

EDUCATION AND HEALTH: FORGETTEN RIGHTS FOR HMONG IN BAN NONG, HADXYAYFONG DISTRICT, VIENTIANE PREFECTURE, LAO PDR

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to describe and evaluate the implementation of community service conducted by the author from the Graduate Program of Universitas Kristen Indonesia Jakarta to build community awareness of education and health, two forgotten areas that this service targeted for the Hmong tribe in Ban Nong, Hadxayfong District, Vientiane Prefecture, Laos. The steps and strategies chosen for this Hmong community outreach included a survey of health care and education opportunities and partner referrals on which the strategies were based. The strategy included counseling on healthy teeth and nails and promotion of the importance of schooling, especially for children, delivered through education, especially for young families (counseling on healthy teeth and nails and counseling on the essence of education), conducted through presentations to the participants with the support of World Prayer International. We conducted the outreach over a one-week period, during which it gave approximately 100 participants including mothers and children education and demonstrations on how to properly brush their teeth and take care of their nails to keep them free from disease. On average, 60% of the participants who attended this counseling claimed to understand how to brush their teeth properly, how to care for and clean their nails, and the importance of education for children. Awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy teeth and nails increased by 10% after they received the education. The outreach and community engagement strategy, especially the provision of toothbrush and nail clipper packs, made the outreach more effective as the researchers practiced it directly in front of the participants.

Keywords: Community Service, Health, Education, Ban Nong, Laos

INTRODUCTION

Ban Nong Village, Hadxayfong District, is located about 100 km from Vientiane City, Lao PDR (Map of Laos, 2023), with geographical coordinates of 17° 53' 52" North latitude and 102° 38' 51" East longitude (see map 1). Although Ban Nong is part of Vientiane province, in terms of welfare and education, it is still below the poverty line, and access to education is very limited, especially for primary education. According to the latest data, as cited by Xinhua (2023), student enrollment at each school level is declining, and dropout rates are increasing in both primary and secondary schools. Due to the country's economic situation, rising living costs, inflation, and the devaluation of the local currency collectively impact students' efforts to obtain higher education.

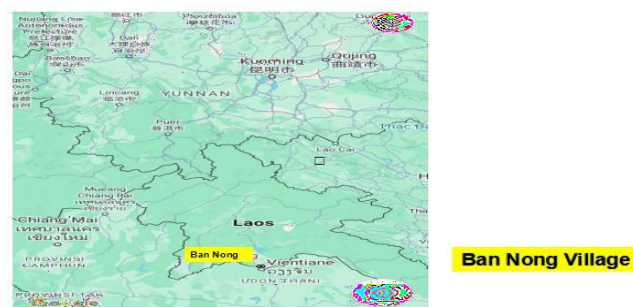


Figure-1: Map of Ban Nong, Hadxayfong District, Vientiane Prefecture, Lao PDR.

Source: Google Map, Lao PDR, 2023.

The Hmong are one of 200 ethnic minorities, making up approximately 9.2% of the total number of ethnic minorities inhabiting Laos. The International Working Group on Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (IWGIA 2023) notes that the Hmong-Ew-Hmien are clearly the most vulnerable group in Laos, facing territorial, economic, cultural, and political pressures and experiencing multiple threats to their livelihoods. According to data from the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (2021), the Hmong on average face poverty, hard work, lack of knowledge and skills, illiteracy, limited access to health services, cultural aspects, and limited access to legal information that complicate women's involvement in educational, social, and political spheres, which independently prevent them from being able to enjoy, protect, and advance their rights.

Through an initial survey in Ban Nong Village, in collaboration with World Prayer International in June 2023, it was found that some Hmong residents in Ban Nong Village lacked understanding on how to care for healthy teeth and nails and also lacked education, especially primary school children. So it is necessary to provide counseling and understanding to them on how to take care of healthy nails and teeth, as well as an understanding of the importance of education, especially basic education for children.

To improve the understanding of the Hmong ethnic community in Ban Nong Village regarding health and basic education, on November 16–20, 2023, the International Community Service Team from the Graduate Program of the Christian University of Indonesia, Jakarta, provided health and education counseling that could support the improvement of the awareness of the Hmong ethnic community in Ban Nong Village regarding health and education under the title "Service to the Hmong Community in Ban Nong Village, Hadxayfong District, Vientiane Prefecture, Lao PDR" Figure 2, 3).



Figure 2: International Community Outreach Team, Postgraduate Program Universitas Kristen Indonesia arrived in Laos



Figure: 3 International Community Outreach of Postgraduate Program Universitas Kristen Indonesia Jakarta arrived in Lao PDR.

This extension program is significant and considered urgent due to the current health issues (Shin, Kim & Kang, 2020), and access to basic education faced by the Hmong in Ban Nong village. Significant because this extension program has never been conducted in the health and education fields in Ban Nong Village and is considered urgent because of the low level of awareness of health and education in the community due to the difficult economic situation.

METHODOLOGY

Preliminary Survey of region and population

A preliminary survey and literature review of the community (Harrison et.al, 2021) was conducted at the Hmong site in Ban Nong Village to identify areas requiring in-depth attention in June 2023. Information was collected as part of the final assessment by the chief of Ban Nong Village, the Indonesian Christian University Jakarta Initial Surveyor Team in collaboration with World Prayer International to supervise and assess the community's health and basic education needs during the outreach program. This outreach program adopted the El Sol Community Outreach Strategy (2022) including: defining the purpose and target of the outreach for the Hmong to understand the importance of dental and nail health and the importance of basic education, Identifying the target population of 100 participants from the Hmong in Ban Nong village, clear message: "clean nails and teeth to avoid disease and think about basic education for children, each team member performs expertise according to their field, the best outreach strategy through counseling and teaching by distributing tooth combing props, nail clippers and English illustrated brochures for children.

Participants

The participant recruitment strategy was carried out by the Ban Nong village head by selecting 100 participants to take part in community outreach activities. These participants consisted of 25 mothers and 75 minors. Participants were selected based on an invitation given by the village head by compiling a list of eligible households, of which 30 households were from Ban Nong village (Figures 4, 5).



Figure 4: Ban Nong Village participants



Figure 5: Children participants

Counseling and Teaching

Data collection on the issues of mother and child education, diet, nail and tooth cleaning, basic education rights, and basic English was all conducted using counseling and teaching methods in Indonesian and guided by translators in Hmong. The method in the implementation of community service activities in Ban Nong Village is a participatory method because it is simpler and more meaningful (Global Hub and Participatory Democracy, 2022), involving village officials, World Prayer International, children, and mothers as participants, with the delivery of material by the service team from the Postgraduate Program of Universitas Kristen Indonesia by providing props in the form of toothbrushes, nail clippers, and illustrated English learning materials, followed by questions and answers.

The strategies included education on healthy teeth and nails, promotion of the importance of education, especially for children, delivered through education, especially for young families (counseling on healthy teeth and nails, education on the essence of education) conducted through presentations to participants with the help of the World Prayer International team. To ensure the outreach program and effectiveness of communication, both the team and participants understand each other (Laglagaron, n.d), and accurate translation, the outreach and teaching is translated into Hmong and then back into Indonesian. If there were participants who did not speak Indonesian, each team had enumerators who were also proficient in Hmong (Figures 6,7).



Figure 6: Participants were taught dental and nail health



Figure 7: Child participants are taught the importance of education and very basic English (accompanied by a translator from English to Hmong)

Participants were asked why they only used one toothbrush for the family; did they not know the risks of using one toothbrush for all family members? Do participants know that long, unkempt nails can be a source of disease? Why don't children go to school? Families were asked to name reasons why this was more difficult. Similarly, participants were asked whether access to health services was much more difficult, easier, or not available at all. Three standardized variables were used to evaluate household toothbrush and nail care and children's basic education.

To find out more about the health and education issues in Ban Nong Village, participants were given the opportunity to share their problems, and the outreach team provided solutions (Hampton & Wadun, 2023), both for practical ways to maintain healthy teeth and nails and basic education rights and basic English for children in particular. When practicing how to properly brush teeth and maintain nail hygiene and basic education rights, the equipment used to facilitate the delivery of the material is by distributing toothbrushes, toothpaste, and nail clippers to each participant, guided by an outreach team with a medical background, making it easier for participants to practice.

During the counseling and practice of maintaining healthy nails and teeth, the participants' enthusiasm to know how to brush their teeth properly was quite high. In Figures 8 and 9, the extension team explains the correct brushing technique and how to take care of nails using the tools distributed to participants. Participants were advised to brush their teeth in a circular way so that the gums are not damaged, cut their nails, and clean them so that they do not become a source of disease. Dirty nails contain many bacteria that, if not cleaned, will cause diarrhea, worms, and fungal infections (Nenoff et al., 2014). Diarrhea can be experienced by people who have dirty nails due to malnutrition and severe anemia (Guerrant et al., 1992).

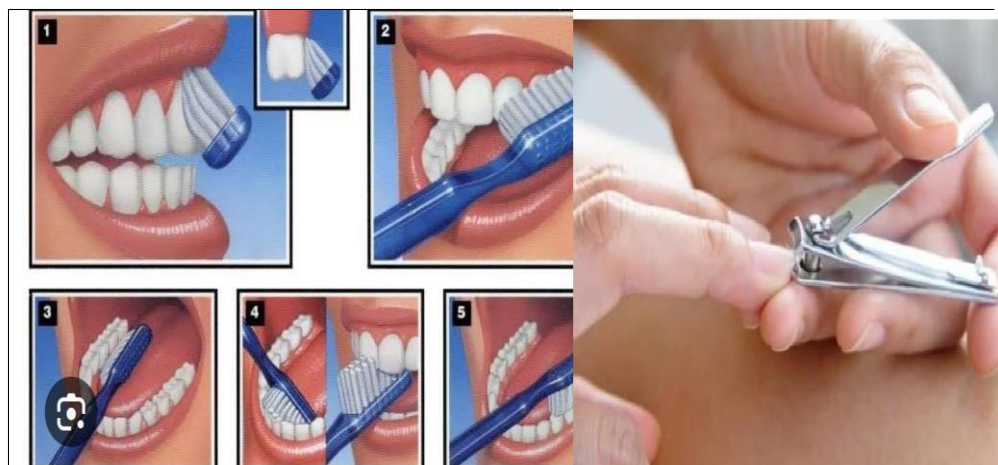


Figure 8: This picture explains the correct method of brushing teeth given to participants



Figure 9: Outreach team members who are health experts are explaining how to brush teeth and care for nails properly.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The participants in this outreach recognized, on average, that they knew how to properly brush their teeth, care for and clean their nails, and how important it is for children to get an education. After receiving a free set of toothbrushes and nail clippers, their awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy teeth and nails increased by 10%. The effectiveness of this outreach was enhanced by the

practice of outreach and community engagement strategies conducted by the researchers (El Sol Environmental Education Center, 2022), specifically by distributing the toothbrush and nail clipper packages in front of the participants.

Our outreach results showed that an average of 60% of the participants who attended the outreach acknowledged that they already understood how to properly brush their teeth, care for and clean their nails, and the importance of education for children. Awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy teeth and nails increased by 10% after they received the free toothbrush and nail clipper package. The outreach and community engagement strategy, especially the provision of the toothbrush and nail clipper packets, made the outreach more effective as the researchers practiced it in front of the participants.

The results of the outreach to the Hmong tribe in Ban Nong village showed effective results because props were used and distributed directly to all participants. Likewise, the children were taught basic English by using English pictures, which helped them learn some English words. Although this outreach was aimed only at participants recruited for the outreach program, the correct way of brushing teeth and cleaning nails can be transmitted to other members through social networks (Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Society and Health, 2022). Maintaining dental health by brushing teeth properly and maintaining nail health to avoid disease with this practical method is part of the preventive action so that the Hmong tribe, whose health is still low, can be overcome. The issue was that the Hmong who participated in the outreach needed tools like those distributed by the outreach team and needed money to buy them. However, it is believed that the methods presented by the outreach team will change the culture of the participants, increase their awareness of how to maintain healthy teeth and nails, and help them understand the importance of basic education for their children.

CONCLUSIONS

The community outreach program for the Hmong tribe in Ban Nong village has been carried out well as well as the response from the participants who are very enthusiastic about how to maintain dental health by brushing teeth properly, taking care of nails and learning basic English for children using props distributed to all participants. The output of this counseling has succeeded in providing understanding to them to maintain healthy teeth and nails to avoid disease. The distribution of free teaching aids to all participants supported the implementation of this outreach program, namely: Hmong participants in Ban Nong village knew how to keep their teeth and nails healthy and children understood English words.

With this knowledge, the Hmong community can already pass on the knowledge gained during the outreach program to other Hmong tribe members. However, outreach needs to continue, especially to Hmong living in other areas so that they are protected from dental and nail diseases and their children can also enjoy basic education.

APPRECIATION

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