

Quality Improvement Model Of Thai Massage Establishments

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were to study 1) the quality level of the Thai massage establishments and 2) the quality improvement model of the Thai massage establishments. This research was the mixed research methods using the combination of quantitative research and qualitative research. The research results revealed that 1) the overall quality of the Thai massage establishments was at good level, and 2) the SPEM Model was (2.1) the service focused on speed, thoroughness, and fairness, (2.2) the products with quality, safety, and certified standards, (2.3) the environment in terms of cleanliness, comfort, and peace, (2.4) the development of Thai massage staffs by formulating policies, training, personality improvement, instillation of ethics, and use of the principles of good governance in human resource management.

Keywords: Thai massage, quality of establishment, management

I. Abstract

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROBLEM

The government policy by the Ministry of Public Health determined the promotion of Thai traditional and alternative medicine services in all levels of service establishments. As a result, more Thai traditional medicine services are provided in line with the national strategic plan of Development of Thai Wisdom for Thai Health No. 2 (2012 – 2016). The aim was to address the standard of Thai traditional and alternative medicine service systems. It has been established to promote and support the use and development of local wisdom for health, Thai traditional medicine, folk medicine, and other alternative medicine. In addition, in 2011, the Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine, Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, Ministry of Public Health, set the standards for Thai massage services divided into standard Thai massage service requiring the place, tools, equipment, environment, personnel, operations, quality control, and service management. This is to ensure the

protection of consumers in providing Thai massage services to the public effectively. The results of the government's policy to promote such Thai traditional medicine cause people to be more alert to use Thai traditional medicine health services, especially Thai massage therapy. It is widely available in public health facilities both in the public and private sectors (Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, Ministry of Public Health, 2012).

Thai traditional massage is Thai wisdom and folk wisdom inherited from Thai ancestors. It is the science and art that helps in the health of Thai people. Although the advancement in modern medical technology plays an important role in the health care of people all over the world, in Thailand, there are still many people seeking alternatives to take care of their own health. In the United States, massage has been used to stimulate body transformation as well as adjusting the circulatory system pain or aches functioning of the immune system, sleep and quality of life. It is also used to reduce

muscle stiffness, blood pressure, fatigue, anxiety, breathing and heart rate. At the same time, massage can create positive feeling in the relationship between the patient and the physiotherapist to create the positive atmosphere for the patient's mind and body appropriately and relevantly (Paulo, 2011).

Nowadays, traditional massage or Thai massage is very popular among foreign tourists whether it is Asian people, European people, and Westerners. It is the science of healing that has been around for a long time helping to reduce body aches. It can create relaxation and comfortable feeling because the muscles and nerves have been massaged to relieve fatigue which is important for public health care. In addition, Thai people have more feelings of cherishing Thai wisdom, including Thai traditional medicine. The government has also adopted Thai traditional medicine more widely. This made the trend of socialism in Thai traditional medicine being more accepted. Taking care of people's health in a holistic manner and promoting health through Thai traditional medical science consist of Thai massage, herbal compress, herbal steam. Especially, Thai massage have long been used to take care of the health of people in society. Health promotion, treatment and rehabilitation care can make people have better quality of life. At the family, community and society level, the health of people can be enhanced to be healthy both physically and mentally. This causes many public health services to open up Thai massage service which is another option to take care of. Therefore, it can be seen that alternative medicine in the type of Thai massage has played a greater role in the field of modern medicine as it is an alternative for laborers as well as other occupations. The purpose of this research was to study the quality level of Thai massage establishments and the quality improvement model of the Thai massage establishments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts and theories related to Thai massage

Thai massage is a branch of Thai traditional medicine. It is a culture of health care within the family when there is tiredness, fatigue, body aches as well as developing learning to be the Therapeutic massage until the present time. The massage is a touch to feel comfortable and relaxed. In every style, the skin, muscles and joints are hit, stroke, rubbed, and pressed systematically. Sometimes massage may be used in combination with other methods such as herbal compress, aromatherapy and hydrotherapy, etc.

Thai massage is considered part of the Thai way of life that has been carried on since ancient times. There were inscriptions mentioned since the reign of King Narai the Great (2199-2231 BC). Structurally, the Department of Chiropractors was established. Until the present time, there have been many extensions of knowledge in this field of science developed into the health service system of Thailand including the local massage in the community, massage to promote health in the workplace for the health of both the public and private sectors including massage therapy in various hospitals.

Being the agency responsible for bringing the wisdom of Thai traditional medicine in Thai massage for health benefits with quality and standards, Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine builds the confidence among people and increase economic value from Thai massage. The strategic plan to promote and develop Thai massage (No. 1), 2020-2022, has been prepared through hearing opinions from government agencies and those involved to determine the direction to drive operations in accordance with the requirements of UNESCO. The main approach is to create the standard of Thai massage in terms of knowledge. The curriculum includes the Thai massage service system to be accepted at the

community level, which is the origin of the wisdom of Thai massage and internationally in the future. It also creates jobs and creates career for the people of the nation. It can preserve the wisdom of Thai massage to stay with Thai society for a long time, including honoring National Thai Specialists in Thai Massage, building the Thai Massage Museum and the large statue of Thai Hermit in traditional exercise as the landmark of Bangkok. Importantly, Thai people and around the world will remember that on December 12, 2019, Thai massage has been registered as the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity by UNESCO in Bogota, Republic of Colombia. Apart from being cultural heritage of Thailand and humanity, Thai massage will be able to continue to build a stable Thai nation economically” (Hfocus News Agency, Insights into Health Systems, 2019).

Moreover, the Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine has proposed the approaches for promoting Thai massage; 1) Establishment of Thai massage standards including the development of body knowledge, the development of Thai massage courses, the development of Thai massage service systems, 2) Assessment and certification of Thai massage standards in the country (Certification Body), 3) Creation of the identity of “Thai massage” to the world class, including honoring National Thai Specialists in Thai massage, establishing the Thai Massage Museum and the construction of large statue of Thai Hermit in traditional exercise (Landmark of Bangkok), and 4) Preparation of strategic plan to promote and develop Thai massage.

Thai massage styles: Thai massage styles can be divided into two types according to the purpose of massage; Thai massage for health and Thai massage for therapeutic purpose.

Benefits of Thai Massage: Thai massage is helpful in reducing muscle contraction,

increase the blood circulation and lymphatic system, stimulate the nervous system, enhance the efficiency of the respiratory system, restore the condition of the musculoskeletal system, circulatory and nervous system, and create the relax feeling.

Concept about quality of Thai massage establishments

The Division of Health Establishments (2016) said that Thailand’s health care business needs to be adequately regulated in order to cope with the rapid development of the business. At present, the health service business is the health spa business, health massage, and beauty massage. There are specific laws that govern business operations to be effective as of 27th September, 2016, namely the Health Establishment Act B.E.2559. According to Section 3 of this Act, the “health establishment” means a place established to operate the following businesses; 1) spa business providing the services related to health care and enhancement by means of hydrotherapy and body massage mainly together with other services as prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations at least three other things unless it is done in a medical facility under the law on medical facilities or a massage bath or steaming which is a service in a bathing, massage or steaming place according to the law on service places. 2) Massage for health or beauty purposes except massage for health or beauty purposes in a medical facility under the law on medical facilities or in a public health service unit of a government agency or massage which is a service in a bathing, massage or steaming place under the law on brothel, 3) other activities as prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.

Division of Health Establishments (2016) discussed the potential and higher growth of the health service business that brings a lot of income to the country today.

The Department of Health Service Support, Ministry of Public Health, is responsible for the preparation of quality

accreditation criteria for health spa establishments by considering the standards in 5 areas; service, personnel, products, tools and equipment, administration and organization management, location and environment. The establishments that meet the specified standards will be certified for quality and are allowed to use the Spa Shop logo of the Ministry of Public Health. At present, there are a total of 383 establishments participating and certified by the aforementioned standards, comprising 33 Thai Spa Quality Award establishments and 105 health spa establishments. There are 244 health massage establishments and 22 beauty massage establishments. The government has issued various regulations for spa businesses including the registration of all establishments, issuance of employee certificates, and submission of request for accreditation. This allows Thai spa operators to compete in order to improve the quality of their services until they can be promoted to the equivalent of international standards especially for the entrepreneurs who request for the accreditation of spa business standards internationally (Thai Spa Quality Award). In 2016, there were 22 registered spa establishments. The service quality of a Thai massage establishment is an important component or model in the development of a Thai massage establishment to have the quality of service that meets the expectations of the service users the best.

The criteria for quality certification of Thai massage establishments consists of 5 standards (Narumon Triphetsriurai, 2012) including (1) Service quality standards, (2) Staff skill standards, (3) Product tool & equipment standards, (4) Organization & management quality standards, (5) Facility and environmental Standards.

Standard 1: Service quality: The objective is to check the service whether the service activities are complete and correct with quality according to academic principles as well as customer satisfaction.

This includes; 1. Providing various services in a health spa establishment (main service) consisting of 4 main types of services; hydrotherapy, massage or touching, heating, cooling, 2. Other additional services such as Body Treatment services, skin cleansing, skin healing, exfoliation, facial treatment services, use of science and techniques that cause relaxation such as sound therapy, color therapy, services with healthy food and beverages and advice on properties. 3. Service process such as menu of Thai massage services. The time spent must be detailed and the service price must be clarified for each menu in Thai. There is the service system in the same standard in each service menu. There is a document showing the steps of each menu clearly (Treatment Manual) for the employees to follow. There is a security system for customers during the service. The evaluation results are regularly updated. The system is provided for the customers in making an appointment, cancelling an appointment, payment of services, consultation, information services, etc.

Standard 2: Staff skill: The objective is to assess the knowledge and abilities of personnel in a Thai traditional massage facility whether they are qualified to serve customers safely and impressively or not.

1. Thai massage operators must have additional qualifications from the standards announced by the Ministry of Public Health such as the ability to communicate in Thai and foreign languages, close interaction with customers to receive various suggestions about work and facilities in the Thai massage establishment. The training is provided for staffs for the best service provision. The operations must be planned in every Thai massage establishment with quality. The conditions can be arranged to take care of the environment for all customers to be impressed. 2. Service providers must undergo training for specific knowledge of each type of service, providing more than the standard of

service providers of Ministry of Public Health. They must be able to communicate well in Thai and speak at least one foreign language. The staffs must be responsible for customer service in making treatments and providing satisfactory customer service. The staffs must also be polite, be interested, and care to maintain the cleanliness and orderliness of product equipment in the treatment room to always be available. The staffs must pass the training both inside and outside the establishment regularly. 3. The receptionist must have at least the degree of Diploma or equivalent. They must be able to communicate well in Thai and speak at least 1 foreign language. They have to welcome and serve all customers with polite and impressive manner as well as having the ability to solve immediate or emergency problems.

Standard 3: Tool and equipment: The objective is to make Thai massage establishments supply products tools and equipment with good quality intended for customer service. For example, the products used or available for sale must not be falsely advertised or exaggerated that may lead to misleading or misinterpreting in the quality of such products. It must be standardized according to the certification criteria from the Food and Drug Administration or the law. The source of production must be clearly specified for products manufactured and imported from abroad. There must be the Certificate of Manufacturer or the Certificate of free sale with quality and safety. There is the guarantee for the users of the product in case of problems of Product liability. The label must contain the correct and complete details as required by law. The products must be packed in proper containers with proper storage and environmental management appropriately to maintain product quality. There is a user manual for every item for the maintenance of cleanliness in the tools, equipment, and products correctly and consistently

according to the standard to be in a safe and ready-to-use condition. The persons with knowledge will take care and provide information to the team for application.

Standard 4: Organization & management quality: The objective is to make Thai massage establishments realize the importance and have an efficient management system. It also encourages continuous improvement in the workplace, such as having an appropriate organization chart and clearly allocating job descriptions according to job titles. There is a clear line of command to promote the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. The hiring and compensation system is transparent in accordance with Thai labor laws. The human resource development plans are modern and suitable for business conditions. The manual of operation is prepared to maintain service standards and continuous work of employees. The organization's business is operated with transparency, ethics, morality, good governance, and responsibility to the environment and society.

Standard 5: Ambient and environment: The objective is to make the service users impressed in the ambient and environmental conservation. 1. Location and environment must have a unique Thai identity and naturalness, not crowded and free from various pollution. The map is required to show various points of the establishments. It is clearly displayed, clean and has a good maintenance system on a regular basis. The lighting is sufficiently proper at the service point. The security and alarm systems are required. 2. Facilities such as lockers or chests are available for customers to store valuables in a safe manner. There is a relaxation area and consultation area. 3. Conservation and preservation of environment such as having an environmental policy are provided with measures to protect the environment and reduce global warming with the efficient use of water, wastewater management, reduction on the amount of

waste, and separation on solid waste.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used the mixed research methods. For quantitative research, the sample group consisted of 400 Thai massage users in Nonthaburi Province. The sample size was determined using the criteria 20 times the observed variable with the layered sampling method. The data were collected with questionnaires. The content validity was examined with IOC values ranging from 0.80 to 1.00. Regarding the reliability of the scales, it was found that the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the observed variable scales used in this research had the values ranging from 0.789 to 0.976. Overall, the value was 0.939. It was analyzed with descriptive statistics to interpret the results according to the criteria of Best and Kahn (1993).

For qualitative research, the data were collected by in-depth interviews with key informants; (1) 5 Thai massage operators, (2) 5 Thai massage service providers, and (3) 10 Thai massage service users totaling 20 people.

Research findings

Quality level of Thai massage establishments

The quality of Thai massage establishments means the services provided in a Thai massage establishment

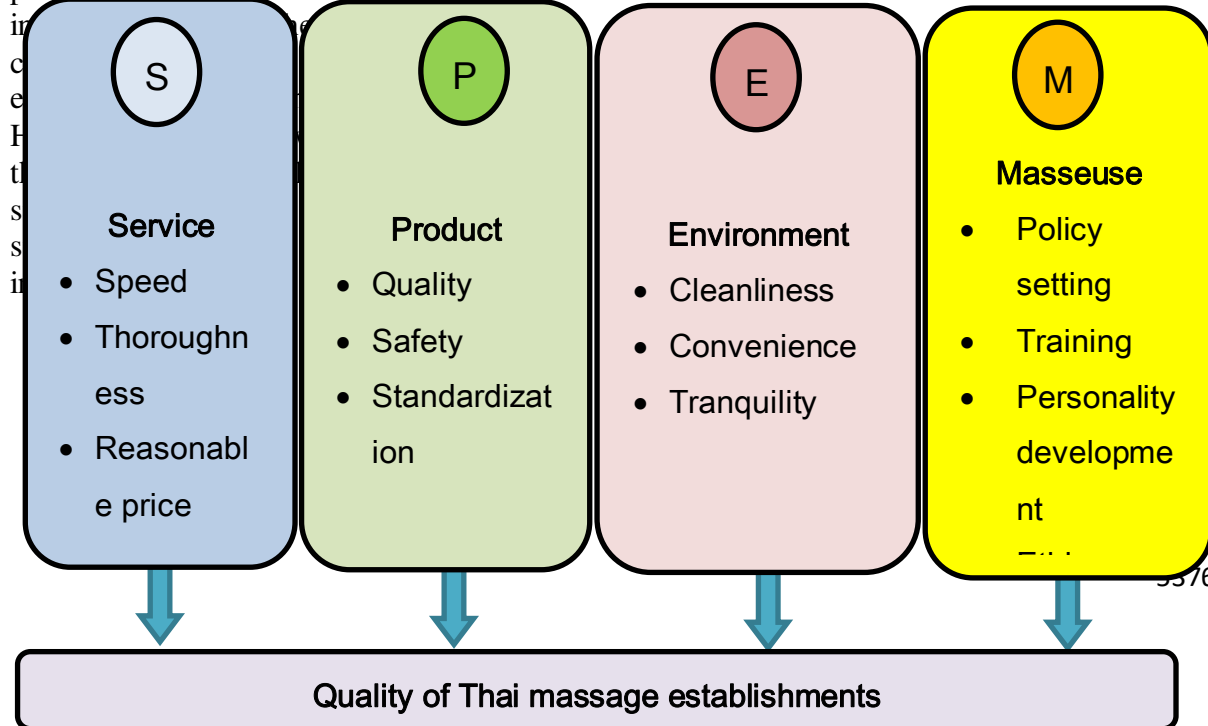


Table 1 Quality of Thai massage establishments

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Service standards	4.4	0.44	Good
Personnel standards	4.4	0.43	Good
Product standards	4.5	0.41	Very good
Facility standards	4.4	0.43	Good
Overall of quality of Thai massage establishments	4.5	0.25	Good

From Table 1, it was found that the overall quality of Thai massage establishments was at a good level (mean = 4.50). Considering each aspect, it was found to be in good and very good levels. The quality of Thai massage establishments in terms of product standards was better than others (average = 4.56), followed by personnel standards, facility standards and service standards (mean = 4.48), respectively.

Quality improvement model of Thai massage establishments

Figure 1 Quality improvement model of Thai massage establishments (SPEM Model)

From the research findings, the researchers were able to create the model for quality improvement of the Thai massage establishment (SPEM Model) as shown in Figure 1. It can be explained as follows.

Service

1. Speed is the response to the needs of customers such as service users who come to receive services. There must be the receptionists to welcome the service users, ask about their needs, and recommend various services to the service users. This is a way to impress the customer's mind. In addition, the service process that is convenient and fast can reduce the waiting time for the service users such as problems in waiting in line for services. The problems can be solved by using technology to help managing such as booking in advance through various online channels or cashless payments using electronic payments instead. The operators or Thai massage staffs can deliver services to the service users to make them impressed by giving advice to prevent problems with service users without having to ask the service users step by step. This will make the service unexpectedly fast.

2. Thoroughness means the commitment to perform duties and correct practices with service users as well as treating service users equally without discrimination.

3. Reasonable price is to have the list of services and service rates disclosed or verifiable. The customers can access services and products that are worthwhile and beneficial. They are willing to pay for services based on market prices and target customers.

According to the improvement of masseuses, products, environment, and services, these 4 factors lead to quality Thai massage establishments.

Products

1. Quality, i.e. products, tools and equipment used or available for sale must not contain false advertising of quality or exaggeration that may lead to misleading or misinterpreting in the quality of such products. The products must be placed in the correct container with proper storage. The environmental management must be appropriate to maintain product quality.

2. Safety means the products used or available for sale must be safe and of quality. There is a guarantee for users of the product in case of problems from using the product. The label must be presented with the correct details completely as required by law. There is maintenance of cleanliness in the tools, equipment, and products correctly and consistently according to the standard and to be in a safe and ready condition with the knowledgeable persons to take care and provide information to the team to collect and use.

3. Standardization means the products to be used or to be sold must be standardized according to the certification criteria from the Food and Drug Administration or the law. The source of production must be clearly specified for products manufactured and imported from abroad. There must be the Certificate of Manufacturer or the Certificate of free sale. The standards are required with the manuals for all items.

Environment

1. Cleanliness is to have the place that is clean and has the good maintenance system on a regular basis with good environment. It must not be crowded, has good ventilation system, and is not stuffy. The room size must be suitable for the number of service users with thermometer. There is alcohol available for personnel and service users to clean their hands.

2. Convenience is to access to various points of the service conveniently. Lockers or safes are available for customers to keep valuables safe. The rest area is provided. There is a place for changing clothes suitable for the service users. Changing rooms must be clearly separated from men and women. If they cannot be separated, the use of the changing rooms must be managed with care. Facilities are provided for people with disabilities and the elderly.

3. Tranquility means having proper lighting enough at the service point and free from various pollution. The atmosphere is set with the right scent. There is music or songs used appropriately for listening and feeling relaxed according to the nature of the service point.

Improvement of masseuses

1. The policy can be formulated by planning clearly and systematically. The approaches can be formulated as the guidelines for personnel development of Thai masseuses both in short-term and long-term. The coordination can be made in the improvement plan of Thai masseuses in collaboration with government agencies and the private sector to monitor and evaluate performance in accordance with policies and plans that have already been done. The solutions to problems and obstacles related to the development of Thai masseuses are suggested.

2. Training can be provided both in short-term and long-term as well as organizing a skill level test in Thai massage with educational institutions of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor, government agencies and the private sector to provide knowledge and understanding from the history of Thai massage, guidelines for maintaining health both physically and mentally, anatomy, first aid, massage skills, prohibition, cautions, and practices in massage including foreign language skills.

3. Personality development of Thai masseuses to be polite, clean, dress appropriate for the profession, perform

duties with physical, verbal, gestures, smiling faces, gentle eyes, willing to serve, focusing on customer satisfaction as much as possible.

4. The ethics and morality are important by cultivating ethics and morals to be responsible for performing duties strictly. The masseuses must know how to work with others. There is psychology in service with the ability to solve immediate problems. They must have professional ethics towards service users with self-worth in the professional field to perform duties with pride. They must have a mind that is ready to serve all service users without discrimination.

5. Personnel management can be done by developing personnel using good governance. There is an assessment on the performance of personnel that emphasizes on good governance. Individuals are encouraged to work well and work hard on an individual basis to create motivation at work such as compensation, revenue sharing and benefits.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Over the past one decade, Nonthaburi Province has expanded even more causing a lot of new businesses and careers to emerge, especially the expansion of the Thai massage business. This was a business highly popular both from the entrepreneurs themselves and quality masseuses. These resulted in the increasing popularity from customers. Nowadays, Thai massage establishments are rapidly expanding to more than 500 shops reflecting that the Thai massage business is growing rapidly.

However, it was also found that the aforementioned Thai massage establishments had to face problems with services that were not as standard as they should be. This caused the service users and those who are interested in using the service lack of confidence in using Thai massage whether it is safe or not. In addition, some Thai massage establishments that provide services are

crowded, unclean, and unhygienic not suitable for service. Moreover, some Thai massage establishments have an atmosphere that is not conducive to relaxation. The service fee is not suitable for the type of Thai massage service that is not standardized according to the principles of Thai massage service. Furthermore, the employees still lack knowledge and skills in providing real services. This is due to not having the proper training and not being certified by Thai massage standards before. For the congested building conditions, the entrance and exit of the trip is inconvenient without sufficient parking lots. Some establishments are located far from the business zone or located in the midst of a community where noise is always around. Some are located in the areas with smelly atmosphere. There is a problem in marketing promotion that lacks good public relations. There are no promotions to attract seasonal patronage, especially the rainy season. This includes the problems caused by the process of the service process due to improper service procedures. This is because the processes that start from the management of the operators and staffs who are responsible for the internal management of the Thai massage establishments such as leaving the service users to wait too long without a welcome or service, unclear division of work of employees, etc.

Thai massage management is an important process that practitioners and those involved in the Thai massage profession must have knowledge and understanding. At present, competition is quite high. Opening a business without effective management may cause many entrepreneurs to close themselves. Management should focus on competition by providing good service, standard and outstanding to customers. The above research findings are consistent with the ideas of Certo (2000), Wirot Sanrattana (2012) and Wirat Sanguanwongwan (2007). In addition, they are consistent

with the study results of Suwan Tangchitcharoen (2013) and Jittima Senachai et al (2015).

The knowledge and skills of Thai massage practitioners or employees do not make a quality Thai massage establishment if there is a lack of good management of Thai massage and knowledge of Thai massage skills. It is of great importance as a component and a model for effective management of the skills and knowledge of the Thai massage establishments. The operators should have knowledge and understanding related to Thai massage and the use of products, tools, and equipment used in the service, especially the knowledge of herbs, the use, the collection of medicines as well as the blending of various herbal formulas to provide services to customers. The research results are consistent with the research of Naphawan Netpradit (2015).

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