The Scenario of Family Strengths in Generation Alpha in the Thai Context

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The relationships between people of different generations have been a core component of family strength. This future research aims to investigate the scenario of family strengths among Generation Alpha and in the Thai context, by Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research, with 15 experts including policy makers, academic experts, professional practitioners and parents who received national awards for children and family. The findings on family strengths among Generation Alpha in Thailand consisted of different levels of aspects, including personal and environmental factors, including family institutions, educational institutions, media companies, government institutions and the community, as follows: (1) the personal factors are mental immunity, resilience, critical thinking, and media literacy for Generation Alpha; (2) the institution of the family provides quality time, positive communication, emotional self-regulation and positive discipline; (3) educational institutions provide essential knowledge, life skills and education in formal settings and on digital platforms; (4) media institutions provide appropriate content and act as tools to promote the strength of the family; (5) government institutions provide mechanisms to support the work-life balance and to promote strong family institutions; (6) community-provided childcare centers and learning spaces, as well as a safe and supportive environment in the community. The scenario of family strengths is a main contributor to the discipline of behavioral science to foster family well-being and to develop of positive behavior in Generation Alpha.

Keywords: scenarios, family, strength-based approach, generation alpha,

The family is one of oldest and most resilient institutions in the world (Defrain & Asay, 2007). It is also how children are taught to socialize, survive and thrive. It is hard to deny that family is an important part of human behavior and a source of financial, emotional, and social support (Walsh, 2012). Family can bring a great joy or awful pain depending on family functions (Defrain & Asay, 2007). The family also plays a fundamental role in all societies (Coleman & Lawrence, 2015). As societies change, so do families. Globally, the notion of family has dramatically changed. Thailand also finds itself in transition from a young to an ageing population. The number of people aged 60 and older is projected to double from 2015 to 2050 (Prachuabmoh, 2019). The demographic shift in the population structure of Thailand, a transition into an ageing society, with a steady decline in the number of children, and an increase in the number of aging and elderly. These demographic changes in age structure are predicted to decline in terms of both family size and the way that Thai people form families. (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2019). In the near future,

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Thai society will be comprised of populations from many generations whose attitudes, mindsets and behaviors vary significantly. This demographic change in the family structure creates massive transformations in the socialization of individuals, families and society.

Generation Alpha is the demographic cohort succeeding Generation Z, the majority of the individuals in this generation were preschoolers or not yet born, consisting of those born in the early 2010s to the mid-2020s (McCrindle, 2015). Generation Alpha are truly the millennial generation, born and fully shaped in the 21st century. The rapid development of technologies and innovation breakthroughs, such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and drone technology are some of the key factors contributing to the development of Generation Alpha, who are truly digital natives and are the most technologically literate generation (Nagy & Kölcsey, 2017). However, technology and innovation need to be emphasized in order to maximize the positive impact and minimize any negative impact.

Traditionally, family research has focused on weakness, dysfunction and pathology to understand the problems of family and how it affects family members and the surrounding community (Wheeler, 2008). Recently, many researchers have studied family from a strength-based perspective by examining certain characteristics of family strength, including an expression of appreciation, quality time, commitment, spiritual well-being, and the ability to deal with problems and crises in a positive way (Stinnett, 1996). The perspective of family strengths is a world-view regarding life and families, including positive, optimism, and well-being (McCashen & Wayne, 2005; Hammond, 2010). This strength-based perspective does not overlook family problems but emphasizes their proper place in life as vehicles for testing our capacities as families and reaffirming our vital human connections with each other (Green et al., 2004). Different researchers suggested embedding social values and culture through family upbringing by promoting the ideology of happy families with strong family bonds; an encouraging way of living, adhering to morality, ethics, and righteousness, with events and activities aimed to help promote such characteristics; as well as developing parents to become good role models. (Dahlsgaard el al., 2005; Defrain & Asay, 2007; Foot & Hopkins, 2010). Despite the many benefits of the strengths of families, there is limited research on family strength in Thailand.

Research objectives

This research aims to investigate the scenario of family strength among Generation Alpha in the Thai context.

Literature Review

Parenting

Parenting styles have changed across generations, so it stands to reason that the way people within these generations function as adults also would change. Most members of Generation Alpha are the children of Millennials, born between 1980 and 2003 and the children of the Baby Boomer generation. Millennials have adopted an individualistic identity, express their own ideas with greater freedom, and challenge cultural expectations and their superiors. Millennials have taken a more involved approach to parenting compared to

previous generations. Millennials also tend to spend more money and time on their children. Therefore, members of Generation Alpha look up to their parents and to see their families as financially and emotionally supportive (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, the younger generation is affected by the growing income gap and a shrinking middle class. This caused stress in the home for some and showed the importance of saving and being financially responsible for the younger generation (Turner, 2015). This set of unique experiences have influenced the characteristics of the younger generation and may impact how they live their lives and take on the perspectives of others (Twenge, 2017).

Emotional Security

The younger generation appears to have an emotional connection to strong feelings with other people (Carré et al., 2013). Since video face-to-face chat is so accessible to the younger generation causes them to feel the emotions of others (Carrier et al., 2015). This type of advanced technology can enhance cognitive empathy and help in understanding the feelings of others (Carré et al., 2013). However, being emotionally connected can also be negative, for instance, if a person is emotionally connected to their cell phone. The younger generation can experience negative emotions such as anxiety, disorientation, and panic when away from their device or experienced feelings of fear if they did not know what everyone else was doing (Vincent, 2006). Emotional discomfort from online communities can exacerbate the emotional damage of negative social interactions. The younger generation appears to be more afraid of social interactions than physical injury, which is the reason for an increase in depression and anxiety. The younger generation are more likely to commit suicide due to emotional fragility (Twenge, 2017).

Technological Advances

The younger generation grew up with the use of technology, which is an advantage as they can get news quickly and communicate worldwide (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, this can also be a disadvantage, if technology is used as a replacement for social interaction (Twenge, 2017). The younger generation is known to have a bond with digital media, causing them to become emotionally attached to the internet in order to avoid their struggles in the real world. Moreover, the internet gives access to unlimited amounts of information, such as negative websites that teach young people about self-harm (Turner, 2015).

Social Media

One aspect of technology that is widely used by the younger generation is social media. Social media has highlighted a phenomenon called Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as children view their friends spending time together through social media, which could explain why the use of social media generally leads to unhappiness. Social media can create a misperception of reality through highlighting positive moments in life, while excluding the difficult moments and focusing more on the self by creating a positive and unattainable image (Twenge, 2017). Social media algorithms reinforce the idea that most people think like you do instead of providing a balanced perspective, which could damage empathy, because it is more difficult to accept other perspectives when members of the young generation assume all of their Facebook friends have the same ideas as their own (Yang, Holden, and Carter, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

There is a large body of theory on family strengths that draws from psychology, sociology, and social work that explains the importance of family well-being.

Ecological Model of Human Development

The Ecological Model of Human Development by Bronfenbrener was adopted from the first paradigm in 1970s to explore a broad range of variables in the social environment of children, from their immediate environment to more distant environments, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrener, 1994). The microsystem is a pattern of social roles, interpersonal relations, and activities within the immediate environment of children. The mesosystem consists of the connections between two or more settings. The exosystem involves the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings that indirectly influenced processes within the immediate setting. The macrosystem consisted of the overarching patterns of micro, meso, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture embedded in each of these broader systems. The chronosystem included the transitions and shifts in the lifespan.

Socialization

Socialization is a social and psychological process of internalizing the cultural norms of society. Socialization embraces both learning and teaching and is thus the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained (Clausen, 1968). The family is the primary context for socialization and child development, and parents represent one of the most powerful influences in their children's lives. Parent socialization continues throughout the entire lives of individuals, becoming particularly relevant in moments of change, such as adolescence (Axpe et al., 2019). In the future, Thai society will be comprised of populations from many generations whose attitudes and behaviors may differ. This demographic change in the family structure are creating massive transformations in socialization of individuals, families, communities and society.

The Strength-Based Perspective

The Strength-Based Perspective is derived from work-practice theory in the field of social work field, but is now widely applied in various fields, with a focus on self-determination and the strengths of individuals (McCashen, 2005). This type of perspective builds individuals and their families on their strengths, identifying them as being resourceful and resilient when they experience adverse conditions. The Strength-Based Perspective allowed for conditions for an individual to see themselves at their best and transform that value forward to capitalize on their strengths rather than focusing on negative characteristics (Hammond, 2010). The Strength-Based Perspective not only examines the individual, but on their environment as well (Foot & Hopkins, 2010).

Methodology

This study was based on Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR), which is a method of exploratory forecasting on future needs and followed by statistical analysis.

Participants

The recruitment of the participants determined the exclusion and inclusion criteria and whether or not they could be considered experts in the field and into four groups. The first group consisted of two policy makers with at least 10 years of experience in formulating policies for strengthening families at the Division of Family Institution Promotion and the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development in the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. The second group consisted of professional practitioners who specialized in child and family development in the field for 10 years, including three senior social workers, two senior pediatricians, one child psychiatrist, and one family psychologist. The third group consisted of three academic experts on the field of children and family. The fourth group consisted of three parents who received national best family awards.

Data Collection

All of the participants were contacted in person, by phone or e-mail to explain the project and request their participation, providing them with an in-text informed consent form, and requesting that they return the form by e-mail, with their name typed as a signature. In addition, a set of semi-structured interview guidelines were sent to participants, including the current situation of Thai families; such as how you deal with the family dynamic; how to mitigate potential risks for the Generation Alpha; and how policies and planning can strengthen families. The non-directive, open-ended, face-to-face interviews focused on the most-probable scenario data and cumulative summarization technique were conducted between June 2019 and January 2020. The research protocol was approved by the institutional review board of Srinakharinwirot University (Certificate of approval No. SWUEC/E-014/2563).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis. The themes uncovered in the interviews also served as constructs and emerging sub-constructs for survey development. The opinions of the experts were used to create a cumulative questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scaling technique for the second round of interviews. The results were analyzed using the percentage, median, and inter-quartile range (Q3-Q1) for classifying consensus opinions and the most likely or highest probability trends, or a median value of 3.51 or higher. This process has been cycled through three or more times, until it was determined that there was no new material to be elicited from the process point of saturation. The data was then analyzed and a report was written and drafted for the scenario of family strengths in Generation Alpha.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The findings revealed the scenario of family strengths of Generation Alpha in Thailand consisted of different aspects, including personal factors and the surrounding environmental factors, including family institutions, educational institutions, media institutions, government institutions, and community: (1) personal factors including mental immunity, resilience, critical thinking, and media literacy of Generation Alpha; (2) family

institutions provide quality time, positive communication, emotional self-regulation, and positive disciplines; (3) educational institution provides essential knowledge, life skills and education in formal settings and digital platform; (4) media institutions provide appropriate content and act as a tool to promote the strength of the family; (5) government institutions provide mechanisms to support the work-life balance and to promote strong family institutions; and (6) the community provides childcare centers, learning spaces as well as safe and supportive community environments in Table 1.

Table 1
Theme of the results from in-depth interviews

Key Findings
Generation Alpha
-Having the mental immunity to be able to cope with problems and obstacles such as resilience, emotional regulation, morality, stress management, empathy, and human relationships.
-Acquiring media literacy and digital wisdom to use social media in a positive and useful way.
-Assessing information with critical thinking, positivity, and looking at the truth and reality.
Family Institutions
-Role of parents are not only childcare, but to be a role model and to cultivate good attitudes, behaviors, disciplines, knowledge, and life skills.
-Building positive relationships within a family that requires love, warmth, trust, and support, and spending quality time together.
-Parents are adapting to modern technology and media for learning sources and increasing career opportunities in the future
Educational Institutions
- Strengthening the knowledge and skills needed for children, such as thinking skills, media literacy, volunteering, relationship skills, positive psychology and financial management.
-Adapt the educational system to suit the digital world or produce media that children can learn on their own, such as e-education and virtual classrooms
- Build a network of partnerships with families, universities, organizations where children can learn with real practice and experience.
Media Institutions
-Produce appropriate media and supports the use of information media as a tool for strengthening family institutions**.**
Government Institutions
-Establish family online social support center to educate and develop family potential to perform quality functions.
-Create mechanisms to encourage establishments to support and encourage employees to create work-life and family-life balances.
-Raise awareness and encourage organizations across all sectors to participate in surveillance and to promote and develop strong family institutions
Community
-Provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth
-Establish childcare centers and to create learning spaces in the community

The opinions of the experts were used to create a cumulative questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scaling technique in the second round of interviews. The results were analyzed using percentage, median, and inter-quartile range (Q3-Q1) for classifying consensus opinions. Then bring the most likely and high-probability trend, or a median value of 3.51 or higher, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
The Scenario of Family Strengths in Generation Alpha in the Thai Context

Scenario of Family Strengths	Median	Trend	Q3-Q1
Generation Alpha			
1. Resilience	5	Strongly Agree	0
2. Critical thinking	5	Strongly Agree	0
3. Media literacy	5	Strongly Agree	1
4. Tolerance	5	Strongly Agree	0
5. Adaptability	5	Strongly Agree	0
Family Institution			
1. Quality time	5	Strongly Agree	0.75
2. Positive relationship	5	Strongly Agree	0.75
3. Positive communication	5	Strongly Agree	1
4. Emotional self-regulation	5	Strongly Agree	1
5. Positive discipline	5	Strongly Agree	0.75
Educational Institution			
1. Provide essential knowledge and skills	5	Strongly Agree	1
2. Role-modeling	5	Strongly Agree	1
3. Understanding child development	5	Strongly Agree	1
4. Education in the new digital age	5	Strongly Agree	1
5. Network with family and other institutions	5	Strongly Agree	1
Media Institution			
1. Produce appropriate content	5	Strongly Agree	0.75
2. Awareness of the impact of media	5	Strongly Agree	0.75
3. Media as a tool for strengthening family	5	Strongly Agree	1
4. Develop creative media for children	5	Strongly Agree	0.75
Government Institution			
1. Promote the role and responsibility of family	5	Strongly Agree	1
2. Establish online family support	5	Strongly Agree	1
3. Establish social media censorship	5	Strongly Agree	1
4. Support work-life and family life balances.	5	Strongly Agree	1
5. Support vulnerable families	5	Strongly Agree	1
Community			
1. Provide a safe and supportive environment	4.25	Agree	0.75
2. Monitor the behavior of children and youths	4	Agree	1
3. Create learning spaces in the community	4	Agree	0
4. Establishment of childcare centers	4.25	Agree	0.75

The future research on strengthening families for Generation Alpha is derived from the highest-level trends, or a median of 3.50 or higher, and a consensus is the interquartile range (Q3-Q1) not exceeding 1.5, compiled and concluded as the future of the strengthening

of Generation Alpha. In terms of family institutions, educational institutions, media institutions, government agencies and communities, as follows:

Figure 1:
The Scenario of Family Strengths in Generation Alpha in the Thai Context
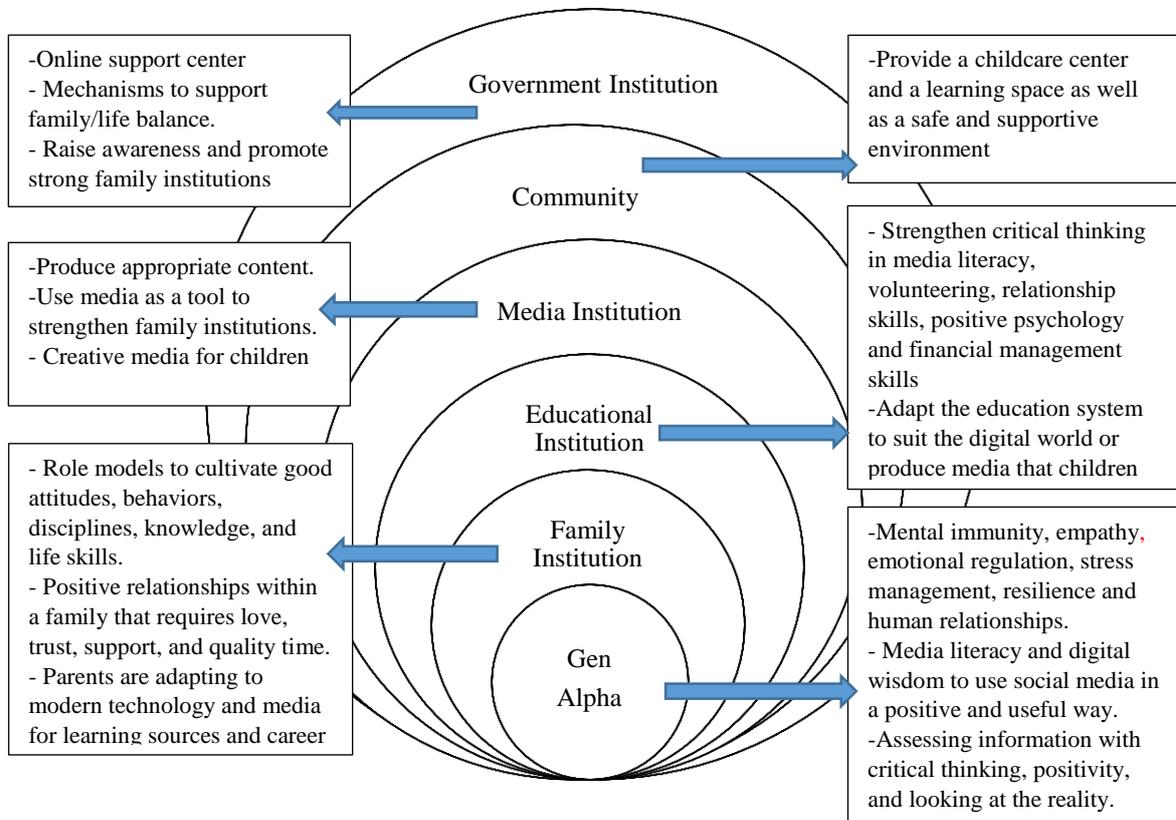
Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that strengthening families from the Alpha generation in the Thai social context cannot be explained by a single factor. This is supported by the Strength-Based Perspective, which not only examines the individual, but their environment as well (Foot & Hopkins, 2010). This findings also fits nicely with the younger generation, as every child is different and all children have their own unique strengths. Moreover, the Strength-Based Perspective falls in line with the Ecological Model of Child Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). As children are learning and developing, their knowledge, skills, and strengths are also developing (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Furthermore, the factors that strengthen the Generation Alpha family is complex and comprised of personal and environmental factors. These findings were in line with the Ecological Theory of Human Development which focused on both a personal and different level of environmental factors from family institutions, educational institutions, media institutions and larger social structures (Bronfenbrener, 1994). This is supported by the Ecological and Developmental Contexts of Family Resilience (Walsh, 2012), viewed in the light of multiple, recursive influences of human functioning are seen as resulting from the interactions of individuals and family in dealing with stressful experiences and the social context (Walsh, 2012).

The strength of the Generation Alpha family emerged from personal factors, such as mental immunity, which is not being able to resist negative thoughts, but the ability to cope with them in a healthy way and not acting on them. This is consistent with the research of Twenge (2017) that found that members of the younger generation are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and panic. Emotional discomfort can exacerbate the emotional damage of negative social interactions. Generation Alpha appears to be more scared of social interactions than physical injuries, which could be the reason for an increase in depression, anxiety, and emotional fragility (Vincent, 2006). Therefore, mental immunity is critical for Generation Alpha. In addition, Generation Alpha is associated with digital media, which allows them to become emotionally attached to groups of people on the internet (Vincent, 2006). This can have positive and negative effects, such as accessing news and seeing real-world problems. It can be helpful, but the ubiquity of information without parental control or monitoring the information available on the internet can be harmful to young people (Turner, 2015). Hence, social relationships, positive thinking, and critical thinking skills are important factors in strengthening Generation Alpha families. This is congruent with Bromwich and Haag (2018), which focused on the positive relationships and the emotional intelligence of the younger generation.

Personal factors are a major contributor to child development, but there are other systems of socialization within ecological system theory. Generation Alpha interacts with many features of their environment, all of which contribute to the social development of Generation Alpha, including family institutions, educational institutions, media institutions, communities, and government institutions. Environmental factors begin with the institution of the family, which plays an important role and is the first institution in terms of child development and socialization. These findings were consistent with extensive research that supported the importance of the institution of the family and its role in supporting children and youths who are able to function in society (Ceja, 2004; Bryan, 2005). It primarily occurs within the family and where children first learn their own individual identity, acquire language, and develop cognitive skills. Within the family, children are socialized into particular ways of thinking about morals, cultural values, and social roles. Of course, socialization results from primary socialization and rests heavily upon the social class, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds and the attitudes of the family. Furthermore, the results showed that good family institutions should have positive communication, accepting differences and understanding digital media. These findings are in line with research of Twenge (2017) who claimed that technology can be a major tool for parents to communicate with their children. In addition, parents can be friends with their children on social media and receive instant responses through text messages, which also makes it easier for parents to keep track of their children.

Children are born and raised in different family cultures with different behaviors and learning. Therefore, educational institutions including schools and agencies involved in education are one of the vital social institutions that help families to teach and to socialize children and youth. There was also empirical evidence about members of younger generations who tended to avoid fear and did not create the methods or strategies needed to confront fear (Twenge, 2017). Therefore, it is critical for educational institutions to enhance the life skills and emotional skills of Generation Alpha children. Furthermore, building a network of academic and family collaborations is of paramount importance.

In the twenty-first century, media institutions play an important role in strengthening the family because Generation Alpha has grown up with information technology which can be either positive or negative. The advantage of technology is that Generation Alpha receives news quickly and communicates effectively with people around the world (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, the use of widespread technology has caused a decrease in one-on-one communication (Turner, 2015). Generation Alpha is associated with digital media, which makes them emotionally attached to the internet. (Kramer et al., 2014). Therefore, promoting, supporting and producing appropriate and constructive media for families and young people is vital. It is important to strengthen Generation Alpha families (Carré et al., 2013; Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Child and family development occurs at the microsystem and mesosystem levels rather than at the exosystem and macrosystem levels, where structural societal policies were embedded in advanced technology for Generation Alpha, which also contribute to the level of risk. The government institutions are in a wider contextual setting in which Generation Alpha did not have any active roles and still affects the development of children. Hence, the importance of investment in strengthening Generation Alpha families is being recognized increasingly by policymakers around the world.

In conclusion, family orientation involves a crucial shift in emphasis from family dysfunctions to family strengths, with conviction in the potential inherent in family systems for recovery and positive growth out of adversity. The Strength-Based oriented family empowerment as they bring hope, develop competencies and strengthen family bonds. Moreover, it is important to understand the socialization of Generation Alpha and its family, because they symbolized the future and provided a prospective of the next decade and beyond. At the moment, Generation Alpha are currently preschool students, by the end of the 2020s the oldest will be moving into adulthood and if a family wants to not only exist in a decade, but thrive and flourish, so an understanding of the strengths of the family in Generation Alpha would be beneficial for individual, family, and society.

Limitations

Due to Covid-19, we tried to collect all face-to-face interview by the end of January 2020 and tried later to contact participants through email and phone for the quantitative phase of this study.

Policy Implications for Behavioral Science Research

1. To foster positive behavior within families that require love, trust, and quality time.
2. To transform the learning processes and family functions that are appropriate for the 21st century.
3. To build psychosocial mechanisms to support the establishments of family well-being.

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