A Qualitative Construction of Sufficiency Living Wage in Thailand
Based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

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In our world where economic disparities are slowing down progress, the call for adopting living wage policies for workers seems to be essential for sustainable human development. This research endeavored to identify the meaning of a "living wage" in concurrence with the sufficiency economy philosophy (SEP), by developing a new concept of "sufficiency living wage" (SLW) in the context of Thailand. A qualitative approach was adopted to examine how minimum wage earners interpret SEP and merge it with their perceptions of living wage. Twelve employees, working at a riverside resort in Thailand, were invited to join the research, as they represented workers who had absorbed the concept of SEP at their work. Interviews were used for data collection. From the thematic analysis of the interviews, two main themes emerged to derive meaning of the SLW from the workers' experiences. The first theme about the "sufficiency of wages" emerged from the understanding of participants about the 3 tenets of the SEP—moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity, when applied to a living wage. The second theme was the "psychological utility of wages," which was valued in terms of tangible and intangible components of perceived utility of the SLW. These findings could be of significance to not only the workers but also to employers, as the emerging concept of SLW could support providing affordable and sustainable living wage. From an applied perspective, it might be beneficial to develop the construct of SLW quantitatively and examine its impact on work and life outcomes.

Impact and Implications
The emerging concept of "sufficiency living wage" (SLW) provides a unique perspective about the culturally valuable sufficiency economy philosophy in the Thai context. The researchers anticipate that a quantitative scale to measure SLW could predict the well-being of minimum wage earners and their families, and hence could be promoted as a beneficial and sustainable mechanism in Thai organizations. It is anticipated that if organizations could adopt SLW, it could contribute toward the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the 2016–2030, specifically to the goals—SDG 1 (reducing poverty), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities) through sustainable consumption (SDG 12).

Keywords: living wage, sufficiency economy philosophy, Thailand, qualitative research

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One of the critical set of issues that is hampering development in our world today is that of economic disparities, which is perhaps more evident in developing nations. This problem has received diligent coverage from economists and behavioral scientists, as well as policymakers at national and international levels over the past few decades. One key policy suggestion to address economic inequalities has been to set a standard of minimum wage across a country or industry. But as noted by Yao, Parker, Arrowsmith, and Carr (2017), there are a number of factors such as “declining wage share, rising inequality and increased cost of living observed across the developed world” (p. 875) that are propelling an interest toward something more than minimum wages. Anker (2006) emphasized the importance for workers to earn enough to not only support their own needs but also that of their families and subsequently from this arises the need for a living wage (LW). As explained in a comprehensive review of LW, Anker (2011) wrote that though the idea of “living wage” has existed for long (ILO, 1919, UN 1948 as cited by Anker, 2011, p. 1), it has seen a “rebirth” in the 21st century. Researchers have noted that a living wage has linkages for a better quality of life for the workers (Carr, Parker, Arrowsmith, Watters, & Jones, 2016, p. 2).

From the behavioral science perspective in Thailand, we were inspired by this impact of a living wage on not only the individual’s quality of life but also their families. Applying to the specific context of our research, we aimed to develop a new construct of “sufficiency living wage” (SLW), which seeks to integrate the sufficiency economy philosophy (SEP) of Thailand with the concept of a living wage. The SEP, introduced by the late King Bhumibhol Adulyadej of Thailand, has provided a guiding framework of balanced living and sustainable development in the country since 1997 (Wibulswasdi, Piboolsravut, & Pootrakool, 2012). This research adopted a qualitative design to understand how the Thai workers could interpret the SEP model, and merge it with their perceptions of a living wage. These findings could provide a distinctive but valuable perspective about the living wage from the socio-cultural context of Thailand, which has adopted the SEP framework at various levels, ranging from individual living to the national agenda, for development over the past 3 decades.

Literature Review

This research was developed using the philosophical foundations of living wage and the SEP. An overall perspective based on the ecological systems theory was adapted to explain in the linkages of theory to research within the context of Thailand, as elucidated in the subsequent sections.

The Living Wage

Though many countries across the world have implemented “minimum wage” policies, the requirement for a living wage arises from the persisting gaps in socioeconomic equalities. This rationale is emphasized by Parker, Arrowsmith, Fells, and Prowse (2016), who noted that a living wage implies “a basic income that provides more than mere subsistence, enabling participation in society and some scope for workers and their families to insure against unforeseen shock.” Researchers have systematically worked to provide a formal definition and measurement of living wage (Anker, 2011). For our research, we draw on the explanation of living wage as given by Yao et al. (2017), which points it as the wage level that is perceived by employees as a “step-change” to experience a better life at work and personal levels.

Contributions in the area of living wage are based on the groundbreaking contribution of Sen (1989) and his “capability approach” model. According to Stabile (2008), the capability approach rests on the principle that human beings have many functions in the society, and when applied to compensation given to workers, it could impact the quality of life of not only the individual but also that of their families. Researchers point out that living wages can contribute to humanistic thriving (Fox, 2012, as cited by Carr, Parker, Arrowsmith, & Watters, 2016). In a recent study, Carr, Parker, Arrowsmith, Haar, and Jones (2017) empirically tested and found significant linkages between wages and human capabilities, measured in the various dimensions of work happiness, well-being, and wage fairness.

In terms of wage policy, many developed countries such as New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom have imple-
mented aspects of living wage policies (Parker et al., 2016, p. 2); however, the implications for developing nations are yet to be assessed. In their article, Yao et al. (2017) highlighted the need to understand the impact of living wage on employees, especially on their “subjective dimensions” such as the perceptions of well-being, as this is a key component in ensuring the “step-change” nature of a living wage. Hence, this study aimed to provide some fresh insights concerning the concept of living wage by an exploratory qualitative evaluation of the workers’ perceptions about it in Thailand.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The other philosophical foundation of this research is based on the “philosophy of sufficiency economy,” which has been prominent in the research context of Thailand, both as a philosophy and also in practice. This SEP was conceived by the late king of Thailand, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and first shared with the Thai people in 1997, when the country was going through a financial crisis. The practice of Buddhism as a religion in Thailand and the Buddhist teachings promulgating a “middle path” have influenced the main aspect of the SEP, which adapts this to a balanced way of living (Kantabutra, 2007; Mongsawad, 2012). This philosophy has three pillars or principles—moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity, which must be applied along with the conditions of morality (or virtue) and knowledge. These pillars have to be understood from the Eastern context, wherein, moderation means to live within one’s means or not doing something too little or too much at the expense of oneself or others; whereas reasonableness is taking rational decisions, which could be explained by the economic concept of “bounded rationality” or “satisficing”; and self-immunity is to prepare oneself for future financial crisis, akin to risk management (The Chaipattana Foundation, 2017; Wibulswasdi et al., 2012).

To understand the desired application and impact of the SEP on the socioeconomic development in Thailand, Mongsawad and Thongpakde (2016) quoted the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2007):

> ... the philosophy points the way to toward a more resilient and sustainable economy that is better able to meet emerging challenges such as globalization. Sufficiency Economics stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by Thai people at all levels, from family to community to country. It calls for national development and administration to modernize in line with the forces of globalization. (p. 137)

The SEP has evolved over the past 3 decades and integrated with the Thai National Economic and Social Development Plan since the year 2002 (Charungkaitikul & Henschke, 2014, as cited by Barua & Tejativaddhana, 2019, p. 198). Further, as elucidated by Wibulswasdi et al. (2012), this philosophy has provided guidance on appropriate conduct covering numerous aspects of life in Thailand, and even toward achieving the United Nations’ goals of sustainable development. Noting the contributions of this philosophy, the late King was also awarded with the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) first ever “Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award” in 2006 (UNDP, 2006). In the current scenario too, the SEP has been integrated with the 20-years National Strategy, as well as the 12th National Economics and Social Development Plan (2017–2021; quoting the Royal Thai Government, 2016).

Several research studies have highlighted the implementation of the SEP at various levels and contexts in Thailand. In a recent meta-analysis of studies regarding the impact of SEP on the well-being of Thai people, Barua and Tejativaddhana (2019) found that it had a positive correlation with well-being across six different areas—education, social, economics, agriculture, environment, and health. In another research by Sarapirom and Sarkar (2018), participants from five key target groups were interviewed—individual, community, school, religious institution, and business sectors. All of these had won awards for applying the SEP in their practices. The qualitative findings of this research showed that the application of the SEP to raise the quality of life and individual happiness depended on four factors—internal, social capital, community empowerment, and other external factors. These researchers also found that SEP could be applied toward the goal of achieving poverty reduction by building the capability of the people to shape their lives and giving them the opportunity to make choices. In another mixed method research by Kanlayanamitir...
(2016), a quantitative survey of 400 persons indicated that the implementation of SEP could reduce inequalities in the economic, social, and psychological aspects of Thai society, whereas the qualitative study indicated that the participants could use SEP as a guide in their life. Other researches in Thailand have verified the impact of the SEP as a guideline in reducing inequalities and addressing poverty (Kongkamkeaw, 2004; Loetyingyot, 2017; Phangnaren, 2015). Thus, keeping in perspective the economic and sociocultural implications of SEP in Thailand, the present research sought to understand whether the SEP could be integrated with the living wage perceptions of the Thai workers.

The Overall Research Perspective Based on the Ecological Systems Theory

Through this research, as we endeavored to understand the significance of living wage in the context of Thailand, the ecological systems approach provided a befitting framework that could integrate the multilevel perspectives about the implications of living wage. The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains the interconnectivity of various systems or levels of contextual factors that encompass an individual’s life and provides an explanation for human development. Researchers have noted that this theory was “in a continual state of development” till the death of Bronfenbrenner in 2005 (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Though originally the focus of the ecological theory was about the interactions between a person and the systems in his or her environment or the context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), later on during the 1980–1990s, the researcher modified to add the complexities of processes and time, thus calling it the process-person-context-time model in the “bioecological theory” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 and 2005).

Applied to this research, the person is a minimum wage earner, the context is the workplace/in Thailand’s sociocultural milieu, and the process that this research seeks to examine is the cognitive-affective integration of the SEP with the concept of living wage as perceived by the worker.

The model of Bronfenbrenner is significant for behavioral science since it “provides a holistic perspective in dealing with the numerous and complex behavioral problems” (Mohan, 2015, pp. 51–52). Adapting the ecological systems view for the current research (as depicted in Figure 1), at the macro level are the global policies such as the Sustainable Development Goals (or the SDG as known in shorter version) of the United Nations (2016) that have set the agenda for development for the world, and related to the context of this research are the SDG 1 (reducing poverty), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities). These policies encourage governments to provide meaningful work for citizens, and also provide wages that fulfill their needs as

![Figure 1. The multilevel context of living wage. SDG = sustainable development goals.](image)
well as provide a decent quality of life for the workers and their families.

At the meso level are the interactions between the different levels that can impact policies on decent wages for workers. For instance, negotiations between the three parties, such as the national policymakers, the work organizations, and the individual employees, may determine what a worker is paid in terms of securing the minimum wages. This is elucidated by Anker and Anker (2013), who highlighted that the participation of various stakeholders is essential in the process of estimating a living wage in a specific context. For this research, we propose that providing living wages could be in accordance with the existing national policies of Thailand. For instance, the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2017-2021 and Thailand’s 4.0 Policy (Thailand’s 20-Year National Strategy, 2016) both set the agenda for the country to grow with security, prosperity, and sustainability. An important feature of these policies has been to integrate the SEP as the guideline to sustainable development plans (Royal Thai Government, 2016). Hence it may be meaningful to explore if the SEP could be linked to the concept of living wages to provide sustainable living and development for the people.

At the micro level, this research focuses on the individual worker earning minimum wages, and how they might perceive the impact of a living wage when integrated with the SEP, on the quality of life for themselves and their family. The adoption of cultural values, such as those based on the SEP, is impacted by an individual’s beliefs and motivation (Barua & Tejativaddhana, 2019; Yipyintum, 2014). The positive impact of living wages on quality of life has been highlighted in recent research studies (Carr et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2017). Thus, as we can see by adopting an ecological perspective, we can understand the significance of living wage from various levels, which has been depicted in Figure 1.

**Integrating the Theoretical Frameworks With the Research Context of Thailand**

Thailand is a developing Asian country with a population of 69,037,513 (according to The World Bank, 2019). As noted in the World Bank’s overview (The World Bank, 2019), although Thailand recorded a substantial decrease in poverty rates in the past 30 years “from 67% in 1986 to 7.8% in 2017,” yet in the recent years the progress in reducing poverty and inequalities has slowed down due to various factors, including a “slower wage growth.” Thailand had approved “the minimum wage system in 1972, and has adjusted it a number of times since then” as noted by Paitoonpong, Akkarakul, and Sukaruji (2005, p. 3). In a more recent context, since 2013, a policy of minimum wage of Thai Baht 300/month (or approximately $9.38 in today’s currency exchange rate) was implemented. The minimum wage levels were raised again on 1 April 2018 to a range between Baht 308 to Baht 330 (Ministry of Labor, 2019). But the policy of implementing the minimum wages has not been able to achieve the objective of raising the standard of living (Paitoonpong et al., 2005). Further as noted in their review, Lathapipat and Poggi (2016, p. 3) highlighted that the minimum wage standards in Thailand have not had the desired effect, for example, “little impact on aggregate employment, with signs of contraction in employment for low-skilled youth.”

**The Emerging Research Question**

From the review of literature and in the context of Thailand, it may be meaningful to investigate what impact the workers would perceive if they were to earn not just a minimum wage but a living wage, and could this living wage amount be conceived in a different perspective when linked with the SEP. The current research sought to explore how the research participants applied their experiences of the SEP to a living wage and the meaning of this emerging understanding of an SLW developed from the Thai context.

**The Research Methodology**

The present study was the first phase of a larger research project that aimed to develop the meaning and concept of sufficiency living wage, and later on empirically test if SLW could be behavioral science construct. This research article encompasses the first phase, based on a qualitative design of research, in which qualitative techniques could be used to explore a phenomenon in depth as per the recommen-
The research team got approval and ethics clearance from the university for the research project (ref: SWUEC 030/60E, dated 13 June 2017).

The Research Participants

The participants of this research were selected from the tourism sector in Thailand for three main reasons as explained further. First, the tourism sector is one of the main contributors to the economic development of Thailand (Chulaphan & Barahona, 2018), contributing to one fifth of the GDP. Furthermore, it was clearly stated on the Thai government’s public relations website (“Thailand’s 20-Year National Strategy,” 2016) that the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan, 2017–2021, is geared to help the country achieve the goals of sustainable development (United Nations, 2016). Moreover, Thailand’s national development adopted the “Thailand 4.0” agenda, with the tourism sector as one of the key contributors to the value-driven economic growth under this policy (Division of Economic Information, Department of International Economic Affairs, Thailand, 2017).

Second, the UNDP has supported Thailand in localizing the UN’s SDGs to the community level through various projects and programs. Among these, the “Sustainable Tourism for Human Development” project (UNDP, 2018, p. 111) was implemented in four communities across Thailand’s different regions, thus, localizing several SDGs: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for Development).

Third, the tourism sector based on the national development plan aims to continue the focus on the SEP (“Thailand’s 20-Year National Strategy,” 2016). There are many researches that have noted the implementation of the SEP in the tourism sector; with researchers even developing measurements to evaluate the impact (see Chartrungruang, 2010, 2011). Hence, for the current research, the choice of “tourism” sector seemed appropriate for achieving the aims of the research.

Selecting the Participants

For this research, two organizations in the tourism industry were selected; both were businesses in Thailand that has adopted King Bhumibol’s SEP for their management and business operations. We got consent from only one organization and then contacted the management team of this riverside resort to seek approval for collecting data. The hotel management allowed us to collect the data from their employees, who met our sample selection criteria: persons who received a minimum wage of Baht 300/day (which is approximately $ 9.38/day). The manager set an appointment with their employees for data collection.

Finally, the researchers visited the resort and took interviews from 12 minimum wage workers at that resort. Among the participants, there were nine women and three men, all between the age ranges of 25–53 years. Eleven of them were married, and had lived in the province with two to five other members of their family. Five participants lived in their own house, whereas the rest lived in rented rooms or houses. Five participants worked as staff at the resort’s gardens, whereas others worked at other departments: housekeeping, Thai traditional performance, product development, cleaning, and laundry.

Development of the Interview Questionnaire

As a part of the qualitative approach, we collected data by interviews. The researchers followed a systematic process for the development of the questionnaire for interviews. First of all, we started with a preliminary study to develop the guidelines for the interview questions. We initially interviewed the staff who worked at our university’s hotel, including the president, the manager, and the officers. Then we developed a set of question guidelines and verified the content from two experts, one in psychology and the other in management. After that we tried out the interview questions with eight workers, who matched the criteria of people making minimum wage, and worked as cleaners and guards at our university. Subsequently we discussed the information collected, adjusted the interview questions, and finalized the guidelines for the interviews.
Our interview questions were separated into three parts. The first part was about recording the personal data of the participants regarding their current living standards, family, job, and wage. The second part aimed to find out the participant’s estimation of “living wage,” which began by asking them about their basic needs for living. This was followed by asking them about the desired things or extra products that could make them happier, and finally requested them to give a suitable wage that they thought could afford their extra needs. For the last part, we asked them regarding their understanding about the King’s SEP. After that we asked them to rethink about living wage estimates that they desired for fulfilling their extra needs, and then gave us an estimate of the living wage that would be in concurrence with the SEP.

Data Collection and Analyses

The data collection from interviews was done in Thai language. The researchers followed the ethical guidelines of research and informed consent, as also recommended by researchers doing work on living wage (Carr et al., 2017). Thirty to 50 min were used for each interview. The information from the interviews was transcribed in Thai and later in English by one of the researchers and a research assistant.

The thematic analysis technique was used for the data analysis, adapting it from the six-steps framework provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps in our research included the following:

1. Familiarizing with the data—which was done by reading and rereading the transcribed interviews. Two researchers were involved in this process.
2. Generating initial codes—the data were coded by two researchers separately first. Each researcher coded the data using questioning of data by following the overall guidelines as mentioned by Flick (2018, p.156): “what is actually happening in the data?”, “what is the participant’s main concern?”, “what is the action?”, “how can I define it?”.

Each researcher coded the interviews of six persons. Memos were separately written.

3. Two external researchers, with backgrounds in sociology and applied behavioral science research, were invited to cocode. Before the meeting they coded data for six persons each. At the collaborative coding meeting, we discussed the codes and data-related memo to finalize the initial codes. This step helped the researchers to get interdisciplinary perspectives of the data. The differences found during the meeting were about different meaningful data portions, different interpretations, and different codes. These were discussed to refine the codes.

4. Searching for themes—the codes were sorted out into different themes.

5. Reviewing themes—the themes were sorted into groups based on the understanding of theoretical frameworks. At this stage the researchers cross-checked their separate analyses and combined them.

6. Defining and naming themes—based on research questions and literature review, themes of the results were identified. These were translated into English and also back-translated. Supporting quotes for each theme were also identified.

7. Producing the report—the findings are shared in the next section. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, their names are coded as P1, P2 and so on.

The Research Findings

The qualitative research findings from the study participants are presented in four subsections; the first two are related to the participant’s shared information about their current wages and estimates of living wages; the next is linked to living according to the SEP; and finally the last section discusses the development of the meaning of Sufficiency Living Wage as conceived by the participants.

Current Wage and Current Wage Expenditure

The participants received basic wages that ranged from 300–367 Thai Baht per day (which
is approximately USD 9.84 to 12.04 per day). Nine out of 12 persons reported that they received extra money from working overtime and extra jobs. All of them spent the earned wages for housing, food, and daily expenses. Ten out of 12 spent the wages for their family and extended family expense. Three out of 12 participants reported having debt. When asking whether they think they have enough money for spending, three persons said “the wage received was not enough,” whereas four participants could not answer this.

Living Wage: To Support the Additional Needs

When asked what extra needs could make them live happily, the participants identified that they would like extra money to pay back their debts, save money for future to buy a pickup truck, a house, or some electric appliance. The range of this higher wage for 10 of the participants ranged from 310–500 Thai Baht per day (which is approximately USD 10.17 to 16.40 per day); though two participants did not give an exact amount, the overall amount was more than the basic wage they earned.

The participants shared that if they were to get higher wages (living wage), it could be used to satisfy the additional needs for their current and future living, and could be separated into three different parts according to the time frame: short-term, medium-term, and long-term needs. The living wages could be used in the short-term for the repayment of debt, purchase of utensils such as an electric pot, and cosmetics. Medium-term expenditure was about taking care of their children and parents, or buying a vehicle for part-time occupation, or going for traveling by themselves and family. The long-term desires of the participants were about owning a home and doing charity. When we ask about desired living wage that can afford these needs, they roughly estimated it to be more than the amount they earned currently, but in moderate amounts. Even though most of them thought that a higher wage and appliances could make them happier, one of them expressed that she hoped for a happy family and that was not something that came from getting more wage or the things that could be bought from the higher wages (P 10).

Living Wage According to the SEP

Though the exact amount in terms of wages was not identified, the meaning of SEP when applied to the living wage from the point of view of the participants was linked to knowledgeable consumption. They explained that one should think deeply about how to allocate their income to serve themselves and their family’s basic daily needs, for investment, and saving for uncertainty. They should decide about leading a suitable way of their life, one which is compatible to their ability to earn. They should do something that they can do by themselves such as growing vegetables on the balcony behind their rented room or in the backyard. They would not like to spend by imitating others. For instance, as one participant explained, “... happy with whatever you have. Not spending on unnecessary things... know how to save money” (P1).

In addition, some of them expressed that a feeling of contentment, as well as their parents’ satisfaction about them managing their finances independently for living, were a crucial part of a living wage based on SEP. They identified certain lifestyle practices based on the SEP, which were related to spending carefully, borrowing less, cooking by themselves, reducing buying unnecessary appliances, doing many things by themselves, not imitating other’s way of life, investing to support future uncertainty, and not being ambitious beyond reality.

Developing the Meaning of SLW

From the thematic analysis of the interviews, individual and overall structural descriptions of SLW were constructed. The SLW could be understood in two main themes. First, the theme of “sufficiency of wages” could explain the meaning of SLW as measured in terms of cognitive and behavioral components. The second theme identified the “psychological utility of wages,” which could be measured in tangible and intangible components.

Theme 1: The Sufficiency of Wages

The concept of SLW is constructed from thinking about the living wage in accordance with the King’s philosophy (SEP). Its meaning emerged when the participants talked about the living wage in consideration with the three main
dimensions of the King's philosophy—moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. Each of the three dimensions had two psychological aspects—cognitive and behavioral, which were reflected in the theme of "sufficiency of wages."

The cognitive aspect of sufficiency of wages. The cognitive dimension of SLW deals with the positive beliefs about spending the wages according to the three tenets of the King's philosophy in mind—moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. For instance, when we talk about the belief about the sufficiency living wages one participant expressed—"I believe in not spending extravagantly" (P1). This is related to the tenet of moderation of the SEP.

Regarding the use of money, the participants adhere to the tenet of "reasonableness" of the SEP and then mention how they could use the living wages—"I believe in knowing how to save money. The rest is used" (P2). The tenet of self-immunity from the SEP can be understood from the participants' view that they realize that they have to save some money every month.

The behavioral aspect of sufficiency of wages. The behavioral aspect of the sufficiency of wages is linked to the actions taken by the participants based on SEP. In terms of the tenet of moderation, participants show the intention to spend their wages with the principle of moderation—"I wouldn't spend the money more than what I have. Need to be economical so I can keep on living" (P5).

Regarding reasonableness, the participants could weigh carefully the causes and consequences of their expenses—"How I spend on food and stuff . . . knowing when and what to spend on and do not spend unnecessarily" (P3).

Based on the tenet of self-immunity, they are careful about their expenditure, for instance as one person shared—"I do not overspend. I spend with only whatever amount of money I have at the time" (P6).

Theme 2: The Psychological Utility of SLW

Further thematic analysis of the interview data revealed another important aspect of the SLW, the perceived positive psychological utility of the living wage, which deals with the positive feelings of utility about the living wages, measured in two categories—tangible and intangible. The tangible utility of the SLW is measurable, such as what one participant told—"I'm willing to tell anyone how much money I earn" (P3). The intangible utility of the SLW refers to the affective aspect of the psychological utility of the wages; for instance, one participant said—"I am happy to have money to support my parents every month" (P4). Another participant expressed that, "The wages earned make me and my family happy" (P5).

Discussion and Conclusion

Main Findings and Discussion

The findings of the research provide interesting insights about the perceived meaning of living wage when integrated with the SEP by the research participants who were minimum wage earners in Thailand. A qualitative analysis of the findings was undertaken to develop the meaning of SLW.

As is evident from the findings, when the workers integrate the SEP with the concept of living wages, it reflects the assimilation of SEP values with a perceived enhancement of quality of life. According to Wibulswasdi et al. (2012, p. 39), the application of SEP in an individual's life develops a "mindset" for "sharing, assisting and cooperating with others for the common good," which could be beneficial not just for the individual but also for the society, and hence lead to sustainable development. The emerging concept of SLW shows that it embedded the three tenets from the SEP—moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity, which can be also expressed as the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of an attitude. According to Puntase (2004), sufficiency thinking integrates both cognitive and behavioral aspects. The three dimensions of the SLW corroborate the three principles (see the definitions by Barua & Tejativaddhana, 2019, p. 195–196): moderation related to avoiding extreme and overindulgence in the need for higher wage (or a living wage); reasonableness implied to an understanding of the causes and consequences of the wages for instance spending only within the means; and self-immunity implying protection from future changes that could result by saving the wages. As the results showed, the research participants could apply all the three pillars of SEP, which is linked to the "middle path" of thinking and
hence could lead to living with moderation as well as with sustainability (National Economic and Social Advisory Council [NESAC], 2007, p. 19).

This research also found that the SLW can be understood from the dimension of the psychological utility of the living wage. This perhaps is linked to the “experienced” utility as explained by Kahneman and Thaler (1991), and in this research it is about the positive feelings about the living wages, measured in both tangible and intangible terms.

If we view the emerging concept of SLW, we can find linkages to the living wage research and its perceived impact on improved quality of life or “human thriving” (as mentioned by Carr et al., 2016) or on supporting a family and saving (Yao et al., 2017). It may be meaningful to evaluate the congruence of the emerging concept of SLW with the “wage sufficiency” of the “human capacities” approach as proposed by Prowse, Fells, Arrowsmith, Parker, and Lopes (2017, p. 781).

In our attempt to explain the findings of this research in terms of the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), we first explain the processes. The two proximal processes most relevant to this research were the experiences of the research participants. First, in this research we asked the worker to explore what would be the extra needs that he or she would like to satisfy were they to get a higher wage. The findings point toward complex social-psychological processes that the individual workers applied in identifying a “living wage” that was higher than the current wage, and one that could help to satisfy these “other needs.” Second, the participants applied their understanding of the SEP to the perception of earning a living wage, and through this emerged the concept of sufficiency living wage. This alludes to more complex processes that would need further evaluation from the behavioral science perspective.

The person factors can be explained in three dimensions of demands, resources, and dispositions (or forces) according to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998). Applying to this research, the person factors could be understood in three aspects—(a) demands of the workers, which they could identify as their current needs and future needs, as well as the needs of their families; (b) the resources referred to the current wages earned by them and also living wages to fulfill other needs; and (c) the forces within a person can be explained in terms of their ability to apply the SEP to the living wages in their lives, as well as the attitudes toward SLW.

Applying the context from Bronfenbrenner’s model (2005), the context in this research is that of the blue collar workers who are earning minimum wages and specifically working in organizations that follow the SEP. An understanding of the SLW from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s model could be useful for developing some applications for future, as human behavior is complex and each of the elements has a role to play in human development (Eriksson, Ghazinour, & Hammarström, 2018). Though it is beyond the scope of this research, it is urged that an understanding of the complex interactions of the person with their environment must be taken into account to promote the living wage agenda in a country.

Limitations of the Research

This research was an exploratory initiative in its scope, as it studied and developed an integrated concept of SEP and living wage from the perspective of blue-collar workers in Thailand. However, several limitations and suggestions for future research should be addressed. First, small sample size of 12 workers were selected, and hence gender difference of three males and nine females may not represent the conceived experience of SLW for males. Future studies may focus on blue-collar male workers from the tourism sector. Second, our study was based on data from in-depth interviews to collect workers’ belief, and practices of the SEP related to their spending for living. Another data sources can be using reflective diary writing. Future studies could ask participants to write their daily spending and reflection of their spending related to the SEP. Finally our study assumed that Thai citizen practice the Buddhism philosophy of the middle path and the SEP without really differentiating between these concepts; hence next research may be conducted to clarify how the SLW concept was developed.

Implications and Recommendations

This qualitative research was designed to study the perceptions of workers in Thailand
about living wage by applying the unique perspective of a culturally valuable philosophy—the SEP, and accordingly constructing the new concept of SLW. In terms of further research implications, a quantitative scale for SLW would be developed and evaluated for its psychometric properties, as well as examined for its impact on various outcomes, including well-being at work and in life.

In terms of practical implications, the researchers anticipate that the SLW could be useful as a cognitive tool to predict the well-being of workers and their families, by upholding the three pillars of "sufficiency" in terms of moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. The organizational implications of this research should be explored with regard to enhancing wage (by providing SLW) for the minimum wage earners, and evaluating the impact on increased well-being of the workers. Furthermore, from a wider perspective, it may be beneficial to examine the impact of SLW for Thailand as a nation, as the initial findings of SLW indicate that it has linkages with sustainable living, and thus, could contribute toward Thailand's efforts for achieving the UN's SDGs for the 2016–2030, specifically, the goals SDG 1 (reducing poverty), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities) through sustainable consumption (SDG 12).

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