

**PSYCHOSOCIAL CORRELATES OF
BUDDHIST MONASTIC EXPERIENCE
OF SOUTHERN THAI MEN**

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The present research study aimed at answering two important questions. First, what are the important factors relating to the decision to enter monkhood in Thai men. Second, what types and degrees of training during the 3 to 4 months of monkhood that could later be related to the high level of Buddhist religiousness, favorable attitudes towards various virtues and the moral reasoning ability of these men. In this study 712 newly ordained monks, 175 novices and 541 lay-peers of these monks and novices from 112 monasteries in Songkla Province in the southern part of Thailand were asked to respond to 2 sets of questionnaires administered 2 months apart. The average age of the monks was 23.8 years, the novices was 15.5 years and their peers was 22.0 years. At the time of the administration of the second set of questionnaires, the monks had been ordained for the average of 4.5 months and the novices 10.3 months. The monks had on the average 9.5 years of education, while the peers had 9.4 years and the novices 6.3 years. Most of them were from the lower socioeconomic families.

In this study, there were 4 groups of variables. The first group consisted of the biosocial and background characteristics of the respondents including being (or not being) a monk, degrees of religiousness of family and community. Second group of variables consisted of 7 Buddhist psychological characteristics. The third group assessed

the 4 types of training and practicing experience of the newly ordained monks at various monasteries. The fourth group of variables consisted of 3 important psychological outcomes of monastic experience, namely, the self-awareness of becoming more religious, moral reasoning ability (Kohlbergian theory) and attitudes towards various virtues. Most of the variables were continuous variables. Analyses of Variance and Stepwise Multiple Regression Analyses were performed on the data.

There were 3 major groups of research findings. First, it was found that the monks possessed significantly more of the Buddhist psychological characteristics than their peers, these were belief and value, monkhood objectives, reason to go into monkhood and favorable perception of monastic conditions. Secondly, it was found that both monks and peers who lived in highly religious community or whose parents were highly religious, showed significantly more religious characteristics and the monks experienced significantly more religious training and practices in the temples than the ones who were from less religious family and community. Thirdly, detailed analyses of the data had shown that the monks who experienced high religious training and practices at the temples were the ones who later were significantly high on religiousness, moral reasoning ability and favorable attitudes towards various important virtues. The monastic experience was most significantly beneficial to the younger men (less than 23 years of age), the men whose mothers were less religious and the ones who received less than 9 years of education. It was concluded that well arranged monastic training has been an essential way to socialize Thai men in the past as well as in the future and the benefit can evidently be extended to the families and the society as a whole.