should have clear guidelines and should adjust the role of village health volunteers to become promoters of the concept of health volunteers to suit the era. And Pakthong S. (2020), who

said that the development of the potential of VSV leaders should be driven according to the public policy for health with participation for clarity in implementation.

From the findings of the research in strategy and guideline )Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health., 2020), which is to create a network of cooperation in cross-cultural communication between the health system and the religious system according to the way of life of a multicultural society, is consistent with Kaewthep, K. (2000) and Onnark, P., & Shaw, K. (2023), who mentioned that cross-cultural participatory communication is considered an important form of community communication, with the following objectives: to encourage communities to see their own value and to build confidence in the villagers who participate. This will be the development of Muslim VSVs to become professional community health communicators very well, especially in the context of the southern border provinces, which have cultural diversity. Participation is therefore essential for development towards success. Strategy and guideline 2: Promote and support community health communication competence through a platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences into practice. This is consistent with Benjarongkij, Y. (1999), who stated that the strategy for developing health communicators should focus on the competence of the messenger and the context of communication, society, and culture. Because gender has an effect on communication, which in this case is Muslim VSVs, because women have better communication skills than men, especially in health communication. If communication skills are developed through a platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences into practice, Muslim women VSVs will be able to be good role models in the community effectively. This is also consistent with Pilun-owad, O. (2006) and Surasonthi, K. (2016) who stated that health communicators must have knowledge, professional communication skills, and credibility. The credibility of the source of information comes from two factors: competence or expertise and trustworthiness. In addition Rosenfeld, L. B., & Berko, R. M. (1990) also identifies one characteristic of the messenger: they must be similar to the listener (Similar), which in this case is the VSV. Strategy and guideline<sup>3</sup>: Promote activities to develop community health literacy in a holistic manner. This is consistent with the study by Nuchanart N. (2018), which found that the development of VSVs should include a program on how to become community health communicators, which can be used to create health literacy for VSVs in their professional practice. And strategy and guideline )Nomsiri, A., & Kaewthep, K. (2010) : Promote activities to enhance the use of communication psychology in an integrated manner and believe in one's own abilities. This is consistent with the study by Nattiakrawong P. (2019) who found that development in the new era should focus on communication psychology, by knowing oneself, having motivation, being able to make decisions to solve problems appropriately, having thinking and judgment skills that are expressed effectively, and having good relationships with others.

The strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators for Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces are of great importance because they are a method of developing the potential of VSVs in an integrated manner that truly comes from stakeholders in the development and is systematic. It is based on the real situation that occurs, whether it is the economic, political, epidemic, social, environmental, etc., not a hypothetical plan that cannot be done in practice. Because doing so is equivalent to not getting any results. Therefore, it can be concluded that the importance of having strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators will help develop and create growth in stages. There is a clear form and everyone can follow the plan correctly. For the results to occur in the same direction for development in all dimensions, appropriate for the era and tangible.

## Recommendations

### *Suggestions for Application*

1. Agencies or stakeholders should use the research findings to establish clear guidelines, both in terms of vision and goals, as well as setting targets in line with the strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators.
2. Sub-district health promotion hospitals in the area can use the strategic proposals to develop Muslim village health volunteers in the southern border provinces, providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills according to the components as a guideline for developing VSVs effectively and responsively to community needs.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

1. Investigate and develop strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators in other contexts. For example, Muslim women Village Health Volunteers in Thailand, Buddhist Village Health Volunteers.
2. Conduct an operational study to implement strategic proposals for the development of professional community health communicators in practice and evaluate the resulting development.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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