Engagement with family, peers, and Internet use and its effect on mental well-being among high school students in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand

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This study explores the correlation of the engagement in family activities (EFA), engagement in peer activities (EPA), Internet use, and mental well-being (MWB) among high school students aged 15–19 years in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. This quantitative study was carried out using a multi-stage probability sampling technique. A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection from 1074 high school students in three schools during the 2012 academic year. The analysis shows that family and communication factors significantly affect high school students’ MWB. Based on regression analysis, EFA are more important than other factors in explaining the variations in students’ MWB. The results of this study support building EFA and EPA for enhancing MWB and reducing the risk of depression among youth.

Keywords: engagement; family; peer; Internet use; mental well-being; high school students

Introduction

Thai youth are facing many transformations of the family. More and more children are growing up in single-parent families. At the same time, the number of nuclear families with separated or divorced parents has increased. The Thai family structure has shifted from an extended family to a nuclear family. Parents and children may not have enough quality time together due to pressure to work outside the home to increase household income. In addition, youth like to spend more time with friends at school and, at home, they may continue communicating with friends via phone or Internet.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the cultural transformation through globalisation has disseminated materialism and consumerism through pervasive and persuasive advertising and mass media. Thai youth may interact with globalisation in both positive and negative ways. Technologies, such as computers, the Internet, and mobile phones have become enmeshed in the lives of Thai youth, and Thai youth were found to be using phone, computer and Internet communication more than previous generations (National Statistical Office (NSO), 2011). The survey found that one-fourth of adolescents used the Internet every day. In addition, the survey found that Thai youth spend at least 2 hours and 20 minutes online and approximately 6–7 hours on phone, Internet, or television media. It is clear that Thai youth devote a majority of their time to new-age communication.
In the meantime, Thai youth have dramatically changed in behaviour and self-care. There are many problems related to Thai youth delinquency such as fighting, smoking, drinking, gambling, game addiction, Internet addiction, pursuing a luxurious lifestyle, school drop-out, rape, induced abortion, and suicide. The nationally representative Global School-based Student Health Survey in Thailand in 2008 reported that 16.5% of students reported symptoms of depression, and 8.6% reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year (Tammariello, Gallahue, Ellard, Woldesemait, & Jacobsen, 2012). Among adolescents in Bangkok, Thailand, 19% reported having depression, 12% had suicidal tendencies, and 8% had attempted suicide (Ruangkanchanasetr, Plitponkarnpim, Hettrakul, & Kongsakon, 2005).

However, the mental health survey for the period from 2008 to 2010 found a considerable improvement in mental health of the Thai population aged at least 15 years old during 2008–2010. Specifically, the average mental health scores were 31.8, 33.1, and 33.3 points, respectively (Statistical Forecasting Bureau, 2011). Kanchanaburi Province is situated in west Thailand, bordering with Myanmar. The survey conducted by the Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health in 2010 found that the population of this province had a low average in mental health score (Chamratrithirong et al., 2011). Data from the Ramajitti Institute (2010) reported that, during 2007 to 2009, the average telecommunication service usage of students in Kanchanaburi was quite high, while the percentage of students who did not stay with parents and did not have family activities were above the national average. Furthermore, the duration of time spent with their parents was rather low. Students in this province were experiencing a high level of stress.

In the light of changing family structural patterns and relationships as well as the increasingly important role of friends and telecommunication, this study was conducted to assess to what extent engagement in family, peers, and Internet use can support the mental well-being (MWB) of students in their adolescent years.

**Objectives**
This study assesses the level of engagement in family (EFA) and peer activities (EPA) and Internet use among in-school youth. The effect of engagement of youth in family and friend activities, as well as Internet use on MWB of in-school youth in Kanchanaburi Province is also examined.

**Conceptual framework**
This study involves concepts and theories of Family Well-Being, Interpersonal Communication, Mental health, and Subjective Well-Being. Various studies have revealed that family structure affects the well-being of adolescents, both their emotions and behaviours. Changes in family structure and patterns result in differences in emotions and behaviours of adolescents (Brown, 2006; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007). In families that do not have positive relationships, children and youth are likely to have negative conditions of physical and psychological well-being (Videon, 2002). Adolescents who live with both parents have the lowest risk to their mental health (Pattaravanich, Chamratrithirong, Gray, & Pumsaithong, 2010). Furthermore, it is evident that when family members do many activities together, such as having meals, watching television, and relaxing, their mental health improves noticeably and the risk of developing mental health problems is lower (Chamratrithirong, Prasartkul, & Choolert, 2010).
Some studies reveal that the socio-economic class of a household as well as educational level or warmth in the family has a positive correlation with mental health. In other words, members of households with high income/expenditure, persons with high education and members of families reserving sufficient time to spend with its members tend to have higher mental health scores. (Ruangkanchanasetr et al., 2005; Statistical Forecasting Bureau, 2011) High levels of parental involvement such as homework checks, monitoring of free time and seeking to understand children’s problems were associated with significantly lower odds of symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts for both boys and girls (Tammariello et al., 2012).

Factors relating to the family include low socio-economic status, poor relationships, broken marriages, and parental substance abuse. Socio-environmental factors include being in a gang and loneliness (Ruangkanchanasetr et al., 2005).

Studies on telecommunications (telecom) use have found that family factors directly correlate with the telecom usage behaviour of adolescents. Child-rearing practices of various family patterns also have direct influence on the Internet usage behaviour of Thai children and youth (Prasertsin, 2009). Adolescents whose family members do not have time for each other and youth who do not have positive family relationships tend to use telecom services to seek friends to listen to their problems and give advice as well as help them solve problems ( Apiwattanalangan, Sainsalai, & Hutapat, 2009). However, it was found that online activities have negatively impacted on time spent with family and communication within the family (Lee & Chae, 2007). Furthermore, communication via mobile phones is a way to maintain family links and strengthen family relationships. Also, parents use mobile phones to track the behaviour and whereabouts of the adolescents under their care (Ling & Donner, 2009).

Communication technologies have an impact on various ways of life. Communicating through various media, for example, mobile phones, can create closeness, intimacy, and affinity. This type of communication may reduce distance and help form connections between people. Also, telecom is a way to help relieve stress, tension, anxiety, and pain (Sukplum, 2005). Mobile phone technology helps increase a sense of security in the family and reduce loneliness (Jin & Park, 2010). Internet usage benefits adolescents in terms of connecting them to society, which may increase their well-being because the Internet helps them to express themselves as well as increase their self-esteem by having self-disclosure with the person they communicate with, through instant messaging, email, Twitter, and also through a person’s Facebook (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Moreover, young people can benefit from using the Internet, as Crowe and Bradford (2006) conclude that ‘online gaming worlds enhance rather than constrict the imagination of young people. They offer an opportunity to experiment with different identities and also enable gamer to benefit from opportunity that they may not have access in the real world’. While Internet usage has some positive effects on adolescents, overuse of the Internet could create physical and psychological problems (Suvannakood & Prasertsin, 2009). Some youth may be driven towards addictive use of the Internet due to a lack of real-life social support. Youth who overuse the Internet have a tendency of being depressed, lonely, and isolated (van den Eijnden et al., 2008). Young (1998) found that online social support greatly contributed to addictive behaviours among those who lived lonely lifestyles such as homemakers, singles, the disabled, or the retired.

Clearly the relationship between Internet use and well-being is complex. The correlational nature of our study does not allow us to examine the causality relationship between the EFA and EPA, Internet use, and MWB. Keeping this limitation in mind, it is hypothesised in this study that EFA and EPA will enhance youth MWB, while youth who
have a low level of engagement with family activities, isolate themselves from the society, and spend more time on the Internet will be more likely to have low MWB (Figure 1).

**Research design and sampling**

This is a cross-sectional study. The study population includes high school students attending three schools in the 2012 academic year. Samples were chosen using multi-stage sampling methods. First, 32 secondary schools were divided into three clusters according to school size. One school was randomly selected from each cluster. In each selected school, students were divided by level of education (high school grades 4, 5 and 6). For each level, one classroom was selected. All students in each classroom were asked to fill out the questionnaires. A total of 1074 students, aged between 15 and 19 years, who were present in school on the day when data were collected, were included in this study. Data collection was conducted during August–September 2012. Prior to the self-administration of questionnaires, students were provided with a brief introduction to the purpose of the survey and the importance of honest responses to the questionnaire.

The study protocol was performed in accordance with the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences) of Mahidol University (COA.No.2012/252/1008). Approval for data collection was obtained from the directors of the three schools. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were ensured that their confidentiality would be protected.

**Measurement**

Stovall (2003) suggests that engagement is defined by a combination of students’ time on task and their willingness to participate in activities. However, information collected for this study does not allow for this criterion. Instead, the researchers used youth participation in activities as a proxy for engagement. Important variables used in this study include the following:

**Engagement in family activities**

This variable comprises 9-item self-report questions developed by the ASEAN Institute for Health Development, Mahidol University based on the concept of ‘Thai Family Well-being’ that assesses the confidence of participants in engaging in family relationships. The participants were asked to rate their level of confidence using a 3-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 3 (always) in terms of their ability to relate to their family. The value of Cronbach’s coefficient alphas for this scale was 0.79.
Engagement in peer activities

Engagement in activities with peers was calculated from answers to the 3-point scale questions. The respondents were asked to rate their level of participation ranging from 1 (never) to 3 (always). The Cronbach’s coefficient alphas for this scale was 0.71.

Online communication

Students’ online communications are divided into two types: Internet chat and Online social network. The Internet chat refers to any kind of communication over the Internet that offers a real-time transmission of text messages from sender to receiver such as Instant messaging and Line. Online social network refers to web-based platform that provides means for users to interact over the Internet, share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, interests with other people in their network such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These two variables are measured by the amount of time (minutes) respondents spent on Internet chat and social networking per day.

Mental well-being

This index comprises general mental health, depression, and stress. The standard measurement used is from the Thai Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health.

- **Thai Mental Health (TMH):** The short version of the Development and Testing of Thai Mental Health Indicator Version 2007 (TMHI-15 Version 2007) was utilised to assess the MWB of the high school students in this study. This is a 15-item scale with 4 domains (mental state, mental capacity, mental quality, supporting factors) and 15 sub-domains which ask participants to indicate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always).
- **Depression (DP):** This was measured using a 20-item scale; CES-D (Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale) Thailand version. Report reliability for the TMHI-15 Version 2007 and CES-D was high with Cronbach’s coefficient alphas at 0.67 and 0.79.
- **Stress (ST):** This was measured using a 5-item scale; ST-5 (Srithanya stress scale with five questions). The Cronbach’s coefficient alphas for this scale were high at 0.71.

Data analyses

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Initially, univariate was performed to provide descriptive characteristics of the study. A multivariate analysis was carried out for all factors; \( \beta \) and \( p \)-values were calculated to determine the statistical significance at the \( p \)-value of 0.05. To examine the relationship between family factors, peer factors, and students’ online communication factors, the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient and Partial correlation coefficient were used. Multiple linear regression was used to evaluate the association between the family factors, students’ communication factors, and the students’ MWB. All covariates in these analyses were controlled.

Results

Respondents of this study comprise 492 boys (45.8%) and 582 girls (54.2%) aged between 15 and 19 years. The academic achievement as measured by grade point average (GPA) is
The assessment of MWB on the day the survey was conducted found that students generally have normal MWB and the majority do not show any signs of stress or depression.

In terms of family structure, the majority of youth were living with their parents, and more than half have siblings. Approximately 72% of respondents have parents living together. In total, 61% of students reported having family problems, mainly related to differences in attitudes and opinions among members.

**Youth engagement in family and peer activities**

Participation of youth in family and peer activities is considered important to improve interaction skills of youth with other members of society. This study found that activities that students and family members performed together often include having meals and recreational activities such as watching TV and listening to music. However, activities outside home, such as religious and traditional activities among family members, were infrequent.

Regarding EPA, youth in this study regularly meet with friends. They usually have meals and recreational activities together with their peers (Tables 1 and 2).

**Youth engagement on online communication**

Regarding telecom usage behaviours, students use a variety of telecom services. More than 98% of respondents use mobile phones and 80% communicate using chat, social

| Activities                                      | Never (%) | Sometimes (%) | Always (%) | Mean    | SD |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|------------|---------|----|
| **Family activities**                          |           |               |            |         |    |
| Dining together                                | 3.9       | 40.8          | 55.3       | 2.5     | 0.6|
| Cleaning the house or cooking together         | 7.3       | 67.8          | 25.0       | 2.2     | 0.5|
| Leisure, watching television, listening to the radio together | 4.2 | 42.0 | 53.8 | 2.5 | 0.6|
| Exercising and playing sports together         | 33.9      | 57.6          | 8.5        | 1.8     | 0.6|
| Going on picnics, outings                       | 14.1      | 62.4          | 23.6       | 2.1     | 0.6|
| Visiting relatives and friends                 | 13.0      | 69.1          | 17.9       | 2.1     | 0.6|
| Joint ritual or ceremonies; such as ordinations, weddings, funerals, etc. | 8.3 | 66.8 | 25.0 | 2.2 | 0.6|
| Participating in religious holidays            | 5.5       | 60.8          | 33.7       | 2.3     | 0.6|
| Volunteering or conducting civic engagement activities | 37.8 | 55.1 | 7.1  | 1.7 | 0.6|
| **Peer group activities**                      |           |               |            |         |    |
| Eating meals                                   | 1.4       | 18.8          | 79.8       | 2.8     | 0.4|
| Conducting recreational activities             | 1.1       | 31.1          | 67.8       | 2.7     | 0.5|
| Exercising and playing sports                  | 6.8       | 50.7          | 42.6       | 2.4     | 0.6|
| Chatting                                       | 1.3       | 32.0          | 66.7       | 2.7     | 0.5|
| Travelling                                     | 10.5      | 29.1          | 60.4       | 2.5     | 0.7|

**Table 1. Youth EFA and EPA.**

| % Online use | Amount of time used (minutes per day) |
|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| % | (N) | Min | Max | Mean | SD |
| Internet chat | 83.4% (896) | 5.0 | 600.0 | 104.5 | 120.3 |
| Online social network | 84.5% (908) | 5.0 | 600.0 | 101.9 | 104.8 |
network, and the Internet, with an average of three chat messages a day and 2 hours a day on the Internet and social network sites. The youth reported that they mostly communicated with peers through telecom. In total, 85% used chat and 90% used social network media with friends (Table 3). Youth who constantly use the Internet feel that the Internet creates happiness and comfort (57.1%), increases accessibility to information (48%), and allows them to express opinions towards social issues (Table 4).

The researchers tested the correlation between the use of online communication and engagement with family and peers. The results show that the online communication which is measured by the duration of use increases engagement with friend’s activities. However, it also decreases engagement with family activities. This finding may be explained by the fact that youth online communication is mainly used for interaction with peers at the expense of interaction with family members.

**Effects of engagement with family, peers, and the Internet on mental well-being of youth**

The multiple regression analysis on general mental health and depression illustrates that gender, age, and GPA have a statistically significant relationship with respondents’ general mental health. Girls have a higher chance to suffer depression than boys. With respect to the GPA, the higher the GPA, the better the general mental health and the lower the depression. Regarding family factors, engagement of family activities has a statistically significant effect on students’ mental health; i.e., it significantly increases mental health, decreases depression and decreases stress among youth. In the mean time, engagement with peers has a significant effect only on mental health and depression, but not on stress.

Internet usage, which is measured by duration of time used on online communication per day, is found to have a very low effect on MWB of students in this study. Chatting online has no significant effect on general mental health, depression, and stress on youth.

**Table 3. Persons that youth communicate with by type of online communication.**

| Type of communication | Friend (%) | Boy/girl friend (%) | Family (%) | Others (%) | Total (%) |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Internet chat         | 85.2       | 11.3                | 2.5        | 1.1        | 100.0% (896) |
| Online social network | 90.2       | 7.8                 | 1.3        | 0.7        | 100.0% (908) |

**Table 4. Purpose of using online communication.**

| Objective                              | Never (%) | Sometimes (%) | Always (%) |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| Relieve stress                         | 13.4      | 61.4          | 25.2       |
| Relieve loneliness                     | 12.3      | 53.0          | 34.7       |
| Reveal inner thoughts                  | 28.6      | 55.0          | 16.4       |
| Express opinions                       | 4.3       | 50.1          | 45.6       |
| Increase familiarity/intimacy          | 9.7       | 51.2          | 39.1       |
| Building networks                      | 8.3       | 50.5          | 41.2       |
| Happiness and comfort                  | 3.6       | 39.3          | 57.1       |
| Security and safety                    | 22.3      | 58.1          | 19.6       |
| Increase accessibility to information/education | 4.7   | 47.3          | 48.0       |
| Realising a greater sense of self when online | 15.1  | 60.8          | 24.1       |
Only the increased amount of time used on online social networks has a tendency to increase chance of stress (Tables 5 and 6).

Discussion

Thai youth and social engagement

Thai youth in Kanchanaburi have a high level of engagement in activities with family and friends. However, a majority of these activities are limited within their groups. The activities with others outside the home are very low. The activity that a majority of Thai youth regularly engage in is having meals with family and friends. At school, students always have lunch in groups. Even for activities outside school, youth always go out for lunch or dinner together.

As sharing food is a tradition in Thailand, having meals together, particularly with family members is considered to be a customary practice and having meals together is one of indicators for measuring ‘Family Well-being’ in Thailand. (National Institute for Child and Family Development (NICFD), Mahidol University, 2003) The findings from this study are consistent with the findings from a Thai national survey that 71% of families regularly have meals together (Pattaravanich, Gray, & Pumsaithong, 2009). Meals are a time for parents and children to share their thoughts, and for parents to socialise their children regarding social etiquette. Thus, having meals together is a time for children to learn from their parents. Ideally, youth should be able to discuss any topic with their parents as this would promote healthy family relationships and improved mental health.

Table 5. Correlation of online communication and EFA and EPA.

| Online communication | EFA     | EPA     |
|----------------------|---------|---------|
| Internet chat        | −0.005  | 0.084** |
| Online social network| −0.006  | 0.108***|

Notes: Control variables: sex, age, GPA, *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 6. Regression analyses: predicting youth MWB (N = 994).

| Factors                   | MWB       |       |       |       |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
|                           | TMH       | DP    | ST    |       |
|                           | B         | β     | B     | β     |
| Boys                      | 0.306     | 0.031 | −1.040*| −0.073 |
| Age                       | 0.690***  | 0.135 | −0.591***| −0.080 |
| GPA                       | 1.300***  | 0.150 | −1.499***| −0.121 |
| EFA                       | 0.368***  | 0.235 | −0.462***| −0.205 |
| EPA                       | 0.354***  | 0.130 | −0.278* | −0.071 |
| Internet chat             | 0.001     | 0.027 | 0.001  | 0.013  |
| Online social network     | 0.000     | −0.020| 0.000  | 0.001  |
| (Constant)                | (3.899)   | (42.801)***| (15.566)***|       |
| R²                        | 0.120     | 0.072 | 0.052  |       |
| Adjusted R²               | 0.114     | 0.066 | 0.046  |       |
| F                         | 30.772*** | 11.771***| 8.350***|       |
| SEE                       | 4.634     | 6.849 | 2.375  |       |

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.
The low level of engagement of youth in social activities outside their home and schools may be because formal education is more highly valued than recreational activities with peers. Thai parents expect children to concentrate only on their studies. Thus, permitted activities outside home are mostly related to school or academic activities such as tutoring. Some youth may meet friends after school and during weekends for recreational activities such as seeing movies, sightseeing, or visiting shopping malls. Thai youth rarely participate in socially-responsible activities, civic engagement, or political activism. This is due to the fact that these activities are not the main aim of today’s Thai youth. The ambitious only aim is to excel in school and continue their studies at the university level. In many cases, Thai youth are considered as passive citizens who only join civic activities when they were asked or required to do it. Many social or civic activities are initiated by school and adults, but not by the youth themselves (Tuntisoontorn, 2011).

Youth engagement on the Internet

This study has shown that family, peer, Internet usage behaviours, and MWB are interrelated. It is interesting to find that almost all students use the Internet in their everyday life. Students use modern telecom devices to communicate with their peers. This is in accordance with the interpersonal communication concept that frequency and behaviour of communication depends on the type of receivers. Furthermore, students and their peer group would normally have a higher level of understanding and ability to use telecom devices than their parents. The Internet plays an important role in students’ daily life nowadays as it can be seen from service usage, type of usage, duration of usage, and addiction to the usage. Today, the Internet is interwoven into students’ life because they need to communicate and search for information from the Internet as part of their academic assignments. High-speed interactive telecom also has the potential to erode attention span of youth. For example, students may prefer to send and receive messages during a particularly boring lecture, or chat while waiting for a bus. That said, students can connect with their parents in the time between school and arriving home, which may be a cause of satisfaction to parents. In sum, youth engage in Internet communication in the various folds of their life when they are not otherwise engaged or wish to be engaged (Ling & Donner, 2009).

Internet use may enhance youth happiness. They may not feel isolated while they in their cyber world (Jin & Park, 2010). In contrast, if youth spend too much time or become addicted to the Internet, this may lead to depression (Ryu, Choi, Seo, & Nam, 2004). As a result, youth may isolate themselves from society, and experience less interaction with family and friends. In this case, youth would lose social skills and reduce time spent engaging in face-to-face interactions. Davis, Flett, and Besser (2002) explain that ‘the process occurs as individuals confine themselves to virtual communications and reduce time spent engaging in face-to-face interactions’ (p. 332). In other words, when individuals’ primary use of the Internet is synchronous online social interaction, it becomes harder for them to control their Internet use and devote sufficient effort to their face-to-face relationships.

In addition, this study shows that “engagement in family activities” (EFA) is more important than other factors.

The effect of EFA, EPA, and Internet use on MWB

The results of this study show that EFA as well as EPA have a positive effect on mental health, and help reduce depression and stress among youth. By contrast, excessive use of
online social networking may increase stress among today’s youth. The findings suggest that in-person primary social groups such as family and friends are more efficient sources of MWB promotion.

Respondents in this study were found to have considerably higher level of communication with family members, especially face-to-face communication, including sharing different attitudes and coming to mutual understanding when in conflict or disagreement, consultation when facing problems, and expressing feelings of love and care at special times of the year. Good family relationships foster love, bonding, understanding, forgiveness and support among family members, and results in a happy family and well-being of family members.

The EFA has proved its significance for the well-being of young people. The activities within the family may reflect positive relationships among family members. As a result, children and youth are less likely to have negative physical and psychological manifestations (Videon, 2002). In Thailand, it is evident that, when family members do lots of activities together, such as sharing meals, watching television, and relaxing as a group, their MWB improves noticeably and the risk of developing mental health problems is lower (Chamratrithirong et al., 2010).

Though youth in this study have used Internet in their everyday life, Internet usage is found to have very little effect on MWB of youth in general. The online chatting has no relationship with mental well-being, stress and depression. Only the time used on online social networking that tends to increase stress among youth. Concentrating on online social networking could reduce the level of engagement with family activities and results in increasing stress. Social network users such as Facebook may consume overloaded information shared on their network. They may also expect responses from friends after posting their ideas.

Conclusion

Thai youth in Kanchanaburi exhibit a traditional practice in engagement in activities with family and friends such as having meals and recreational activities such as watching TV and listening to music together. The participations in family and peer activities may reflect positive relationships among family members and friends. This study proves its significance in the well-being of young people as it is the most important factor contributing to increasing MWB of youth and lower depression and stress. MWB of Thai youth in Kanchanaburi province also related to academic performance which is one of the most important aims for students. The satisfaction with their achievement would contribute to increasing general MWB and decreasing depression.

Internet usage, even though it is becoming integrated in youth life, is found to have less effect on MWB of youth than family and peer activities.

Policy implications

The findings highlight the need to promote good family relationships, especially, the engagement of youth in family activities as this will increase students’ MWB. At the same time, parents and the school should increase the level of youth engagement in social activities outside the home and school to make them more cognizant of their social responsibility and reduce the time spent on telecom devices.

Implications for future research

Because of the cross-sectional nature of this study, it is not possible to define the direction of the causality of studied variables. All the factors analysed in this study are measured at a
single point in time. This analysis can only provide evidence of statistical association between variables. In practice, there may be a more complicated relationship that is associated with other variables. There is a need for further study of these relationships in larger study populations.

Moreover, the ‘family doing activities together’ indicator used in this study may not provide a good explanation for the evolving dynamics of the Thai family structure. The majority of the concepts and indicators used to study the family still adhere to the ideal of a warm family, in which both parents and children live together and perform activities together. Attention for further study should be on the love and care among family members as it impacts on the MWB of members.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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