

The Development of Social Life Skills of the Elderly in Pa Mamung Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study aimed to (1) examine an appropriate model for developing social life skills among elderly individuals, (2) implement participatory activities to promote such skills, and (3) propose recommendations to support sustainable development for the elderly. The study employed a mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase involved 10 key informants, including administrators and elderly representatives, selected through purposive sampling. The quantitative phase included 265 elderly participants, and 30 elderly individuals participated in participatory action research activities. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, brainstorming sessions, and structured questionnaires. Qualitative data were analyzed inductively, whereas quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that an effective social life skills development model for the elderly should encompass four core components: (1) traditional knowledge and life experience, (2) social interaction and volunteer engagement, (3) awareness of elderly rights and relevant legal knowledge, and (4) digital and media literacy. Active participation by older adults at all stages of the process was essential, particularly in selecting learning topics aligned with their interests. The implementation of activities through participatory workshops facilitated two-way learning, strengthened social relationships, and enhanced peer exchange. Participants functioned simultaneously as learners and knowledge contributors, fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion. The study concludes that social life skills among the elderly can be effectively enhanced through participatory, interest-driven learning processes that recognize older adults as active agents rather than passive recipients. A flexible learning structure that integrates traditional knowledge with contemporary skills is critical for promoting meaningful engagement and sustainable outcomes. The study suggests that programs for elderly development should be designed based on participants' interests and encourage continuous involvement. Multisectoral collaboration is necessary to provide financial support, technical expertise, learning materials, and suitable venues. Furthermore, the establishment of a Subdistrict Elderly Council is recommended to strengthen elderly leadership, promote self-governance, and ensure the long-term sustainability of social life skills development initiatives.

Keywords: Elderly, Development of social life skills, Activities for developing social life skills.

INTRODUCTION

At present, the number of older persons is increasing rapidly due to economic, social, and technological changes, as well as advances in modern science, which are key drivers of national development across all dimensions. These factors have contributed to declining fertility rates and rising life expectancy in Thailand, leading to ongoing changes in the country's population structure. According to projections by the National Economic and Social Development Council, in mid-2019, Thailand had a total population of 66.4 million people, including both Thai and non-Thai nationals registered in the civil system, of whom 11.6 million were older persons aged 60 years and over, accounting for 17.5% of the total population (Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute Foundation, 2019). It was further projected that the northern region would have the highest proportion of older persons, with those aged 60 years and over accounting for 22% of the population.

Reports on the ageing situation in Thailand indicate that declining birth rates and increasing longevity will reduce the ratio of working-age people to older persons approaching or already exiting the workforce. As a result, Thailand entered an "aged society" in 2022, when the population aged 60 years and over accounted for 20%, and is expected to become a "super-aged society" by 2033, when this proportion is projected to reach 28%. With the growing number of older persons and the continuous decline in the working-age population, it is essential to promote and develop the potential of older persons so that they can live independently in all dimensions, serve as a vital force for national development, and coexist with other generations with dignity.

Data from the Tak Provincial Statistical Office (2021) indicate that, in 2017, Tak Province had a total population of 635,697, of whom 69,346 (10.9%) were aged 60 years and over, a trend that has continued. In Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province, there were 884 older persons in 2019, accounting for 20.5% of the total population (Pa Mamuang Subdistrict Administrative Organization, 2021), indicating a predominantly aged population. Field surveys conducted on 15 July 2023 revealed that many older persons in Pa Mamuang live alone without close relatives or family members, leading to depression and feelings of worthlessness. If supported through collective activities within older persons' clubs, such as knowledge promotion, conservation of local wisdom, legal literacy, technology, health, and recreation, older persons would be able to develop social life skills and live more happily in society. Preliminary consultations indicated that older persons expressed a strong need for support in enhancing social life skills, group participation, joint activities, knowledge of rights and laws, and new social skills to keep pace with global changes, thereby improving quality of life and reducing dependence on others.

The Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education for Special Target Groups, Ministry of Education (2022), emphasized that social life-skills development for older persons involves awareness and preparation for social readiness, such as learning for ageing, understanding rights, and participating in group activities for personal and collective benefit. Key areas include preparation for old age, positive interaction within families and communities, hobbies and volunteer work, and awareness of social welfare rights and relevant laws. Consistent with this, a study by Poolsak Homsombat, Phra Baidika Suphot Tapsilo (Kasetnakorn), Banyawat Fangkam, and Supimol Sornsakda (2022) on "Elderly Schools: Empowering Older Persons in an Ageing Society" found that lifelong learning processes play a crucial role in strengthening older persons' capacity for self-care and improving quality of life. The study highlighted that older persons possess valuable potential and should be encouraged to contribute to society through learning programs that link their life experiences, practical knowledge, and community networks. Older adults' schools also serve as spaces for them to express their potential and transmit accumulated wisdom to others, thereby sustaining community heritage and enabling older adults to live meaningful and happy lives.

In Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, an elderly school was established in 2019 as a community-based education initiative to enhance older persons' knowledge and understanding of essential life issues, in line with its vision: "To know thoroughly, stay informed, and pass on knowledge." The school functions as a central mechanism for coordinating and driving activities related to older persons in the area, with joint management by the Subdistrict Administrative Organization. Consequently, local administrators and older persons' clubs have sought support from academics and researchers to develop life skills for older persons across multiple dimensions collaboratively. Although older adults already possess intrinsic motivation, they lack leadership and systematic planning to translate ideas into concrete, sustainable outcomes.

Therefore, promoting participation to improve the quality of life of older persons is critically vital for addressing challenges and achieving sustainable development for older persons, communities, localities, society, and the environment, in preparation for a rapidly ageing future. This study thus aims to examine "The Development of Social Life Skills of Older Persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province" to explore appropriate models and provide recommendations for enhancing social life skills, as well as to implement social life-skills development activities that can lead to improved quality of life and sustainable living for older persons.

Objectives

1. To study the models for developing social life skills of older persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province.
2. To organize activities for developing social life skills of older persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province.
3. To examine recommendations for the development of social life skills of older persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

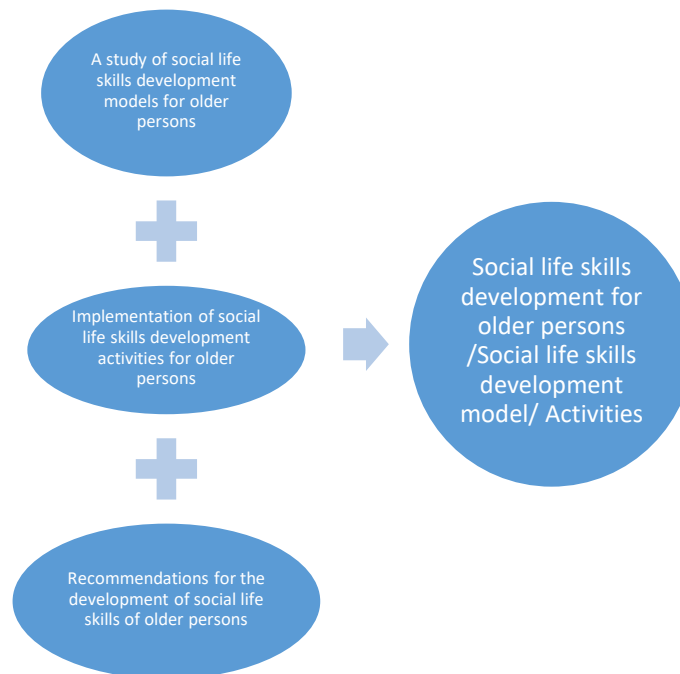


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the research

Concepts Related to Older Persons

Thatchakorn Phatraphanpi (2018) defined older persons as individuals aged 60 years and above. With increasing age, changes occur in various aspects of life, including a gradual decline in cognitive abilities, memory, and learning capacity, as well as in psychological functioning. However, older persons possess rich life experiences, moral values, and wisdom, and therefore deserve respect and recognition in society.

Concepts of Social Life Skills Development for Older Persons

According to the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education for Special Target Groups, Ministry of Education (2022), social life skills development involves learning activities designed to prepare individuals to live harmoniously and peacefully in society. This includes learning to live with others and independently; understanding personal rights and benefits; learning relevant laws and legal transactions; and accessing public services accurately, efficiently, and of high quality.

Concepts of Education Management for Older Persons

Jirawat Chansit (2019) stated that education for older persons is essential and highly beneficial, as it helps prepare them for managing life in later years with happiness and peace. It encourages continuous learning, keeps older persons up to date with current social information, and supports adaptation to social change, enabling them to maintain a good quality of life and become productive older citizens.

Concepts of Community Participation

Cohen and Uphoff (1981) described community participation as a reflection of harmonious community life, in which members recognize the shared importance of development activities. Participation involves cooperation, mutual assistance, and sharing to achieve common goals. The participation process includes joint decision-making, collective action, and shared benefits from successful development activities.

Demographic Data of Older Persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict

According to data from the Pa Mamuang Subdistrict Administrative Organization (2021), Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province, had 884 older persons aged 60 years and over, accounting for 20.5 percent of the total population. This proportion clearly indicates that the area has entered an aging society, defined as having more than 20 percent of the population aged 60 years and above, with a continued upward trend projected.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a research and development (R&D) approach with a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to ensure comprehensive coverage of both breadth and depth, thereby enabling a more holistic understanding of social life skills development among older persons. Data collection was conducted in two main phases, as outlined below.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative component targeted older persons aged 60 years and above residing in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province. The purpose was to examine their needs and perspectives regarding the development of social life skills. A total of 265 participants were selected from an elderly population of 884 individuals (Pa Mamuang Subdistrict Administrative Organization, 2021). The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table, assuming a population proportion of 0.50, a 5% margin of error, and a 95% confidence level.

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected at both group and individual levels to explore development models and generate recommendations. The participants consisted of 10 key informants, including administrators and community development officers from the Pa Mamuang Subdistrict Administrative Organization, relevant personnel, and committee members of the elderly club. This phase focused on identifying appropriate models for social life skills development, informing the design of development activities, and gathering recommendations for sustainable implementation. In addition, 30 older adults aged 60 years and above voluntarily participated in social life-skills development activities. These participants were directly involved in the study's implementation phase.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (Approval No. RMUTL-IRB 049/2024). Prior to data collection, all participants were informed of the research objectives and procedures. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Research Instruments

The research instruments included:

In-depth interview and focus group discussion guides, using semi-structured questions to collect data from administrators, elderly group leaders, and relevant stakeholders. The interview framework comprised seven key areas:

1. policy support for strengthening elderly groups,
2. characteristics of effective social life skills among older persons,
3. appropriate formats for social life skills development activities
4. roles of older persons in such activities,
5. implementation strategies and stakeholder involvement,
6. approaches to sustainability, and
7. challenges and obstacles in elderly development initiatives.

A questionnaire on social life skills development needs was administered to 265 older adults. The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

1. personal background information,

2. needs related to social life skills development across four dimensions—experience and local wisdom, social interaction and volunteerism, legal knowledge and elderly rights, and technology and online media, and
3. Open-ended questions for additional suggestions.

Experts reviewed the questionnaire, and content validity was assessed using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method, yielding an overall IOC value of 0.94. A pilot test was conducted with 30 older adults who were not part of the main sample, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.97.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews were verified for accuracy and analyzed using descriptive analysis and content analysis. Data credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation, ensuring the adequacy and consistency of findings in relation to the three research objectives.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to examine personal characteristics and levels of need related to social life skills development among older persons.

RESULTS

This study on social life skills development among older persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province was implemented through (1) documentary review and stakeholder interviews, (2) a needs survey among older residents, and (3) pilot activity design and implementation. The results are presented in accordance with the three research objectives.

1) Identifying the Model for Social Life Skills Development among Older Persons

Findings from qualitative (in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) and quantitative (needs survey) components converged to describe an emerging local model with four priority domains: (1) experience and local wisdom, (2) social interaction and volunteering, (3) legal literacy and older persons' rights, and (4) digital literacy and online media use.

Qualitative findings (interviews and focus groups; n = 10)

Key informants (local administrators, older adults' group leaders, and other relevant stakeholders) reported that strengthening older adults' well-being is embedded in the regional development plan (2023–2027). The subdistrict has established an Older Persons School, operated under the social welfare unit, as a mechanism for continuous learning and social engagement. Budget allocation and external support have been used to organize group-based activities that enhance older persons' knowledge, social participation, health, and economic well-being. However, informants highlighted operational constraints: activities were not fully continuous due to term breaks, and the activity portfolio was perceived as insufficiently diverse. These were identified as key barriers to the sustained development of social life skills.

Regarding participation, informants emphasized that older persons should be positioned as both learners and knowledge contributors, using peer exchange and community-based sharing to strengthen relationships and social cohesion. Broad stakeholder engagement was also recommended, including collaboration with local government, health agencies, educational institutions, and social development networks.

Significant challenges identified included: limited social life skills in several areas, weak formal group organization among older persons, insufficient budgets/materials/technology, underutilization of local resources and wisdom in activities, and health constraints that reduce participation in community events.

Quantitative findings (needs survey; n = 265)

Participant Characteristics

Table 1. General characteristics of survey respondents (n = 265)

Variable	Key results
Sex	Female 59.2%
Age	60–64 years 54.0%
Marital status	Married 62.1%
Education	Upper secondary/vocational certificate (equivalent) 37.7%
Monthly income	< 5,000 THB 50.2%
Income–expense balance	Income < expenses 62.3%

Occupation	Homemaker / not employed 35.1%
Chronic conditions	Yes 94.3%
Top chronic conditions	Hypertension 73.6%; musculoskeletal conditions 28.8%; diabetes 24.4%
Functional independence	Independent without assistive devices 68.7%
Living arrangement	With spouse and children/grandchildren 66.4%
Top hobbies/regular activities	Cooking 50.6%; travel 40.4%; weaving/handicrafts 29.8%
Membership in groups/clubs	Not a member 61.1%
Most common community activities joined	Culture 50.6%; physical health promotion 45.7%; recreation 41.5%

Overall, respondents were predominantly younger-old, primarily female, and largely financially constrained, with a high prevalence of chronic conditions. Despite health burdens, most remained functionally independent.

Needs for Social Life Skills Development (Four Domains)

Table 2. Top three activity needs by domain (ranked by mean score)

Domain	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
Experience & local wisdom	Food/nutrition wisdom (M = 4.36)	Industry & handicrafts wisdom (M = 4.25)	Natural resources & environment management wisdom (M = 4.21)
Social interaction & volunteering	Volunteering in crafts and dissemination of local occupational arts (M = 4.31)	Volunteering for stronger community development (M = 4.20)	Environmental volunteering (M = 4.01)
Legal literacy & older persons' rights	Older persons fund (M = 4.53)	Universal and fair monthly allowance (M = 4.47)	Funeral assistance according to tradition (M = 4.41)
Technology & online media	Using popular platforms (LINE, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, etc.) (M = 4.43)	Safe phone-call practices (M = 4.29)	Safe online shopping (M = 4.25)

Open-ended suggestions emphasized: selecting skills and activities aligned with older persons' interests, securing trainers and multi-sector collaboration, arranging appropriate venues for regular group activities, establishing close coordination and support, and mobilizing funding from public and private partners.

2) Implementing Social Life Skills Development Activities (Pilot)

Based on qualitative insights and the needs survey, the research team convened planning meetings with older-person leaders and stakeholders to co-design a pilot program aligned with the four domains. The pilot emphasized participatory learning, with older persons acting as both recipients and contributors of knowledge.

Four workshop themes were selected through group consensus:

1. "Aging with Dignity: Preserving Local Wisdom" Activity focus: banana product processing, chosen because it uses accessible local resources, is practical, and enables peer teaching.
2. "Volunteering and Sharing: Nurturing Collective Wisdom" Activity focus: eco-printing/natural dye printing on fabric using local materials, with planned distribution (e.g., handkerchiefs/scarves) as gifts to community members and for future older-person activities.
3. "Legal Literacy for Older Adults" Activity focus: rights and benefits (older persons fund, monthly allowance, funeral assistance), with a case-based discussion on will-making to support real-life application.
4. "Think Before You Share in the Digital Era" Activity focus: safe phone calls, safe online shopping, and safe online living; hands-on practice using popular platforms (LINE, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok).

The workshops were held at the Pa Mamuang Older Persons' Quality of Life and Occupational Promotion Center (OPDC) due to accessibility and adequate facilities. A total of 30 older persons voluntarily participated, with strong coordination across relevant sectors.

Following the workshops, participants demonstrated improved knowledge based on pre-post assessments (summary reported by the project). After three months, a follow-up meeting and evaluation indicated increased real-life application of the learned skills:

- Experience & wisdom: participants applied banana processing skills independently, shared knowledge with peers, and initiated an informal group to produce banana products for sale.
- Volunteering & interaction: participants produced eco-printed fabrics, transferred skills to others, and used products for community gifting (e.g., New Year), with plans for Songkran distribution.
- Legal literacy: participants reported greater awareness and utilization of public services and entitlements (e.g., health services access, allowance claims, funeral assistance guidance), and some initiated will-making.

- Technology & online media: participants increased competency in using social media platforms and reported greater awareness of digital risks; online purchasing behavior increased, with emphasis on safer practices.

3) Recommendations for Strengthening Social Life Skills Development among Older Persons

Based on the identified model and pilot implementation, the study recommends:

1. Develop a structured program that selects skills and activities based on older persons' interests and local context.
2. Build partnerships with public and private sectors to secure sustainable funding.
3. Establish a formal older-person group/council at the subdistrict level and provide an appropriate venue for regular activities.
4. Engage academics or qualified trainers to deliver targeted learning modules.
5. Assign dedicated coordinators within the local administrative organization to support close follow-up.
6. Organize regular social life skills activities (at least once every two months), in addition to traditional community events.
7. Promote stronger roles for older persons in community and local development activities.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The development of social life skills among older persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province represents a structured approach to enhancing older adults' quality of life by emphasizing social competencies that contribute to both physical and psychological well-being. This approach supports holistic living across personal, family, peer, and community dimensions, thereby strengthening overall life satisfaction in later life. The implementation of this study aligns with the principles of social life skills development for older adults promoted by Thailand's Non-Formal and Informal Education system, which emphasizes preparation for ageing, positive social interaction, leisure activities, volunteerism, and awareness of legal rights and social welfare entitlements.

The development program was designed around four core dimensions: (1) self-worth recognition and intergenerational transmission of wisdom and experience; (2) positive interaction within families and communities, including volunteer engagement and social contribution; (3) awareness and understanding of legal rights and social welfare benefits for older persons; and (4) openness to new perspectives and effective use of technology. These dimensions are consistent with principles of adult and lifelong learning, which emphasize empowerment, adaptability, and active ageing. The findings also align with educational frameworks for older adults that highlight the importance of continuous learning, social engagement, and access to up-to-date information as essential factors for successful ageing and improved quality of life.

At the community level, the promotion and strengthening of older persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict has been formally embedded as a key mission within the local development plan (2023–2027). The establishment of the Pa Mamuang Elderly School under the Social Welfare Division of the Subdistrict Administrative Organization has served as a central mechanism for implementing activities that enhance older adults' social participation and well-being. Continuous support, including budget allocation, interagency collaboration, and activity facilitation, has enabled older persons to engage regularly in meaningful group-based activities.

The activity model emphasized participatory processes throughout all stages, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, and reflection. Older persons were encouraged to act not only as learners but also as contributors of knowledge, sharing accumulated life experience and local wisdom. This participatory approach fostered mutual learning, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and reinforced a sense of social belonging. Such findings are consistent with previous studies on older adults in schools and community-based ageing programs, which demonstrate that active participation enhances social integration and perceived self-worth.

Survey findings indicated that the majority of participants were female, aged 60–64 years, married, and not formally employed, with chronic conditions such as hypertension, musculoskeletal disorders, and diabetes being common. Despite these health challenges, most participants were able to live independently and resided with spouses or family members. However, participation in organized community groups remained relatively low, highlighting a gap in opportunities for structured social engagement. This finding reinforces existing evidence that involvement in social activities is positively associated with quality of life among older adults.

Needs assessment results revealed clear priorities across the four dimensions. In the domains of experience and wisdom, participants expressed a strong interest in local knowledge related to food and nutrition. For social interaction and volunteerism, creative volunteer activities and community development initiatives were prioritized. In the legal domain, understanding of elderly funds and welfare benefits was most in demand. In the technology

dimension, learning to use popular digital platforms such as LINE, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok was identified as a key need. These findings guided the design of targeted activities that were responsive to participants' actual interests and daily life contexts.

The implemented workshops comprised four thematic modules: local wisdom preservation through banana product processing; volunteer engagement through natural-dye fabric production; legal literacy focusing on older adults' rights, welfare benefits, and wills; and digital literacy emphasizing online safety and social media use. The workshops employed experiential learning methods, including demonstrations, hands-on practice, and peer exchange, which are widely recognized as effective strategies for adult and older learner education. A friendly and non-threatening learning atmosphere further facilitated engagement and sustained motivation.

Post-training evaluation demonstrated increased knowledge across all four dimensions. A follow-up assessment three months after the intervention revealed meaningful application of the acquired knowledge in daily life. Participants reported transmitting local wisdom to others, forming informal groups of older adults for product processing, engaging in volunteer activities, accessing public welfare services more effectively, drafting wills, and using digital media more confidently and safely. These outcomes indicate that the program not only enhanced individual competencies but also contributed to community cohesion and social capital.

Overall, the findings confirm that social life skills development programs grounded in participation, local context, and learner-centered design can significantly enhance the quality of life of older persons. Such programs support active ageing by enabling older adults to remain socially engaged, valued, and able to contribute meaningfully to their communities. The results reinforce the importance of integrating experiential learning, intergenerational knowledge exchange, and institutional support in sustainable ageing initiatives.



Figure 2: Model of Social Life Skills Development Activities for Older Persons

The development of social life skills among older persons must take into account both individual needs and personal potential. The activities implemented should be aligned with the community's local context and environmental conditions. In addition, emphasis should be placed on integrated collaboration among relevant networks and stakeholders, with a strong focus on participatory engagement from all sectors. This approach ensures that the development of social life skills for older persons is responsive, inclusive, and contextually appropriate, while effectively incorporating appropriate technologies and innovations. Such a development process enables older persons to enhance their capacities and gradually achieve greater self-reliance. Ultimately, this leads to the formation of active, capable, and high-quality older persons who are well prepared to adapt to social changes across multiple dimensions and to continue contributing meaningfully to their communities.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of the study “Social Life Skills Development for Older Persons in Pa Mamuang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Tak Province,” the following implications are proposed for practice and policy:

- 1. Sustained and diversified program implementation:** Social life skills development for older persons should be implemented continuously and through diverse activities. As the older population continues to grow and individual needs vary, it is essential to foster shared understanding and actively engage older adults in participatory discussions to co-design activities that best reflect the group's collective needs.
- 2. Needs-based and capacity-appropriate activity design:** The selection of topics and activities should be grounded in the backgrounds, interests, and capacities of older persons. Activities should prioritize the use of locally available resources and be aligned with participants' physical and cognitive abilities, avoiding tasks that require excessive physical strength, rapid movement, or strenuous exertion.
- 3. Alignment with time constraints and practical relevance:** Given the limited duration of workshop-based activities, program content should be carefully selected to match the available time while emphasizing topics that older persons can readily apply in their daily lives to enhance practical outcomes.
- 4. Continuous updating of knowledge and digital competencies:** In light of rapid advancements in knowledge and technology, program content, particularly in the area of digital and technological literacy, should be regularly updated to ensure relevance and to strengthen older persons' ability to navigate contemporary digital environments safely and effectively.
- 5. Participatory and supportive learning environments:** Activities should be delivered in a flexible, varied, and non-stressful atmosphere, emphasizing active participation and enabling older persons to assume multiple roles beyond that of learners, such as knowledge contributors and peer supporters. This approach enhances engagement, confidence, and social interaction.

These implications highlight the importance of participatory, context-sensitive, and adaptive approaches in promoting sustainable social life skills development and improving the overall quality of life of older persons.

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