



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The hill tribes are the minority ethnic groups of people who live in the mountainous area of northern Thailand. Statistical report in September 1989 shows total hill tribal population of 563,495. Among these the Karen, with the population of 279,738 or 49.68 percent of the total hill tribal population, is the majority follows by the Hmong (14.92 percent), Lahu (10.80 percent), Yao (6.41 percent), Lisu (5.78 percent) and Akha (4.45 percent) respectively. The Karen live mainly in the western part of Northern region. Chiangmai province has the largest Karen number, follows by Mae Hong Son and Tak.

Most of the hill tribes resides in the remote area with the difficulty of communication and their access to the health services has been limited. In the treatment of illnesses, the hill tribes have used traditional treatments such as spirit rite and herbs. Opium is also known for its capacity to relieve the symptoms of cough, diarrhoea and pain. The medical use of opium is one of the reasons leading to opium dependence. The result from the village survey showed that the health problems among the hill tribes were high birth rate, high infant mortality rate, poor hygiene and sanitation, malnutrition, prevalent communicable diseases, and parasitic infestation. It was found that the most common diseases among the hill tribes were the diseases of the upper respiratory

tract and gastrointestinal tract systems which frequently resulted from poor general health, malnutrition and poor hygiene.

Since the fourth National Development Plan (1977), the hill tribes have been assigned to be one of the target population of health development and various programs targeted towards the development of health services. At present, the Ministry of Public Health has adopted the primary health care model to develop the health care delivery in the tribal areas through the villagers themselves such as village health volunteers (VHV's), village health communicators (VHC's) and community health workers (CHW's). This design increases the availability of primary health services, including family planning. However, many reports showed that there were low utilization of health services.

The assessment of health services utilization in rural population of Thailand showed that the use of primary health care services was relatively low in comparing with other alternatives. Many factors have been found to influence the use of health services. These include age, education, economic status, occupation, cultural, traditional belief, the accessibility of services and type and symptoms of illnesses.

This research intends to study the health services utilization in the remote hill tribe communities in the areas of preventive, curative, and family planning services. The Karen are the majority of hill tribes in Thailand, comprising half of all hill tribes population. Opium dependence was shown to be a more serious problem among the Karen than the other tribes. Therefore, it is

logical to target our study towards the Karen where the problems associated with health service utilization might be most severe. The study in the Karen village will be used to illustrate the pattern of health services utilization and the factors affecting it. It is hoped that the result will have policy implication.

Primary Research Question

What is the pattern of health services utilization among the Karen hill tribes?

Secondary Research Question

What are the factors affecting health services utilization ?

Objective

1. To determine pattern of health services utilization among the Karen hill tribe villagers in the remote rural area.
2. To identify the factors affecting health services utilization.

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