International Journal of Buddhist Social Work

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Content

Editorial

"Lord Buddha was the first ever social worker." I remember when I heard these words a couple of years ago while discussing social work together with Buddhist monks in Nepal. There is a long tradition of various services provided by Buddhist temples in many countries and regions in Asia. Indeed, there are terms such as Engaged Buddhism or Socially Engaged Buddhism referring to those activities. However, this journal covers Buddhist social work as a new concept, as a new way for how to perceive, how to conduct, and how to recognize activities rooted in or influenced by Buddhism.

Buddhist social work has been proposed by Prof. Tatsuru Akimoto and highlighted in the research series entitled "Exploring Buddhist Social Work, "providing an overview of Buddhist social work activities in Asia. The working definition, adopted in 2018, is as follows: "Buddhist social work is human activities to help other people solve or alleviate life difficulties and problems, based on the Buddha nature. Buddhist social work always finds causes to work on in both the material and social arena, as well as in the human or inner arena, working on both arenas in tandem. Its fundamental principles include compassion, loving kindness, mutual help, interdependency, and self-reliance. The central value is the Five Precepts. The ultimate goal is to achieve the wellbeing of all sentient beings and peace[1]."

Based on the research and the entirety of work that has been done in this field, the International Journal of Buddhist social work aims to share more about this topic, as well as to polish and refine Buddhist social work. As an academic journal, this periodical publication provides a platform to share peer-reviewed (double-blind peer review) academic articles, activity reports, case studies, interviews, and other content related to Buddhist social work.

Bridging the two fields of Buddhism and social work, we have to inweave various factors and disciplines to strengthen and deepen Buddhist social work. Issuing the first volume of this journal symbolizes the start of the next part of the journey in exploring Buddhist social work. On behalf of the editors' board, I hope that this journal will continue to be a helpful guidebook for all our colleagues on this path.

Josef Gohori

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[1] Akimoto, T., Hattori, M. (eds.) (2018). *Working Definition and Current Curricula of Buddhist Social Work.* Faculty of Sociology VNU University of Social Sciences & Humanities, Vietnam, and Asian Research Institute for International Social Work, Shukutoku University, Japan.

Academic Articles

An Investigation into the Susceptibility of Sri Lankan Buddhist Social Work during the Covid - 19 Pandemic against Severe Public Criticisms

Ven. Rideegama Wanarathana and Dr. Waruni Tennakoon[1]

Abstract

The 'practice of giving' or 'dāna' is a primary Buddhist principle that advocates giving without any expectation of reward (S.N. 5.24) (anupādāya). Since this is an eminent factor that lays the seed for spiritual development according to Buddhist teachings, Buddhist Social Work (BSW) is primarily based on this principle. The present study focuses on a dilemma that BSW in Sri Lanka has faced due to this philosophical basis which a cult of anti-Buddhists has continually misinterpreted. Severe criticisms against BSW for not being in operation during the Covid-19 pandemic, even though they thrived from public donations before the pandemic, have been leveled at Sri Lankan BSW institutions, primarily Buddhist temples. Conversely, a preliminary study showed that many people across the country had greatly benefitted from BSW during the pandemic. A primary observation of these opposing conditions showed that the above criticisms against BSW are resultant of the lack of publicity given for their social work projects, unlike the Western-rooted Professional Social Work intuitions whose projects are blatant attempts to attract publicity as their survival is entirely based on public attention and donations. Thus, the present research addresses this clash of ideas between the underlying Buddhist principles of not promoting BSW projects versus the general opinion. While investigating BSW carried out from March 2019 to July 2021, focusing on the public affected due to the pandemic threat, this study expects to analyze the public opinion of beneficiaries and antagonistic observers of BSW projects. The research intends to suggest alternatives that BSW should consider in its mission to extend an authentic service to a more significant number of people.

Keywords: **Buddhist Social Work, Covid -19, practice of giving, publicity, Sri Lanka**

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Introduction

The practice of giving is not limited to religion, but it is unanimously considered an essential quality of humanity. Buddhism as a way of life emphasizes the importance of this practice, connecting it to both the worldly as well as spiritual lives (Bodhi. B. 2016). Placing it as the seed for spiritual development, the Buddha has clearly demonstrated its importance in the life of a devotee. With this spiritual connection of the practice of giving in Buddhism, it is always incorporated in virtues such as selflessness and morality. Giving should be done without any ulterior motives.

Therefore, "giving" takes a completely different turn from the same teaching in other religions and philosophies because in Buddhist giving, "giving up" is an integral quality. As the Buddhist teachings emphasize, it is with someone's spiritual development that he/she finds the psychological support to "give up" the thing that is given. *"Dānañca yuddhañca samānamāhu,* (S.N.i,20)" meaning "giving" parallels a battle to make up the mind to "give" something that is cherished to someone, as the giver has to combat with his/her inner forces of selfishness and greed.

Buddhist social work has its origins from the time of the Buddha, and it is famously quoted that it is with the Dhamma dissemination mission of the first sixty monks that Buddhist social work actually began. The Buddha advised his Bikkhu disciples to be like the moonlight, *"candūpamā, bhikkhave, kulāni upasaṅkamatha,"* meaning one has to give without expecting anything. In other words, no bond should be created between the donor and the receiver: the Dhamma preacher and the listener. This emphasizes the principles of Buddhist SW that no gain is to be expected in giving anything (S.N.2.197).

The present research addresses the problem of whether Buddhist SW can continue without focusing on "publicity" which equals "more money," owing to certain criticisms leveled at Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka that they remain shut down without helping the needy, especially in this hour of need. There are many social work organizations based on other religions, especially Christianity where they treat those who are in want of help. With movements like Mother Theresa, the Red Cross, etc., the charity work of the Christians has been well recognized

by the world. Needless to say, none of the Buddhist SW institutions has gained such popularity in SW. Thus, the present research investigates the role of Buddhist temples during the time of Covid- 19 in terms of helping the needy.

Research Problem

The present study investigates the problem of whether the lack of popularity for the Social Work projects, which is contrary to the Buddhist philosophical teachings, has attracted negative criticisms against BSW.

Objectives

The present research aims to,

- analyze the adverse comments against the behavior of the Buddhist temples during the time of Covid-19

- survey the SW carried out by Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka and the responses of the beneficiaries over the role of Buddhist temples during this difficult time

- identify the nature of BSW and its lack of popularity

- study the Buddhist philosophical teachings related to SW

- suggest ways to overcome the negative criticisms levelled at the BSW

Methodology

The present qualitative study is based on two recent criticisms leveled at BSW by two popular personalities in Sri Lanka. After analyzing their views that have been positively accepted by many of their followers, the present research will investigate the truth and validity behind their

statements through a survey based on three Buddhist temples that have been randomly selected to cover four provinces in Sri Lanka. The three temples are unique in their funding generation for the social work activities as follows:

1) Santussako Centre – Social Work Projects are run using money given by a few foreign philanthropists for the personal use of the Chief Monk

2) Ridee Viharaya – Social work projects are mostly run using income from the properties of the temple

3) Mahamevanawa – Social Work Projects are run using donations of the devotees attached to many branches of the monastery around the world

In carrying out the research, first the two videos on which the present research is based on were closely analyzed to understand the accusations the two speakers are leveling at the Buddhist temples. After understanding the accusations, the social work projects carried out by the above mentioned, randomly chosen temples covering the areas of Kurunegala and Kandy were studied. In gathering information on social work projects run during the period between March 2019 and July 2021, the Chief Incumbent monks of Santussako Centre and Ridee Viharaya were consulted and the website and the social media posts of Mahamevnawa were followed. Then, 20 respondents who have been the beneficiaries of the social work projects run by these temples were interviewed by telephone (Questions attached in Appendix I) to get their responses. Thereby, 4 respondents who are connected to Santussako Centre, 6 to Ridee Vihara, and 10 to Mahamevnawa were contacted.

Literature Review

Dhana as the foundation of the Buddhist spiritual journey is emphasized as a means of developing the internal character of a devotee. In Ratha Vinita sutta (M.N. I.145) the Buddha compares the spiritual development of a devotee to the silent wheels of a cart, emphasizing the importance of introversion. Probably due to this reason, most of the Buddhist Social Work is not given much publicity in comparison to the Western-rooted professional social work.

The Buddha once appreciated Maha-Sudassana, one of Buddha's former lives as a Bodhisatva who gave away things to others entirely with generosity, "without attachment, expecting nothing in return, for the attainment of Self-Awakening." According to Buddhism, "Greed," as one essential condition that repeatedly makes us entangled in suffering, should be eradicated for the attainment of the ultimate emancipation from *samsara*. With the practice of giving, one gets accustomed to not clinging on to our belongings which will ultimately weaken our attachment to material things. When 'giving' is practiced with the aim of attaining Nirvana[2] (Pali: nibbāna), with our developing generosity we are able to develop 'virtue, concentration and wisdom *(sila, samadhi, pañña)'* (Bodhi 1999, online). This is confirmed when the Dhammapada states, *'jine kadariyam danena,' or, "*to conquer miserliness with generosity" (Dhp. 223). Moreover, *lobha* which is one of the three *akusalas* and unwholesome motivational roots (*akusalamula)* is loaded with egoism and selfishness.

Analysis of Data

The current research is based on two criticisms levelled at the Sri Lankan Buddhist temples by two eminent personalities in Sri Lanka who have a sound fan base. Both of them, in videos published on YouTube as well as on Facebook vehemently criticize the Sri Lankan Buddhist temples for not supporting the needy during the time of the coronavirus pandemic. They accuse the temples to have thrived with people's donations earlier and now they have locked themselves inside temples without extending help to the people who had donated money for the temples. Further, the monks are severely criticized for not practicing the teachings of the Buddha. Observing the number of their followers on social media, the researchers identified the threat BSW could face in the future if ideas such as the above became highly popular, especially among the youth who accept anything that is published on social media without any rationality.

For the next step of the research, the researchers surveyed the social work carried out by the temples that served as the sample of the present study. The data gathered are limited to the period

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[2] a state of freedom from all suffering that Buddhists believe can be achieved by removing all personal wishes (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

between March 2019 and July 2021, and the Social Work projects focused on the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Santussako Centre – The Foundation started in 2015, and many social work projects have been carried out through the centre.

Founder: Most Venerable Indarathana, the founder of the Santussako Centre, is mostly residing in Malaysia, but since 2019 he has been staying in Sri Lanka with the aim of helping the Sri Lankans.

- Providing two Ventilators to the Nikaweratiya Base Hospital and Allawwa Base hospital (May 2021)
- Distributing dry rations during the lockdown: Colombo district: 75 families, Matara district 150 families, Kurunegala 250 families (March 2019)
- Gifting vouchers to 75 senior citizens for medical treatments (LKR 3500 for one family) (April 2019)
- Providing scholarships for needy children who are unable to continue their higher education due to financial difficulties after Covid-19 hit (from 2019 onwards)
- Providing school stationery for needy students (Annual program from 2015)
  After 2019 stationery was provided for students who had difficulty buying stationery because their parents were laid off or lost their jobs because of the pandemic (1 parcel of stationery worth approximately LKR 500)
- Distributing school stationery for the students in remote areas (Buttala – 2019)
- Starting an online English educational centre for low-income children from 2019, where 150 children are studying at present.
- Donating required textbooks worth LKR 200000 to Eppawala Pirivena to strengthen Pirivena education (2019)
- Essential texts books for Kekirawa Sri Gnanodaya Pirivena (May 2021)
- Renovating the old communal hall and starting a primary education centre there (November 2020)

Ridi Vihara – SW began in 2004
Founder – Most Venerable Thibbatuwawe Sri Siddhartha Buddharakkhitha

- Opportunity for those who have lost their jobs during the first wave of Covid-19 in Sri Lanka to cultivate the 250 acres of lands owned by the temple. The money from the harvest was given to them (2019-2021)
- Under the "Ridi Piyasa" House construction project, during 2019 and 2021 special attention was given to poor families whose house construction work had to be stopped midway due to the financial difficulties faced during the pandemic. Thus, 80 houses which had been partially constructed were completed under the project while 7 houses were completely built for some villagers who were living in shanties (2019-2021)
- As a means of encouraging cultivation during the pandemic period, 3750 turmeric plants were distributed to the members of the Association of Buddhist Youth in Ridigama. The Turmeric cultivation is a lucrative business in Sri Lanka (June 4, 2021)
- Parcels of dry rations were distributed among 300 families in Welikanda of Polonnaruwa and Dimbulagala for the New Year 2021
- Parcels of dry rations were donated to 18 families who were quarantining in the neighboring villages (May 17, 2021)
- Parcels of dry rations were donated to 60 poor families in Ridigama (June 20, 2021)
- Distribution of surgical masks to:
  - all the Buddhist temples under the Provincial Council of Ridigama (100000) (June 7, 2021)
  - Christian churches, Hindu Kovils and Muslim Mosques; Christian Church of Dodamgaslanda, Reddagoda Muthumari Amman Kovil, Vigneshwaran Kovil in Panagamuwa, Kovil in Delhena Watta and Lidawul Islam Jumma Mosque in Rambukandana (7/06/2021)
  - Kurunegala District Civil Security Department (6400)
  - Ridigama Cooperative Office (2000)
  - All the Youth Organizations in Morathiha (11000)

- Agricultural Office in Rambadagalla, Dodamgaslanda and Karandagolla (6000)
- Tamil Plantation workers in Keppitigala (7000), Buluwala (2500)
- Elders' Home in Buluwala (1000)
- Health services and Security Forces in Kurunegala District (16, 000)
- Police Stations – Gokarella and Mawathagama (17, 300)
- 900 families in Ridigama (45, 000) – (June 2, 2021)
- Kurunegala Base Hospital (100000) (May 31, 2021)

- Financial donations to 5 families with more than two children (LKR 25, 000, more than three children (LKR 45000), and more than four children (LKR 60000)

- During the time of pandemic, the Blood Bank had had fewer blood samples, so as a support to the patients who were in need of blood during the time of the pandemic, a blood donation program was organized at the Blood Bank, Kurunegala (April 4, 2021)

- Financial donation of LKR 1,674,000 for the Kurunegala Base Hospital to purchase a PCR machine

- Donation of stationery to 2200 school children in Ridigama (December 20, 2020)

- Donation of 8 sets of personal protective clothing to wear during the office hours that cost LKR 50 000 to the Ridigama Police Station (June 29, 2021)

Mahamevana Buddhist Monastery

Founder: Most Venerable Kiribathgoda Gnanananda

- Converting the Dharmashala of Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery in Kundasale to the largest Covid-19 intermediate treatment center in the Central Province. 1000 patients could be accommodated once.
- Soup donation and food donation to corona patients on every Sunday by the Youth Council of the Kundasale Mahamevnawa Meditation Asapuwa
- Sil campaign for the Covid-positive patients on Poson Full Moon Poya Day
- Donating ICU beds to 18 hospitals around the country worth over 18 million rupees

(Kiribathgoda Base Hospital (5 beds), Rikillagaskada District Hospital (3 beds), Dompe District hospital (3 hospitals), Wathupitiwala base hospital (3 beds), Thissamaharama Base Hospital (3 beds), Polpithigama Base hospital (2 beds), Kahatagasdigiliya Base Hospital (3 beds), Udugoda Provincial Hospital (2 beds), Malwathuhiripitiya hospital (2 beds), Kurunegala Teaching Hospital (5 beds), etc.)

- Blood donation campaigns in almost all branches around the country
- Donation of Oximetres and Multipara Monitors (worth AU $5867) to Kekirawa, Thambuththegama, Gampaha, Ragama, Kalubovila, Colombo, Rathnapura and Wethara hospitals
- Donating Personal Protection Clothes, toolkits and some essential medical equipment to the medical staff of 70 hospitals island-wide (April 21, 2020).
- Donating parcels of vegetables to low-income families in Athurugiriya, and Jaela (April 20, 2020) and Trincomalee, Seruwila, and the Wedda families (April 18, 2020). These vegetables were bought by the monastery from the farmers who were unable to sell their harvest due to the lockdown.
- Donating necessities for the Covid-positive patients quarantining in the Kandakadu treatment centre (November 19, 2020)
- Donating a stock of medical equipment worth more than 1.5 million LKR to Mahiyangana Primary Hospital (August 6, 2021)
- Donating two Bedside Monitors worth LKR 1,895,000.00 to Ragama Teaching Hospital (July 31, 2021)
- Donating toys and other family needs for selected low-income families in Seruwila (July 20, 2021)
- Donating Covid Protective Kits and Dry rations for Kidney Patients' Society in Sri Lanka (June 30, 2021)
- Donating medical Communication Kit worth LKR 25,000 to Colombo Hospital (June 28, 2021)
- Donating faceshields to Nursing School in Matara worth LKR 64,000 (November 5, 2021), Mahara Prison PPE Kit 200 worth LKR 200,000 (October 5, 2021), Mahara Nursing School PPE Kits & Faceshields worth LKR 50,000

The next step of the research was to collect information from the beneficiaries of the above SW projects. All the respondents' level of satisfaction on the donations they received was 100% and they have a positive attitude towards the role of most of the temples during time of the pandemic. They acknowledged that they received some donations from some NGOs and from philanthropists of their areas as well, but the donations from the temples had always incorporated the blessings of the particular monk/s involved in the project which was satisfying to the receivers. Giving their views on the negative impressions spread among Buddhists about the role of the Buddhist temples in SW, they commented that there are some temples which are not interested in the welfare of the villagers but many temples in the country are engaged in SW within their capacity. From their views the researchers understood that a lot of young people are critical of the Buddhist welfare activities perhaps because they are not organized in a grand manner as some SW projects organized by certain well-known NGOs. Upon questioning, the respondents answered that they personally think BSW needs to be given media coverage for the society to know the work done by the temples for the society. Even if they are published on social media, the fact that they are not published in media makes the common society ignorant about such work. In contrast, certain SW projects carried out by non-Buddhist organizations prioritize publicity by spending a large sum of money on that, too. Therefore, the public is much more aware of those programs than those of BSW which do not focus on publicity at all. "The youth likes it when they can wear T-shirts of the name of the NGO and have fun with their friends while doing the SW projects. The SW projects of temples are not so flashy. For the latter, the media is also not involved, our young ones want their photos on media and also money from the social work project in return for their work" (My translation) was a common comment of the respondents.

Discussion

The gathered data could dismiss the charges against the BSW by the two popular personalities we analyzed as the basis for this research. From the views of the respondents it was clear that not all the Buddhist temples are engaged in SW projects, but there are many temples which help the needy within their capacity. The researchers, by observation, understood that since a growing

number of youth irrationally support the adverse criticisms against the role of the Buddhist monks on social media while discouraging others to support the donations for BSW projects, the BSW could face a threat to its survival in the future. A Facebook search also proved that the temples which are engaged in social work also have not given attention to promoting it much. Mahamevnawa, which is a powerful Buddhist monastery in Sri Lanka with 60 local branches and 30 foreign branches with a sound base of devotees around the world, has also limited their notifications on fundraising and SW projects only to their Facebook pages. Even in the main website of the monastery the SW projects are randomly uploaded.

The collected data confirms that many Buddhist monks are involved in SW projects but since they are given less publicity compared to the SW projects run by non-Buddhist organizations, society is less aware of them. Thus, it is natural for common people to criticize the Buddhist temples for not engaging in SW compared to the other Non-Buddhist organizations. Analyzing this "quality" of BSW as not being concerned with publicity for the SW they have done, the researchers could conclude the reason to be the philosophical basis behind BSW. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, BSW is based on the principle of "giving up" and "not expecting anything in return." The publicity given to SW projects underlie the expectation of more donations and appreciation which could fuel one's ego. So, it can be concluded that most of the BSW projects do not aim at publicity because of this philosophical basis of the Buddhist act of giving.

Yet, considering the present Sri Lankan society, the researchers would like to suggest that it is high time the Buddhist monks reconsider making the public more aware of BSW projects. With the growing criticisms against the Buddhist temples for turning a blind eye for the grievances of the public, Buddhist monks should understand that such public opinion may be a threat to the Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka because almost all the Buddhist temples are run based on the patronage of the devotees. Thus, the Buddhist monks should come to an agreement on making their SW public, without harming the philosophical basis as well. As a suggestion, the monks can make their SW projects public, with the pure aim of giving a chance to those who become happy in seeing such SW and transferring merit to them. Even if they may not actively participate in those SW projects or donate to the project, they have the chance of 'anumodanawa' (M.N.2.196). There is a story of one of Visaka's friends who could not contribute to one of the *pinkamas*

Visaka did, yet this friend could be born in a higher heavenly realm than Visaka herself for the happy mind she developed by witnessing the meritorious deed. Also, the act of '*patti*' as described in the Ten Wholesome Deeds in Buddhism refers to the act of transferring merit of a deed that one does to another. This has also been given as the '*prapti dana*' and one who performs a meritorious deed may share it with all the beings who are living in comfort and not. Further, the wish should be extended to those who live without comfort so they may rise to comfort with the merits that are transferred. If this view, which is well aligned with the pure teachings of the Buddha, can be popularized in the society, BSW can also be popularized to reach the general public. This emphasizes the need of a common platform for the BSW projects to be published, and considering it an essentiality at present, Buddhist monks may immediately start work upon that.

Conclusion

The present research highlights the need for BSW to be more concerned with publicity given to BSW projects to avoid adverse criticisms of some people who are not aware of the social services extended by many Buddhist temples in the country. Even if BSW has not focused on propaganda as it is not encouraged in the Buddhist philosophy behind '*dana*,' with the pure aim of '*pathanumodana*' they should be made known to the public. Likewise, the necessity to promote a culture to publish Buddhist Social Work with the aim of transferring merit to those who enjoy seeing them is identified in the research.

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Appendix I

(Questions used for the telephone interview)

1. Could you tell us how satisfied you are with your temple's SW projects in a percentage?

2. Do you think the temple did its best to help the victims of Covid-19, or could it have done more?

3. Have you received any other support during Covid-19 from other organizations?

If yes, what are they?

4. (If the answer to question no. 2 is YES) What are the differences you saw in the SW projects run by the temple and the other organizations?

5. What do you think about the criticisms leveled at Buddhist temples regarding their SW projects?

6. Have you ever participated in a SW project carried out by the temple to support them carry out that project?

7. What shortcomings do the SW projects organized by the temples have? What are your suggestions to overcome them?

8. What is your opinion on giving publicity to the SW projects?

Buddhist Social Work Approach: A New Perspective on Professional Social Work in Sri Lanka

Dr. Omalpe Somananda Thero[1]

Abstract

Social Work in Sri Lanka has been slowly progressing, yet even after 68 years it is still in its infancy despite the facts that the country needs productive social work. Research studies and social work scholars believe that the mismatch of the prevailing social work approach with the country's socio-economic culture is the reason for the above slow progress. Western-rooted social work started in Sri Lanka in 1952 under the guidance of Western social work scholar Ms. Dorothy Moses, the Principal of the Delhi School of Social Work, who set up an institute to conduct social work education programs. Social work education, which began with a certificate course in social welfare, now offers degree and postgraduate courses, but it has produced only 1,677 social workers over 69 years. Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. Its social culture encourages philanthropy based on Buddhist values inculcated in the philosophical background of Buddhism. However, prevailing evidence indicates that Western-rooted professional social work does not address the entirety of the social work needs of the Sri Lankan society. Therefore, the present research hypothesizes that a friendly social work approach based on Buddhist values is a better fit which can easily be internalized in the Sri Lankan society. The objective of this study is to identify a new approach to social work in Buddhism that is relevant to Sri Lanka. This paper is based on the literature study analysing both, the primary and the secondary sources (data). This study is important for scholars who are interested in the subjects of social work, especially social work students, in their academic work.

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1. Introduction

Sri Lanka is a *Theravāda*[2] Buddhist country and 72% of the population are Buddhist. It is recognized by the Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka which states that "The republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha *Sāsana*[3]…," (Articles 10 & 14 (1). Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are engaged in various social services and welfare activities. Almost every village in Sri Lanka has a temple and there are groups of people who live around the temple. Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are mainly divided into two groups namely 'village monks' *(grāmavāsi)* and 'forest monks' *(Araññavāsi)*. In particular, the village monks have been very deeply and extensively engaged in daily secular activities serving village people. Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka have always been centres of village life and have fulfilled multi-functions.

Social work is considered a helping profession, which was rooted in Western countries. Western-based professional social work was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1952. A closer view confirms that Western-rooted social work education has uncounted rough surfaces during its journey in Sri Lanka. For the past 69 years only one bachelor's and master's degree program was able to be introduced until 2019, and only very recently was another bachelors and master's program introduced in the country. There have been only 1674 persons recognized as professional social workers so far. This it shows the necessity of indigenization of the social work profession in order to contextualize it to Sri Lankan culture. Sri Lankan culture has grown through Buddhist values. Its social culture encourages philanthropy based on Buddhist values inculcated in the philosophical background of Buddhism. However, prevailing evidences indicate that Western-rooted professional social work does not address the entirety of the social work needs of Sri Lankan society. Therefore, the present research hypothesizes that a friendly social work approach based on Buddhist values is a better fit which can easily be internalized in the Sri Lankan society.

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[2] *Theravāda*; "Doctrine of the Elders", is a name of the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings, handed down in the *Pāli* language. According to tradition, its name is derived from the fact of having been fixed by 500 holy elders of the Order, soon after the passing away of the Master. *Theravāda* is the one of the old schools of Buddhism that has survived among those which *Mahāyānitst* have called *'Hīnayāna'*. (Buddhist Dictionary, Nyanatiloka thera. P.209)

[3] *Sāsana*- (massage): the Dispensation of the Buddha, the Buddhist religion; teaching, doctrine. (Buddhist Dictionary, Nyanatiloka thera. P. 193.)

2. Research Question

At the beginning of 1952, social work was introduced to Sri Lanka to promote child welfare and to develop the human capacity required to growth social welfare services in Sri Lanka. It was also to produce qualified professionals in the formulation of social welfare policies in Sri Lanka. A closer view confirms that Western-rooted social work education encounters rough surfaces during its journey in Sri Lanka. For the past 69 years, only one bachelor's and master's degree program was able to be introduced until 2019. The country does not feel the need for professional social work. The majority of the country has no idea about this profession, and the State has not paid any attention to this. Sri Lanka was able to recognize only 1674 persons who have been working as professional social workers so far. This may have been due to the cultural traditions of Sri Lanka. Focusing on all these issues, it is clear that there is a need for a new social work approach to Sri Lanka. Thus, the author has developed the following research question: does a new Buddhist social work approach fit the needs of the future development of Sri Lankan social work or not?

3. Research Methodology

This study is based on secondary data. Secondary data is data that have been already collected and is readily available from other sources. In this study, scholarly research books, research papers and research articles produced by previous researchers on professional social work and Buddhist social work have been used.

4. Buddhist Social Work

Buddhist social work begins as an extension of the Buddhist social welfare service. The Buddhist social welfare service dates back to the time of the Buddha in 6 BC India, and it has a long history. It was only in recent times that Buddhist Social Work developed as a subject. It has a very young history. The term "Buddhist social work (BSW)" had been used in the social work field, but has a different meaning. The researcher expects that mentioning the young history of Buddhist social work will be beneficial to future students and researchers who are interested in Buddhism and the BSW field in studying the subject of BSW. Prof. Tatsuru Akimoto initiated the educational discussion in 2012 on the subject of BSW as a parallel subject to social work at first. He began to find a link between Buddhism and social work, and his voice was heard in the

social work international communities. So, what is Buddhist social work? The foundation of Buddhist social work is the Buddhist philosophy based on altruism. Buddhist social work is a newborn term in Western professional social work. It can be used as an alternative to the field of social work. The definition of Buddhist Social Work is as Buddha said; *"parattam pati pajjatha"* -work for others wellbeing "or" welfare. Further, Buddha has explained "I am practicing for the welfare and happiness of many people" (*Wassakāra Sutta - NDB.p.424 /AN-2.p.74)* The first definition of Buddhist social work is as Buddha said, "Go forth, Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, for the good, for the happiness of gods and men..." *(Mahāvagga pāli, Vinaya Pitaka 1. P.42).* However, there are no relevant definitions for understanding exactly what Buddhist social work is. Consequently, the Asian Research Institute for International Social Work (ARIISW) also focuses on the definition of Buddhist social work.

Buddhist social work has been defined at the end of a long-term program based on an important research series which can be regarded as a turning point in Buddhist social work and a major contribution to the progress of Buddhist social work. At the Hanoi International Expert meeting in 2017, an attempt was made to define the definition of Buddhist social work. According to their conclusion, two definitions have been made as Models "B" & "C." Thus, for Model B, "Buddhist Social Work is the social work based on the Buddhist philosophy. It helps individuals, families, groups and communities which enhance social functions, and promote their wellbeing, peace, happiness and harmony. It is an academic inter-discipline and a profession; Buddhist Social Work professionals will demonstrate his/her knowledge, skills and values guided by the principle of Buddha nature" (Akimoto 2017: 7). For Model C, "Buddhist Social Work is human activities to help other people solve or alleviate life difficulties and problems based on the Buddha nature. Buddhist Social Work always finds causes to work on in both the material, and social arena, as well as in the human, or inner arena, working on both arenas in tandem. Its fundamental principles include compassion, loving kindness, mutual help, interdependency and self-reliance. The central value is the Five Precepts. The ultimate goal is to achieve the wellbeing of all sentient beings and peace" (Akimoto 2017: 3). Further, some social work scholars have started to comment on this. Prof. Gohori comments on "Model C" stating "This model works with classical Buddhist terms such as loving kindness or compassion. It's clear that this model is

deeply rooted in Buddhist teaching reflecting its core concepts… They underpin the Western-rooted social work definition; however, there is no need to translate them or to interpret them. People in Asia region are already familiar with them and their presence is automatically accepted in Asian Buddhist societies and cultures" (Gohori 2019: p.112-113). Consequently, the model C definition is more similar to Buddhist social work. "The Buddhist welfare values should be the foundation of Buddhist Social Work by leveraging Buddhist concepts and practical knowledge" (Ishikawa 2017: 96). Further, "Buddhist Social Work is based on the emancipation of mental and physical suffering of humans, protecting living beings, balancing social needs, sharing wealth and conserving the nature" (Wickramasinghe 2020: 140). The following are the three important elements for Buddhist social workers according to Ishikawa (2017).

(Source: Ishikawa 2017: p.97)

Figure 1: Three important elements for Buddhist social workers

"The Buddhist Social Work initiative is still in the infant stage within the scientific professional social work landscape. One of the key factors for this situation is that Buddhists themselves do not use the term 'social work' or even they do not identify a category called 'social work'. It does not matter to Buddhists whether people translate or name such activities as 'social work' or whether the Western-rooted professional social work side approves them as social work or not. It only matters whether Buddhist temples, monks and followers can address the difficulties and problems of life people face how effectively and how much" (Akimoto 2017: 2). Based on

religious sources, social work practice has offered an alternative to clients and social workers, despite the fact that research examining the practicality of Buddhist-based social work is very limited. However, a study of these limited definitions makes it clear that Buddhist social work is based on the compassion *(karunā)* – driven social approaches to relieve the others from distress or suffering and strengthening inter-dependency among individuals which is deeply based on unity in Buddhist teachings. In addition, this needs to be done while empowering people, caring for each other and stimulating self-motivation through *Dhamma*. Consequently, this leads to the welfare of others improving happiness in people and finally, the wellbeing of all sentient beings will be enhanced.

5. Professional Social work

Social work is a profession that helps people with problems by developing their strengths to find solutions for their problems. Further, "Social work is a helping profession" is a very common definition. It is functioning in the areas of social service, social welfare and social development. Consequently, this professional approach helps people with problems to solve them on their own. It is believed that in social work, any person has the power to solve their own problems. Every person is capable. Social work interventions are known to help these people solve their problems by giving them the opportunity to identify these possibilities.

The evolution of social work began with scientific inquiry into philanthropy and social service. People came to know that indiscriminate philanthropy and social service had led to an increase in the number of dependents in society. They explored how best the individuals in the society could be helped by empowering them to become independent. It was reported that at the first international conference on social work held in Paris in July 8th-13th, 1928, the new approach to improving the technique of philanthropy was proclaimed as social work and the key to its development was seen as social work education. Therefore, social work has a long history. The Charity Organization Society movement was introduced in the United States by two men from Buffalo, New York who were deeply concerned about the reducing the destitution caused by the Long Depression of the 1870s. One was an Episcopal rector, Rev. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, and the other was T. Guilford Smith, a young successful business man and a parishioner at St. Mary's Church where Rev. Gurteen served. Along with a circle of friends, they discussed the

social and economic problems of their community, the proliferation of private charities, and what more could be done to alleviate poverty. A plan emerged and as part of that plan, Rev. Gurteen traveled to England and spent the summer of 1877 learning about the London Charity Organization Society. On his return, the two men drew up plans to adopt a COS in Buffalo. Various scholars who have studied social work have come up with ideas about social work based on their experience. It is an art rather than a science. Also, individuals are unique, and they differ from each other. Therefore there is no universal theory applicable or which could be developed to apply to all the individuals in the society. Relationship building depends on how both the client and the social worker relate to each other. "Social work skills or competencies developed by the social worker with the art of relating to the client enable him or her to make the service effective" (Ranaweera 2003: 3). Further, social work is a practice profession and the social worker plays its main role. The audiences for the performance are people with problems and needs. Therefore, a skill based methodology has been developed. Thus, the term social work art is based on logical reasoning. The relationships between art and science in the practice of social work" (Pincus 1973: 3) are an art based on scientific method.

The traditional state of the world began to change with industrialization. Ancient social security and welfare system started changing their roles in relation to needy individuals as well. The Industrial Revolution created problems that were different in types and were threatening to society having social and political significance. Because there was discord appearing in the area of interaction between individuals, families, groups, and their environment, these problems compelled the society to create social welfare agencies. Later when it was observed that these problems required a scientific outlook for proper and permanent solutions, a new system of scientific assistance came into existence which was called social work (Bhattacharya 2006: 53). Consequently, "social work" is a method of intervening to solve people's problems through scientific intervention. Social work, unlike earlier charity practices, attempts to help the individuals, groups and communities to get a clear insight into the problems that strengthen their ego to face conditions as reality and then try to improve them. At the same time social work attempts to mobilize social forces to resolve those social and economic situations that lead to ill health, mental suffering frustration and social behavior (Hamilton (1947: 192).

Although social work is aimed at helping others with the help of religious teachings it is not a

charitable service. It is a method that helps people to be independent by studying the situation of problems of people using scientific knowledge of subjects. It helps the individuals, groups and communities to get a clear insight into the problems and their skills and improve them. There is also this similar idea, "Social work is a profession that aims at helping those who cannot help themselves. Being a caring profession, it is the duty of the social worker to find out the root cause of the vulnerability of the clients, while striving hard to promote the dignity and worth of all people regardless of their political and economic status and religious affiliation. The profession is committed to the enhancement of the quality of life and the development of the full potential of the clients by addressing the barriers, inequalities, and injustices that exist in society" (Kafula 2016: 116). "Social work is human activity to help others alleviate or eradicate difficulties and problem in their life" (Akimto 2017: 28). But since human activity is not described here, it should be defined clearly.

The Social Work Dictionary published in 1987 by Robert L. Barker, focuses on social work as the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal. "Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtains tangible service; providing counseling and psychotherapy for individuals, families and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health service; and participating in relevant legislative processes. Further, the practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior of social economic and cultural institutions; and of the interaction of all these factors (Barker 1987: 154). According to this definition, two main points have been given attention. One is 'social work' and the second is 'social work practice'. Thus it is clear that Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups or communities to enhance their capacity for social functioning. In focusing on social work practice, it becomes clear that it is based on social work principles and ethics. It is a good aspect of this profession. These social work practices intend to achieve the following:
- Helping people obtain tangible service
- Providing counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families and groups
- Helping communities or groups providing or improving social and health service

- Participating in relevant legislative processes

Today social work is a highly developed professional fiel. It consists of a process which guides the clients to the problems they face and identifies the resources required based on a scientific analysis and guides them to reach the resources. Another point is "social work is committed to the enhancement of the quality of life by protecting client's dignity and worth and it can play a fundamental role in building resilience, support and constructive social relationships at both individual and institutional levels in an effort to develop peaceful communities" (Kafula (2016: 120). Helping people to be independent helps to preserve their dignity and raise them with dignity. Also, it helps to develop harmony and peaceful communities. Later, with the spread of social work around the world, various educational discussions were held and sub branches of social work were formed.

6. Social Work Situation in Sri Lanka

Despite the fact that social work has its European origin with missionary educational background, social work education has expanded all over the world including in Sri Lanka. This concept was realized in 1952 with the contribution and the guidance of Ms. Dorathy Moses, then the principal of the Delhi School of Social Work who set up an institute to conduct social work education programs. This project was initiated by Y.M.C.A. Ceylon. A committee was appointed and this committee decided to name the institute as the Institute of Social Work. Apart from the training courses, the institute organized seminars to promote awareness on social work as well as to meet the needs of welfare organizations in the country. "In 1955, Mr. J.F.X. Paiva was appointed as a part-time staff assistant and Mr. D.S. Sanders was appointed as a full-time staff assistant. Later both become eminent social work educators in the international field and were pioneers in promoting the social development concept" (Ariyasena 2003:137). Social Work in Sri Lanka has developed slowly. Sixty eight years after the commencement of social work in Sri Lanka, it is still in its infancy. Some research studies and social work scholars believe that the reason for this is the lack of a suitable social work approach to the Sri Lankan culture. Thus, the social work problems, solving methods, scientific tools, and techniques developed in line with Western culture are not applicable to solve human problems in a Sri Lankan context. "Social work is a profession. There is a difference between an unskilled labourer making the garden and a landscaper doing the same job…. professions require mastery of a systematically organized body

of knowledge and demonstrated skills in applying this knowledge (Ranaweera 2003: 6-7)." Consequently, the social worker is a professional whose service depends on the salary. Their service is performed within a specific time frame, program, and code of ethics.

The main objective of initiating social work in Sri Lanka is to achieve social work objectives through the creation of a skilled workforce. Based on the statistics of National Institute of Social Development (NISD) there have been only 1677 trained social workers during the 68 years in Sri Lankan social work history. Also, large scale social welfare projects in Sri Lanka have failed. For instance, the *"Samurdhi* welfare project" which was started with the aim of uplifting the poor has become a "social service project" that makes people dependent while the purpose of social work is to empower people.

The Sri Lankan community practices a variety of religions. According to the 2012 census, 70.2% of Sri Lankans were Theravada Buddhists. Further, Buddhism is considered as the state religion of Sri Lanka and has been given special privileges in the Sri Lankan constitution such as government protection fostering Buddhist Dharma. However, the constitution provides freedom of religion and the right to equality among all its citizens as well. "Buddhism explains a social system to its followers from the very beginning, in which the Buddha himself and monks were also involved. The first social work of the monks was to make people aware of the ethical path" (Narada 2020: 154). The Buddha believed that society could be healed by guiding people who were suffering from undesirable conditions to get out of that situation. Therefore, guiding or instructing person for their own welfare by words alone was insufficient without the acts of the monk. Buddhism highly emphasizes helping each other and therefore when people help monks, they also tended to help laypeople. Buddhism with such a background came to Sri Lanka from India.

As Sri Lankan chronicles report, Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BC by Venerable Mahā Mahinda[4] under the sponsorship of emperor Ashoka[5] in India. As a result, Sri

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[4] Maha Mahinda (son of King Ashoka and Buddhist Monk) was sent as a Buddhist missionary to the Anuradhapura Kingdom in Sri Lanka. Mahinda attained the title of an arhat and resided at Mihintale

Lankan monks have been working for social welfare since the third century BC. Under the influence of Buddhism, Sri Lankan people are maintaining a closer relationship than western countries. They have high social qualities such as a mutual help system within their own community and sharing and a caring system. This philanthropic value has been developed through Buddhist teachings. Until now, elderly parents take care of themselves at home. In addition, there is a strong mechanism within the family to care for disabled children and helpless family members. In Sri Lankan culture, the family has a deep spiritual inseparable bond. The Buddhist philosophy which has been inspired by Buddhist culture has affected this bond. Therefore, the family itself has their own mechanisms to share their support among family members and mutual understanding is very high, hence, family tie are very strong. From childhood Sri Lankans are encouraged to share their thoughts with their parents and seek for their direction, counseling and advice. Further, husband and wife work together and co-operate in raising children. Each has different assigned duties and responsibilities. While the father acts as an authoritarian figure, mother takes the major role as a mediator between children and their father in communication. They are admonished to be good because any disgrace that is committed is a disgrace to the family. In times of misfortune, they are assured of the family's support, sympathy and love. "This background of sharing and caring with responsibility and accountability creates commitment, trust and strong work ethics within the family (Gamage 2012: 68)." So far, the Sri Lankan community has not sought the support on a payment basis of voluntary organizations or institutions to care for their family members. We can arrive at the conclusion that in Sri Lankan society, the needy especially are being supported by Buddhist social work, and owing to that, the people have not yet recognized professional social work to be unique. Moreover, in Sri Lanka, there has been a tradition that the devotees are more open about their needs and problems with the monks of their temple rather than counsellors who are new to their culture (Thennakoon & et al 2020: 73). Thus, in this cultural context, it will be easier to promote Buddhist social work in Sri Lanka which will provide a reliable service.

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[5] Ashoka: King Ashoka was an Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, who ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from c. 268 to 232 BCE. A grandson of the dynasty's founder Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka promoted the spread of Buddhism across ancient Asia.

7. Sri Lankan Culture

Buddhism is the main religion and the culture that has kept all communities together, and the Buddhist way of living practiced over centuries in Sri Lanka can be identified as the main factor for the specific texture of the Sri Lankan society. In other words, the influence of Buddhism has acted as the key contributor, not only for the corresponding aspects of other religions such as helping the needy, valuing peaceful living etc. but for other aspects that have strengthened other cultural bindings. Social Work and Buddhist teachings have much in common and it is apparent that Buddhist teaching can be precisely introduced to form a consistent social work component that is more acceptable to the communities in Sri Lanka.

Compassion and making others' lives easy is at the core of Buddhist teaching. Therefore, the essence of Buddhist teaching promotes and motivates all human beings to help fellow humans when they are in distress. Not only Buddhism but also all the religious beliefs, Seen in Sri Lanka, motivate people to commit themselves to provide services to fellow beings. Philanthropy was originally motivated by religious teachings. A charity such as almsgiving and volunteer work, considered as social philanthropy, mainly focuses on providing basic needs such as food, and shelter for the people who are deprived. Individuals also engage in social philanthropy. Organized services provided by the government and non-governmental organizations, which are directed towards meeting the needs of the poor are called social service. People, who follow the Buddhist philosophy, believe strongly in their next birth hence they tend to gain credits by engaging in various charity and social service activities in the society. Not only Buddhist people but also Christians, Hindu and Islamic followers also follow the same method as their respective religious institutes encourage them to do so. For instance Islamic followers pay a tax to the mosque in order to help those who are in need, the same as Christian followers also offer dry rations or other things to the church during the mass to distribute among the needy people in the community. These deep-rooted cultural activities encourage social services, helping people and looking after needy, vulnerable persons in our own community. Unfortunately due to these concepts people do not see the need of a scientific way of helping people and they do not see that these concepts encourage dependency whereas social work encourages independency.

Social harmony is greatly influenced by Buddhist teaching. In fact, professional social work emphasizes rights-based approaches[6] in unleashing the potential of the needy in providing solutions. But the harmony-based approaches[7] of Buddhist teaching in unleashing the potential of humans can enrich the social work approaches. The policymakers and strategic managerial personnel are ignorant of the importance of social work in improving the quality of life of people in the country. In addition, the Buddhist monks whose guidance is considered respectfully by the community in solving their problems are not motivated to learn about social work. However, if Buddhist social work is nurtured with teachings from Buddhism, the trend of learning social work and applying it in a broader setting will improve. This requires analytical studies of this nature, the pooling of adequate literature and encouragement to do further research in this regard so that Buddhist social work education will be developed at a sustainable pace.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka is a *Theravāda* Buddhist country and it is recognized by the Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka. Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are engaged in various social services and welfare activities which are similar to social work. Social work is a profession that helps people with problems by developing their strengths to find solutions for their own problems. Further, "Social work is a helping profession" is a very common definition. It is functioning in the areas of social service, social welfare and social development. There are various debates about the definition of social work. Professional social work which originated in western countries does not fit Sri Lanka. This is because Sri Lanka has an encouraging background of values and philanthropy built on Buddhist culture. There are also culturally-built mechanisms to help each other. The teachings of Buddhism have influenced this, for instance in the phrase, *"parattam pati pajjata"* -work for others wellbeing "or" welfare. Buddhist social work is more important to Sri Lankan culture than Western social work. It can best be defined thus: "Buddhist Social Work is

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[6] Strength-based practice is a social work practice theory that emphasizes people's self-determination and strengths. It is a philosophy and a way of viewing clients as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity   Harmony based approach in social work means response to varied social and cultural perspectives on common problems in human development and enhances peace and harmony.

[7] Harmony-based approach in social work means the response to varied social and cultural perspectives on common problems in human development while enhancing peace and harmony.

based on the emancipation of mental and physical suffering of humans, protecting living beings, balancing social needs, sharing wealth and conserving nature."

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Research Notes

None-work as an effective form of Buddhist social work during the Covid-19 pandemic

Huong Nguyen[1]

Abstract

For centuries, the term "Buddhist social work" has suggested tangible activities by Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay followers to help sentient beings end their suffering. These activities range from teaching dharma and counselling people, to conducting spiritual ceremonies. During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, many countries ordered Buddhist temples to stop all physical, in-person community activities to help prevent the spread of the viruses. This unprecedented situation poses an important question: How to perform Buddhist social work when traditional tangible help activities are not possible? In this short research note, I will reflect on "none-work" as an effective form of Buddhist social work practice during the Covid-19 pandemic. "None-work" means to help primarily through radiating inner energy to those in need of help, rather than being busy with physical and verbal actions. It means to radiate/transmit energies of unattachment, calmness, peace, "enough," "no desires," and "beyond duality" to enable help-seekers to also feel "enough" in themselves, thus liberating themselves from their endless desires for more. Buddhist social workers embodying none-work will "work" as if not working, without obligation and delusive significance given to the temporary tasks, goals, and the identity as a worker/helper. The paper will provide examples of none-work and discuss how none-work should be used even after Covid-19.

Keywords: **Buddhist social work, none-work, non-attachment.**

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Introduction

For centuries, the term "Buddhist social work" or "Buddhist work" has suggested a wide range of activities by Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay followers to help sentient beings end their physical and mental suffering. Examples of these activities are teaching meditation and dharma, providing shelter for victims of natural disasters, organizing food and supplies donation drives, counselling people in distress, organizing national and community prayers and ceremonies, providing medical treatment, and even supporting the country during wartime (Nguyen, 2013, 2014). The spirit of Buddhist social work in these cases is for a Buddhist social worker to act, help, serve, and sacrifice tirelessly for the collective. Buddhist social workers must mobilize the strength of their physical body as well as verbal, mental and spiritual faculties to conduct physical tasks to help those in need of help. The foundation for their selfless and non-stop activities is a Boddhisattva mindset, which centers around loving-kindness and compassion for all beings without discrimination (Nguyen, 2013, 2014; Inagaki, Kikuchi, & Gohori, 2020). This form of traditional Buddhist social work can be seen across the Buddhist denomination and nations such as Vietnam, China, and Japan (Mahayana tradition) or Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Myanmar (Theravada tradition).

In Vietnam, for example, there are currently some 19,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries embedded in every village across the country, where about 54,000 practicing monks and nuns provide help to the community on a daily basis (Central Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, 2021). Their activities are supported by millions of Buddhist followers, who provide money, time, labor, and other intangible resources. Together, monastic and lay Buddhist practitioners work throughout the year to help individuals, communities, and societies resolve hunger, poverty, sickness, violence, and other ills of society. Even though these activities are meaningful, they also make Buddhist social workers constantly busy and frequently suffering from burnout and stress. More importantly, the more they provide help, the more requests for help come to them. More money, more medicine, more retreats, more temples, more of everything is needed and yet the suffering of sentient beings does not seem to lessen. The cycle of helping might feel endless and without relief for the Buddhist social workers.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries enforced lockdowns and/or social distancing. Buddhist temples and Buddhist communities themselves were sometimes directly ordered to stop all communal activities in order to help prevent the spread of the viruses. In Thailand, for example, when the Delta variant was spreading fast in mid-2021, the Thai government requested all Buddhist temples to temporarily stop all religious ceremonies, extended travel, or any activities where people gather in closed spaces, including daily sermons and meditation sessions. Monks were requested to refrain from making alms rounds outside the temples, a long-held tradition of Thai monks. In other countries, similar measures were also applied. For a while, all traditional activities of Buddhist communities were stopped. Paradoxically, when the pandemic was raging, people were also having the most difficult time facing sickness, death, fear, anxiety, and chaos, thus they were also in greater need of help from Buddhist social workers. This unprecedented situation poses a fundamental question: How should Buddhist social work be performed when traditional tangible social work activities are not possible?

In this short paper, I will reflect on none-work as an effective form of Buddhist social work practice during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. My reflections are based on personal experiences having stayed full-time in a Buddhist temple in Thailand since May 2018, thus experiencing temple activities before and through different waves of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This paper consists of three parts. In the first part, I will suggest a definition and conceptual foundations of none-work, using examples from the Buddha and the first patriarch of Chinese zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma. In the second part, I will discuss how none-work can be applied during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the third part, I will outline the steps for Buddhist social workers to develop none-work as a personal and professional practice. The paper will conclude with insights about applying none-work after Covid-19.

What is none-work?

Terminologies. As a point of departure, I first want to explain the term "none-work." I use "none-work" instead of non-work because "none-work" does not mean "not working, no work" but instead means "working using the power of beyond-duality mind." "None" is used to mean "none of those, neither this nor that," which means the absence of dual thoughts and classification. "None" means "neither yes or no, have or not have, right or wrong, good or bad." It points to the original state of being before one forms and adds arbitrary thoughts, emotions, opinions, views, beliefs, and meanings onto impermanent phenomena. "None" means an emptiness of attachment and identification with any mental formations. This "none" is the equivalent of the term "Mu" in the famous zen koan recorded in The Gateless Gate, a canonical zen text, about an exchange between master Zhaozhou Congshen and a student:

> Student: Does the dog have a Buddha nature or not?

> Zhaozhou: Mu.

"Mu" can be roughly translated as "has not," "be without," "nothing," "neither." In fact, it does not have a meaning. "Mu" is a sound, not to directly answer the student's question but in fact to uproot the seed of questioning and dwelling within meanings created by questions and answers. "Mu" is not a confirmation that the dog has or has not Buddha nature; but it points to the emptiness (i.e., sunyata) before questions emerge and answers are expected. It cuts the cycle of questions and answers, making the student drop completely and ultimately the self that has been experienced as the constant mental formations that come and go naturally. I refer to this "Mu" as "none." The power of "none" is the power of not being limited into the manifesting physical world or the arbitrary and empty labels given to the physical world. It's the liberation from the limited personhood or individuality.

Two examples of none-work from the greatest Buddhist masters. In the history of Buddhism, the Buddha and great masters helped their disciples to end their suffering through pointing them towards their true nature. That means they pointed to this "Mu" or "None." To understand the power of none, we can examine two examples of none-work from the Gautama Buddha and

Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chinese Buddhism. The first example is a famous event called the "Flower Sermon," often cited as marking the birth of Zen Buddhism and the official transmission of the dharma seal from the Buddha to his successor, Mahākāśyapa (Dumoulin, 2005). Even though the event might be described slightly differently in different accounts, it generally goes as follows: One day, when the Buddha was with his sangha (the assembly of his disciples), a supporter paid respect to the Buddha with a flower and requested him to expound dharma. The Gautama Buddha simply held up the flower without speaking a word. No one in the audience understood except Mahākāśyapa, who smiled. The Buddha then announced:

"I possess the true dharma eye; the divine Nirvana mind; the true form, which is without form;

the subtle dharma gate that does not rest on words or letters but is a special transmission outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahākāśyapa."

In this example, the "special transmission" of "true dharma eye, the divine Nirvana mind" from the Buddha to Mahākāśyapa was done in the absence of a physical action or speech. Even though the Buddha did raise the flower, the "special transmission" actually happened in silence and stillness, without form. It was a direct mind-to-mind transmission where Mahākāśyapa's mind became one with the Buddha's "None" mind. It enabled Mahākāśyapa's liberation from suffering and delusions, which he later transmitted to other Buddhist followers after the Buddha passed away.

The second exemplary case of none-work happened between Bodhidharma and Huike, the first and second patriarchs of Chinese zen Buddhism (Ferguson, 2000). In the history of zen Buddhism, this famous zen story was often described as follows: Huike had been practicing dharma for many years but he was still tormented with an anxious racing mind. Determined to seek enlightenment with Bodhidharma, a new master coming from India and residing in a cave near the Shaolin temple, Huike stood outside Bodhidharma's cave in snow through many days and nights. He eventually cut off one arm to prove his sincerity and determination to seek truth. After Bodhidharma had accepted Huike as his disciple, the first exchange between Huike and Bodhidharma were recorded as follows:

Huike said to Bodhidharma, "My mind is anxious. Please pacify it."

Bodhidharma replied, "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it."

Huike said after some silent moments, "Although I've sought for the mind, I cannot find it."

"There," Bodhidharma replied, "I have pacified your mind."

In what seemed like the fastest and most effective session in Buddhist psychotherapy, Bodhidharma was able to "pacify" Huike's anxious mind without any visible physical action. Again, even though Bodhidharma had used some words to guide Huike, the actual pacification was done in silence. In those silent moments when Huike sought for his mind following Bodhidharma's pointing, Bodhidharma transmitted his "None" to Huike, ending Huike's mental

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suffering. Later, Huike was officially confirmed as the second patriarch who carried on the dharma seal from Bodhidharma to succeeding generations.

Definition of none-work. In both examples above, the Buddha and Bodhidharma had conducted the highest form of Buddhist work: enabling enlightenment and ending of suffering for Mahākāśyapa and Huike. They did so in an instantaneous and powerful manner. A few common characteristics could be recognized in the way the Buddha and Bodhidharma conducted their "work":

- <u>The format of help:</u> The format of help was a direct transmission of an inner "None energy" or "emptiness energy." There was minimal physical and verbal actions involved, serving a supporting role to the mind action.

- <u>The substance/resources of help:</u> The main substance offered was an inner energy born out of the Buddha's and Bodhidharma's enlightenment to the truth that everything was impermanent, without a fixed self, and naturally unattached. Because they were not attached to the "have" and "have not," the "is" and "is-not" the Buddha and Bodhidharma constantly radiated this non-attachment power. They could also see clearly that other people's suffering was rooted in their delusive attachment to their impermanent bodies, mental states, and events inside and outside. The Buddha and Bodhidharma could then point people to "None," helping them to enable "None" in themselves, thus ending their suffering.

- <u>The mechanism of help:</u> Because body, speech, and mind were perfectly united into one in the Buddha and Bodhidharma, their physical action, verbal action, and mind action all radiated that same "none" energy.

- <u>The goal of help:</u> Help was done in order to end the help-seeker's desires at the root rather than externally giving them more of what they felt they needed. In other words, helping was done by making help-seekers stop the seeking entirely.

- <u>The execution of help:</u> There was no sense of urgency or pressure to help, "to get it done now" in the Buddha and Bodhidharma. Help was not perceived as help; work was not perceived as work. The Buddha and Bodhidharma acted with no obligation. Instead there was a sense of ease and absolute clarity in their action.

Based on the above examples, what is none-work then? None-work means, rather than being busy using physical and verbal activities to meet people's needs, a Buddhist social worker helps through transmitting/radiating/enabling an energy of "none," which is an energy of non-attachment, empty of delusion into the manifesting dual world. "None" energy enables people to feel "enough," and stop endless cycles of physical, verbal, and mental becoming. Simply speaking, none-work means to work like it's not work. The ability to conduct none-work is naturally activated when a social worker realizes that works, obligation to work, importance of

work, as well as their view toward workers and help-seekers are all temporary, arbitrary, and make-believe. This deep realization frees them from clinging to work and all work-related beliefs, which in turn allows the inner "none" power to be released. Therefore, a social work embracing none-work sees no difference between assigned tasks with any other daily activities and does not separate work from her whole flowing existence. In fact, all her physical action, verbal action, and mind action carry the same energy characterized by clarity, "empty," "free," and "no obstructions."

It's important to note that none-work does not mean being idle, lazy, passive, rejecting work, or going on a strike. None-work is also not the suppression or negative reaction to working. Instead, none-work is the freedom from work by naturally integrating work into one's liberated being. In this way, a social worker gets work done simply by being. And it's exactly in this manner that a Buddhist social worker embracing none-work will be able to work around the clock without burnout.

Table 1. The essence of none-work

Goals of none-work	Short-term: None-work aims to end people's desire to have more, help them feel enough in the present. Long-term: Enlightened to truth and end of all suffering.
Means to execute none-work	Inner "none" power is the primary means; physical and verbal actions are supporting means.
The worker	Let go of the view "I am the worker. I am the helper. I must work. I am the only one who can do the work."
The work	All works are seen as temporary and make-believe as work. No longer have the view "This work is important. This work must be done now. This work must be done in this way…"
The receivers of work results	Let go of the view "They need my work. They need my help. They cannot survive without help."
Evaluation of work	Do work without expectation and attachment to the end results of the work because the worker understands that the results depend on many karmic factors rather than the worker's wishes and efforts.

None-work during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic created an unprecedented massive need for Buddhist social work because it impacted everyone. Hundreds of millions of people directly suffered from sickness, sudden loss of family members, loss of job and income, loss of housing and shelter, separation and isolation, distrust, hatred, discrimination, and violence. Yet, lock-down or social distancing policies made it difficult or impossible for Buddhist social workers to conduct their traditional

help activities. In this situation, none-work might provide the best help to people in need because (1) it emphasizes the use of mind power rather than physical and verbal actions, (2) it cuts the roots of people's problems: desires. Table 2 provides examples of how none-work can be applied during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 2: Examples of none-work during the Covid-19 pandemic

Traditional Buddhist social work	*None-work as Buddhist social work*
Teach dharma every day, using a lot of words, explanations, supporting materials	Teach less, using the power of emptiness, inner peace, and non-attachment to all dualities.
Teach people how to have good health, good job, good family, good career, good life, etc.	Teach people to be okay regardless of good or bad health, good or bad job, good or bad family, good or bad career, etc. Teach them the impermanent nature of things, including Covid-19, sickness, death, family, job, housing, happiness, or anything.
Give food, medicine, shelter, etc…	Give "no food is ok, sickness is ok, no home is ok too. It's all impermanent."
A lot of travel, meetings, ceremonies, retreats, projects….	At home, content, feel enough, send out "no worry" and "stopping" energy.
Build bigger and more temples, create more dharma groups, organize more retreats, expand Buddhist followers, etc.	Online temple, teach people self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-contentment.
Donation drives, charity, etc.	Use only what we have. Feel enough in what we have. Beyond the haves and have-nots.

If none-work is applied, it will create a new kind of people and new way of living during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. This new kind of people is self-sufficient, free of fears and attachment to what is temporarily manifesting in their life and the world. Their mind, body, and speech are united as one, thus their every movement radiates an inner peace, freedom and light. They embody a new way of living in which natural non-attachment is the foundation. They use the totality of body, mind, and speech to help others without delusions into the importance of help, the helper, or those in need of help. They live in a voidness and radiate that voidness, absent of greed and attachment, to all. In other words, they will be living Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on earth.

How to develop none-work as a social work practice?

To cultivate none-work as a social work practice, it is important to be enlightened to the truth that all things – work, tasks, needs, the worker, the help-seeker – are all impermanent, constantly changing, coming and going on their own. Any significance given to temporary work, tasks, needs, the worker, the help-seeker is make-believe and will lead to suffering. This enlightenment automatically enables one's liberating power that can be shared to help others.

To facilitate the realization of one's "none" power, a Buddhist social worker can follow these steps:

•   Step 1 (Reviewing): Review his current views and attitudes towards his own body, mental habits, sense of self, relationships, his work, the importance of work to himself, his identity as a social worker, and those in need of help. He can develop a map of knots where any physical and mental habits, views, opinions, tasks, assignments, roles, people, and work-related aspects to which he feels an attachment and/or suffering is identified as a "knot" that he needs to untie.

•   Step 2 (Untying): After identifying the map of knots, he can untie these knots through the tool of renunciation. He can recite the renunciation statement mentally or out loud: "I renounce the delusive attachment to…

-        This habit of the body (e.g., eating, drinking, sleeping, using the body, etc.)

-        This habit of the mind (e.g., worrying, over-analyzing, criticizing, etc.)

-        This tendency in relating to such and such person (e.g., mother, father, spouse, children, co-workers, etc.)

-        The importance of work, jobs, tasks, helping.

-        My views, opinions, and attitudes towards goals, targets, achievements, what constitutes "a good job."

-        My attachment/fixation to certain ways of working and expectations for certain kinds of work results.

-        My self-importance through working and helping.

-        My belief that others need my help and cannot survive without my help.

-        My belief that others' needs are real and urgent instead of being impermanent.

-      <u>Step 3 (Radiating):</u> After untying the work knots, he can practice radiating out the none-work energy by frequently making a radiating statement, either mentally or out loud in words: "I wish to share all my good energies to everyone and the world, without discrimination."

When the above steps have been followed for a sufficient time, delusive attachment to work will be unwound and be uprooted, allowing none-power to prevail. A social worker will be able to work with lightness, efficiency, and joy, constantly and naturally radiating a liberating energy to help those around her end their suffering.

Conclusion

In this short research note, I have proposed and discussed the concept of "none-work" as an effective form of Buddhist social work. Enlightened Buddhist masters and practitioners have practiced it for thousands of years. In our busy and challenging era, none-work is ever important and applicable. None-work should be embraced not only during but also after the Covid-19 pandemic in order to benefit all sentient beings.

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Activities reports & Case studies

"Assistance" of a Buddhist Monastery during COVID 19: The Case of Erdene Zuu Monastery

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Abstract

This article describes the humanitarian activities of a local monastery named Erdene Zuu, located in Uvurkhangai, Mongolia. The Erdene Zuu monastery is one of the historical monasteries of Mongolia. The authors collected qualitative data on the Monastery's humanitarian activities to learn about the purpose and background of the humanitarian activities of the Monastery. To collect primary and secondary data, the authors used in-depth interviews involving lamas with different ranks, observed the activities and measures of the Erdene Zuu Monastery, and reviewed information and documents shared on the website and social media about the Monastery. The qualitative data showed that between 20 and 28 lamas with different ranks stay in the Monastery, depending on the season.

Furthermore, the qualitative data showed that the Monastery runs spiritual, functional, and philanthropical activities. For example, due to Covid restrictions, the Monastery has started online services that were perceived as emotional support to stimulate immunity and solidarity of the community. In addition, monks provided emotional and material support to local police during the lockdown of COVID. In the end, the Monastery assisted families in regards to state child protection and emergency interventions. The authors were keen to understand the meaning of monks' terms of "assistance" and interpret their meaning into terms of Buddhist social work.

Keywords: **Assistance, Buddhist monastery, Covid pandemic**

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About Erdene Zuu Monastery

The Erdene Zuu monastery is one of the historical monasteries of Mongolia. The Erdene Zuu Monastery was founded on the ruins of the ancient capital of Mongolia, Kharkhorum, in 1586 and is located 380 km from Ulaanbaatar, present-day Kharkhorin soum. Since that time, Erdene Zuu has been considered an important place among Buddhist communities. However, the monastery was damaged in the 16th century because of the war. During the socialist years, the monastery's activities and religious beliefs were limited, so the Monastery's activities were suppressed from 1939 until 1990, and it operated only as a museum. After 1990, the Erdene Zuu monastery became an active place for Buddhist communities and an exciting museum for international and local tourists. Altogether 28 lamas, including the *Khanbo* (head lama), *lovon* lama (spiritual master of the monastery), *geshgui* lama (lama of discipline), lama (monks) and *bandikhai* (students), stay in the Monastery area during summer, and 20 lamas remain during winter. The Lavrin temple serves as the central gathering place for lamas and prayers. According to the common practice of Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia, its main activities are daily gatherings and events on major Buddhist holidays.

Assistance of Erdene Zuu Monastery

Mongols have engaged in nomadic pastoralism over a vast territory. Due to the severe continental climate and the herders' lifestyle, Mongols have enjoyed a communal way of life, assembling a nomadic tent, making felt, preparing foods, etc., together with neighbours (Gombo, 1997). On the other hand, the tradition of mutual support among Mongols is associated with Buddhism, the dominant religion in this country. According to recent studies, Buddhist temples have played and still play important roles, offering charity and mental support for vulnerable groups in society (Jargalsaikhan & Oyut-Erdene, 2018). These studies show that Buddhist monasteries in every corner of Mongolia organize humanitarian activities such as child care, public health, care for the elderly, and community development. Like other Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia, the Erdene Zuu monastery has contributed to the well-being of society. Based on field research, we have divided the assistance of Erdene Zuu during the pandemic into three types: spiritual support, philanthropic activities, and social activities (Erdenechuluun, 2022).

Spiritual support

Spiritual support of the Monastery mainly focuses on organizing monks' gatherings for prayers to build peace and reduce the stresses and anxieties of their community. Until December 2020, worshipers were able to visit the Monastery giving donations for services. But, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Monastery could not function as the laypersons were used to. Thus, as the monks explained, the Monastery has started online services for its blessings, providing emotional support to stimulate the community's immunity and solidarity. According to a head of the Monastery, monks provide public education through delivering spiritual lectures and talks on "Love and Compassion," "Prayer of Um Mani Padme hum mantra," "Mantra prayer of Avalokitesvara," and ads and promotion about giving and helping others.

Philanthropic activities

During the pandemic, the Erdene Zuu Monastery organized philanthropic activities such as fundraising and assistance for vulnerable groups. For example, a survey was conducted with local governments to identify the most vulnerable households, and 50 families with young children were selected. As a result, the monastery gave 50,000 MNT to each family. In 2020, a visit was made to the orphanage of the Church of Christ, giving children gifts and other items. In 2021, the monastery monks raised half of the cost of renovating the local hospital. This year, some local mothers and children received gifts for Children's Day. As the pandemic spread, local authorities were given 500,000 masks. In addition, the monastery supported the establishment of the COVID-19 Unit at the first referral hospital by donating three million *tugriks* (Erdenechuluun, 2022).

Social activities

Besides spiritual support and philanthropic activities, the monastery plays a leading role in community work, by increasing knowledge and changing behavior, attitude, and the lifestyles of local people. Community work at the Erdene Zuu Monastery can be broadly categorized as public education, community development, and organization. For example, the Monastery has implemented public education projects to reduce the stresses and anxieties of local people and increase the life skills of people with disabilities. In this context, an essay competition on compassion was organized among local secondary school children. In terms of community development and organization, monks managed the pandemic prevention work in cooperation with the local police. In addition, monks provided emotional and material support to local police officers during the lockdown of COVID.

Lama/monks' perceptions about humanitarian activities

As mentioned above, we have conducted several interviews with lamas and monks. Lamas or monks of the Erdene Zuu Monastery perceive that their humanitarian activities are closely related to Buddhist philosophy and practice. Lamas or monks who participated in the interview defined their humanitarian activities as follows (Baasansuren, 2021):

- The main activity of the Monastery
- A part of a reform of the Buddhist community
- Social roles of Lamas/monks,
- A part of Buddhist Philosophy
- Social responsibility

Lamas and monks see that their humanitarian activities are different from social work. In fact, they think the Monastery can develop their current philanthropic activities towards Buddhist Social Work by cooperating with academic institutions. Monks perceived all these humanitarian activities that are a part

of the functions and philosophy of the Monastery, roles and social responsibilities of lamas and monks, and reform of the Buddhist community.

Conclusion

To sum up, a local and historical Buddhist monastery named Erdene Zuu delivers three types of humanitarian work: spiritual support, philanthropic activities, and community works. Lamas perceive that their support, charity, and community works are closely related to Buddhist philosophy and practice. Monastery lamas and monks distinguish their support and charity from social work; however, they think current charity work can contribute to Buddhist Social Work. As social work researchers, we see that different pathways exist in Mongolia in terms of helping others. These include natural helping, humanitarian work including Buddhist assistance, and social work.

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Thai Sangha Response to COVID 19:
A Case Study of Wat Tanod, Bang Kruai District, Nonthaburi Province, Thailand

Dr. Kittawan Sarai, Sopa Onopas[1]

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand[2] is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease which began in 2019. Thailand was the first country to report a case outside China, on January 13, 2020. The Thai government's response to the outbreak was initially based on surveillance and contact tracing, though it was late to implement clear quarantine measures. In response to the first outbreak, the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency, effective on March 26 2020. Lockdown measures were implemented in varying degrees throughout the country, with public venues and businesses ordered to close. The public has cooperated relatively well with health advisories, and the country's robust public health infrastructure has been credited as a contributing factor to its relatively successful initial response.

The COVID-19 outbreak affects all segments of the population and is particularly detrimental to members of those social groups in the most vulnerable situations, and it continues to affect populations, including people living in poverty situations, older persons, homeless people, persons with disabilities, youth, and migrant workers. Early evidence indicates that that the health and economic impacts of the virus are being borne disproportionately by poor people. For example, homeless people, because they may be unable to safely shelter in place, are highly exposed to the danger of the virus. The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in millions of people losing their jobs and their income. People live from hand to mouth when their workplace is closed for several days. They hardly are able to buy food for their family members.

Response from Monks and Temples

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Buddhism was once a dominant force in Thai society, but urbanization and social changes in the modern world has reduced the importance of temples and monks. Nowadays, temples are places for performing Buddhist religious activities and where monks sacrifice their secular lives to live in temples, living a simple life, studying and propagating the Dharma. However, each temple has its own special significance. For example, some temples focus on being a place of meditation and educational institutions for monks and novices, while some focus on sacred objects that bring good luck or supernatural holiness. But when there is a crisis in community, temples that have resources or things necessary for life will immediately be giving, sacrificing, and sharing their own wealth with others in order to eliminate greed and selfishness. Giving, or "*dana,*" is one of 4 principles of *Sangkhavatthu*, which is a dharma precept aimed at integrating family and community members into a bonded group so that they can be more helpful to one another. This precept can be practiced by monks and laymen.

When the coronavirus outbreak occurred, some Buddhist temples responded promptly to provide free meals and surgical masks to vulnerable people. Although the temples have no money, but they have dry food and necessities that people donate to the temple for merits, so they are able to cook and distribute to the people who are in trouble. The temple is the center of the community, and the people around the temple are often people who "live from hand to mouth," selling odds and ends or taking odd jobs. When they have no work in the capital, no farm back home, and they cannot access state relief, another center of resources, like the temple, becomes the place to rely on.

All monks are under the rule of the Supreme Council. The administration of the Sangha Supreme is organized in a hierarchical manner, i.e. regional level, provincial level, district level, and sub-district level, and the abbot governs the monks, novices, nuns, people who live in the temple and in the religious places within the temple area. Therefore, the Supreme Patriarch made an announcement for all temples with the capacity to help the people to do so. The National Buddhism Office coordinated temples throughout the kingdom that have sufficient potential establishment of almsgiving with those that have had difficulty during the Covid-19 pandemic situation. This is not a compulsion but is a guideline for cooperation, considering the readiness of each temple with respect to the support from the government, private sector, and civil society in that community. A total of 914 alms canteens were established across the country. Some temples have developed a mobile alms canteen to reach the community. In this regard, there are 274,000 people receiving help per day, spending a budget of 10.9 million baht per day. People have to go through a screening, wear a mask and distance themselves. As for the cooking, there are volunteer cooks who have been affected and were not able to open the shop during the COVID-19 period, who had to take a temperature screening and wash their hands before cooking. In addition, Thai temples in foreign countries have set up almshouses as well to help Thais and foreigners affected by COVID-19 and the poor.[3]

In 2021, when the number of infected people was more than 20,000 per day, the number of hospital beds was not enough to accommodate all patients. As a result, some patients died at home while waiting to be admitted into the hospital. Some temples became field hospitals or waiting centers for patients with mild symptoms. When a patient died from coronavirus in the early stages of the outbreak, people were afraid of getting infected. They did not want temples in

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[3] Thai BPH. (2020). Temples across Thailand have set up 914 alms canteens to help Thai people fight COVID-19. Retrieved May 13, 2020, from https://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/292386

their communities to cremate the dead. Some temples therefore needed to explain to the people in the community to help them understand that they were not infected by the funeral and that they provided measures to perform the funeral safely. Even when the undertaker, who managed the funeral in cremation, refused to do his job, the monks had to act instead. Most temples are able to respond to the suffering of the people by setting up almshouses in just a few days, but they soon ran out of money or donations. There are only a few temples that can continue their activities, and Wat Tanod, Bang Kruai District, Nonthaburi Province is one such example.

A Case Study of Wat Tanod Temple
      Wat Tanod[4] is a small 200-year-old temple located in an old orchard community with a population of about 300 people. It is in Nonthaburi Province, next to Bangkok. It is one of twelve temples in the Wat Chalor Sub-district which is governed by Wat Chalor Sub-district primate/dean in Bang Kruai District. Most temples in the Wat Chalor sub-district provide almshouses for people in the community and nearby communities but have limited resources, so they cannot provide alms canteens to people every day. Therefore, the Wat Chalor sub-district network helped set up different food distribution schedules so people in need can go and get food almost every day. Wat Tanod is a temple that has been doing activities to help people who are suffering from COVID-19 from the beginning of 2020 until the present in 2022. The abbot of Wat Tanod has been declared an outstanding monk who develops public welfare (social work). He has been working to help people who have been suffering from COVID-19 with various activities as follows:

      The abbot of Wat Tanod established a canteen to distribute cooked food to those in need with the support of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand. As the situation of the epidemic worsened, he changed the approach to home delivery using a team of volunteers. Some families are not able to eat a prepared meal, or the food may spoil, therefore he uses a coupon which can be exchanged for food at the participating restaurants within the period specified in the coupon. The coupon is supported by some restaurants at half the usual price. In other words, the temple pays only half to the restaurants, and the other half is considered a merit-making event with the temple.

      When the situation of infected people was overwhelming, the hospital was unable to accommodate all of the patients. The government has encouraged patients with mild symptoms to stay at home or isolate at home. The Wat Tanod temple has provided the patients with home care boxes which contain a thermometer, a fingertip pulse oximeter, medical masks, paracetamol, alcohol hand sanitizer gel and Thai herbs for sore throats and fever. Wat Tanod supports the use of Thai herbs to strengthen health care, and prevents the spread of coronavirus by distributing herbal drinks and herb seedlings.

      Monks often visit bedridden patients at home with community health volunteers, bringing essential supplies and dry food. During the COVID-19 pandemic, monks and health volunteers have distributed food and talked to villagers, giving villagers peace of mind. The community of Wat Tanod has had good surveillance and prevention of COVID-19 throughout the past year of the outbreak, and not a single person in the Wat Tanod community has contracted the virus. At

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[4] Bangkruai Municipality. (2022). Tourist attraction. Retrieved February 20, 2022, from
https://bangkruaicity.go.th/th/attractions/view/41

the beginning of September 2021, the first case was reported. Since then, the community has allowed the cremation of the bodies of those who died from the coronavirus.

Aside from free meals and necessities for poor people, which is physical assistance, Wat Tanod and monks are reasserting their role as a key source of moral support for those in need, by creating online Dharma teaching clips for people to get dharma insights as a guideline for dealing with stress and anxiety. There are only 11 monks live in the temple, but they can do various social work activities to help people during the covid pandemic because:

1. Abbots and monks faithful to the teachings of the Lord Buddha should help people in trouble.

2. The temple has a variety of volunteers to design the development plan of the temple and community. For example, there is a group of the well-educated senior citizen volunteers, a group of organic plant and Thai herbal volunteers, a volunteer group from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, and general volunteer groups, etc.

3. Wat Tanod is supported by a group of donors from the private, public and government sectors because the temple has a clear goal to improve the quality of life of the people nearby the temple. It is not involved in the construction of large buildings or idols to worship, or other sacred things such as the current trend of influencing people to enter temples as seen in other temples today.

4. There are progressive young monks, who are creative are well coordinated with all sectors in organizing activities.

Conclusion

Now in Thailand, there have been 2,217,287 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, with 21,647 deaths, 2,695 active cases and 2,162,138 recovered.[5] It can be seen that the epidemic situation has continued for 2 years. It has had many effects, both directly and indirectly, such as sickness from COVID-19, economic downturn, unemployment, business disruption, insufficient number of hospital beds for infected people, delayed vaccines, etc. This situation has forced people to find a way to survive and they have turned to rely on monks and temples again.

There are 42,879 temples across the country, but the temples with the ability to set up alms canteens are only 914 temples, or 2.1 percent. This statistic leads us to wonder whether there may be more temples that do other forms of social work based on their abilities and interests. Or perhaps the large number of people affected by the coronavirus has made so it impossible to make donations during the coronavirus pandemic so therefore, some temples may not have the resources to help the people. But the case of Wat Tanod showed that if the temple applies an integrated linking of networks to participate in working together as partners, there can be support for activities such as people, money, and things coming to the temple to improve quality of life of the people.

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Utility of Buddhist counselling to reduce family conflicts during the COVID- 19 pandemic

G.H.Kethumali[1]

Abstract

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. COVID-19 is a catastrophic condition causing suffering to the people of the world which they never before experienced. Different countries are taking different measures to control it. Many families in Sri Lanka have been affected by the pandemic. Government policies to mitigate the spread of infection have resulted in increased rates of unemployment, changes in work and family life, school closures, social isolation, and separation among family members. This pandemic situation has uniquely affected children and families by disrupting routines and changing relationships and roles especially in low-income families. In this situation, the government as well as various private institutions and welfare organizations are organizing various activities to uplift the lives of the affected people. Meanwhile, various social welfare services are being coordinated by Buddhist temples. Buddhist counselling is a Buddhist teaching-based process that suggests solutions to people's mental problems and difficulties and promotes mental relief. The objective of this study is to explore how Buddhist counselling can be used to alleviate conflicts in families based on Buddhist teachings in the face of this pandemic situation. This study is based on primary and secondary data and is expected to be described by case studies.

Keywords: **COVID 19, Buddhist counselling, Family conflict, Anxiety**

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1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Covid-19 is a catastrophic condition which has caused suffering to the people of the world never before. Different countries are taking different measures to control the virus. The Sri Lankan government and citizens are taking many actions to control Covid-19. But many families in Sri Lanka have been affected by the pandemic. This pandemic situation has uniquely affected children and families by disrupting routines, and changing relationships and roles especially low-income families. According to Eliot and Merrill, "Family is the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children" Murdock (1949) defines the family as a "social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction". The structure of the family which keeps transforming depends on many factors such as culture and needs of a society. "Family" is also explained as a social arrangement developed to ensure the perpetuation and propagation of the species. The uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic, limitations in health care resources, physical distancing measures, financial losses due to unemployment and loss of earnings, could lead to emotional distress and have psychological manifestations. The psychological sequela of the Covid-19pandemic is still emerging. In this period, there is an increased prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms, post-traumatic stress symptoms and psychological stress in the general population. More psychological distress was shown to be associated with the female gender, younger individuals, those with the presence of chronic physical/mental illnesses, unemployed persons, students, and those with a high exposure to news concerning the pandemic. Responses to emotional frustration could lead to unhealthy ways of coping, such as substance use and non-compliance with public safety measures. Therefore, Buddhist counselling is the proper approach to address this issue. Buddhist counselling is a term used by some scholars to describe the process of a Buddhist practitioner that utilizes Buddhist teachings and interventions to help an individual reduce suffering (Rungreangkulkij&Wongtakee, 2008). Buddhist counselling helps the patient to understand the realistic situation in human-life and- helps to build up their well-being.

A history of treatment for psychological illness is the most significant risk factor for exacerbation of psychological distress (Yamamotoet al., 2020; Zhao et al, 2020). "Studies indicate that loneliness, long periods spent at home, poor health status, deterioration of

relationships with family, high-level concerns about Covid-19 including sleeplessness, deterioration of household and work conditions, and academic difficulties are associated with psychological distress" (Yamamoto et al, 2020; Zhao et al, 2020).Currently, various methods are being explored to alleviate the conflicts faced by the family. "Counselling is an art and science. It's a short term, interpersonal, theory based, helping profession. Its aim is to resolve developmental and situational difficulties. Counselling helps to bring change in life"(S.M.S Kabir, 2017).

The teachings of the Buddha are very important for the well-being of a person's life. Counselling based on those teachings is now gaining more and more attention. It also creates the mental strength in people to face the current epidemic confronting the world. Buddhist counselling helps to minimize family conflicts during the pandemic period. However, the purpose of this study is to identify the utility of Buddhist counselling to reduce family conflicts during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Literature review

COVID-19

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses belonging to the family of coronavirus diseases, which infect both animals and humans. "Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS- CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). A novel corona virus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. "In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death"(WHO, 2021).

Health and Mental Health

Webster's Dictionary (1913) defines health as "the state of being hale, sound or whole in body and mind or soul, especially, the state of being free from physical diseases or pain". Health is defined in the WHO constitution of 1948 as "a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity" (WHO,1948.p.2).

Mental Health is state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to makea contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2001:1). Mental health is the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual well-being. Mental health provides individuals with the vital skills necessarily for active living, to achieve goals in ways that are respectful and just (Vic Health, 2005.p.67). With major mental illnesses, the individual can lose his/her ability of realizing his/her own abilities, coping capacity, working productively and fruitfully and making a contribution to her/his community. These three dimensions are interconnected and it are related to mental health. Mental health is perhaps the most important thing for human beings living in society. Mental illness is fast developing to become the number one cause of morbidity in the world (WHO, 2001). As reported by the WHO-(2001), surveys in several developed countries have revealed that more than 25% of the ordinary persons manifest one or more mental disorders during their lifetime. Mental health problems of different degrees are common, and can affect anyone. Research by Sri Lankans has shown that at any given time about 10% of the people suffer from significant mental disorders and about 2% suffer from serious mental illnesses (Suman,2000).

Family and Family Conflict

Family is defined in different ways by sociologists. Family is also the basic institution in society. Therefore, the well-being of the family is most important for all human-beings and society. "A family is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, adult members of which assume responsibility for caring for children. Kinship ties are connected between individuals, established either through marriage or through the lines of descent that connect blood relatives" (Giddens,2006)."Conflict is defined in terms of differences among members – whether these

pertain to differences in values, attitudes or interests." Conflict may manifest itself in a variety of psychological, emotional states and specific conduct behaviours" (Farrington &Chertok, 1993).Behaviours may range from expressions of mild disagreement to hostile verbal exchanges or the physical abuse of one family member by another. Conflict may occur over any number of issues.

Buddhist Counselling

Buddhist counselling is a term used by some scholars to describe the process of a Buddhist practitioner who utilizes Buddhist teachings and interventions to help an individual reduce suffering (Rungreangkulkij & Wongtakee, 2008). This is an ancient form of counselling originated by the Buddha who consoled many individuals from everyday problems to severe emotional disturbances, such as grief and loss. Contemporary Buddhist counseling is comprised of many different forms and modalities according to the practitioners' tradition, practices, and personal preferences.

The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha has presented the Four Noble Truths to explain the nature and origins of dukkha, a Pali term that is often translated as suffering or dissatisfaction (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011). The First Noble Truth states that *dukkha* is inevitable since the unavoidable conditions of life, such as birth, aging, disease and death, are fraught with suffering (Aich, 2013). The Second Noble Truth asserts that *dukkha* is caused by *tanhā*, which is a Pali term that is described as craving and insatiable thirst (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011). The Third Noble Truth claims that *dukkha* can be eliminated through the cessation of *tanhā*, and the Fourth Noble Truth postulates that *tanhā* can be extinguished by following the Eightfold Path. Some traditional Buddhist teachings further categorize craving as the three poisons: clinging, an uncontrolled desire to grasp onto objects of satisfaction; aversion, reactions to resist any experience of dissatisfaction; and ignorance, the lack of awareness of the laws of cause and effect, especially the associations between one's actions and suffering.

Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is the "Buddhist Ethics" that guide people on how to live their lives in a way that eliminates *dukkha* and attains nirvana through eight core elements (Aich, 2013). These eight core elements are divided into three groups, which are wisdom (*prajña*), virtue (*śīla*) and meditation (*samādhi*) (Maex, 2011).

Wisdom or prajña is comprised of right view and right thought. Right view is the clear view of life's impermanence and imperfections, and the clear understanding that *dukkha* arises from clinging, aversion and ignorance (Davids, 2003). Right thought is the cultivation and selection of good thoughts over bad thoughts. Since desires are thoughts, people are to discard such negative thoughts to reduce suffering and achieve peace.

Sila or virtue consists of right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Right speech is the act of only saying what is necessary so that one does not perpetuate the habit of speaking frivolously and/or gossiping. Right action is how one should act so that one does not bring harm to others by engaging in any of the following: killing, stealing, sensuality, lying, and becoming intoxicated (Aich, 2013). Right livelihood is the practice of living in a way that is both honest and non-detrimental to oneself and/or others.

Samadhi or meditation includes right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (Aich, 2013). Right effort is the persistent determination one should have when fostering the good qualities of the mind and eliminating the bad qualities during hardships, such as struggles and failures. Right mindfulness is the ability to redirect one's conscious awareness to the task at hand. Right concentration is the skill of removing unnecessary thoughts that are distracting one's focus while engaging in a task.

Karma

In Buddhism, karma is an essential teaching of causality which describes cause, conditions, and effect, and assumes every action produces a responsive reaction (Neale, 2011). It emphasizes the significance of one's actions, speech and mind since these factors continuously produce future events and/or experiences. The current experiences one faces are the products of one's past

behaviours and intentions, and the future experiences are determinant on how one behaves and thinks in the present. In order to generate good karma and happiness, it is important to engage in virtuous acts and thoughts that are positive for one and others. Engaging in non-virtuous behaviours and thoughts that bring harm to others will create suffering (Neale, 2011).

2.1. *Theoretical Analysis*

Labelling Theory

Baker, Lemert, Goffman, Matsueda and Brown are the most important sociologists of label theory. Various elements of society operate on the nature of frequent interactions among individuals. Every person has their assigned roles and functions within the society. The sociologists also provide a variety of interpretations that society has developed in order to accomplish those tasks. The various interpretations of individual behaviour can also lead to the ostracism of those individuals. Anyone who acts contrary to social norms and values is considered an outcast. Such people are viewed as influential in the behaviour of society. But it is possible that these individuals may have been affected by some defect in social behaviour.

People who were exposed to Covid-19 are being labelled in society today. But that is not fair. Every human-being has the right to consider that they are living part of society. To get rid of the negative social repercussions of the pandemic, people need to be given the opportunity to live in the society by having the opportunity to do their roles assigned to them in the society.

Person in Environment

In the concept of the person in the environment, the focus is on people of different levels living in different environments. It describes how the environment affects people and how the person makes contact with the environment. An individual cannot live alone without environmental connections. Humans are connected through a wide variety of relationships. These can be good or bad relationships. Family, school, friends and places of worship are important for this purpose. The good relationships help people to live a good life, while the negative impact of relationships

lead to a failure in life. According to this concept, every person living in the society is in touch with the environment around them. They live in severe physical and mental distress due to the breakdown of relationships and the social distance caused by the pandemic. This situation creates conflicts within the family. Against such a background, Buddhist counselling plays a vital role.

3. Methodology

Research Design and Research Problem

A descriptive research design was used for this study. It describes the importance of the proper family functions. It also describes Covid-19 and how it influences the family functions. It describes the reasons and coping mechanisms for these conflicts.

What are the significance of Buddhist counselling mechanisms in minimizing family conflicts caused by the Covid-19 epidemic?

Main Objective

The objective of this study is to explore how Buddhist counselling can be used to alleviate conflicts in families based on Buddhist teachings in the face of Covid-19 pandemic situation.

Sub-objectives

- To identify the reasons for conflict within the family
- To study existing coping mechanisms for mental health problems within the context of family
- To study how Buddhist counselling can be used to reduce family conflicts

Study area

This study was conducted in Padukka Divisional Secretariat, Colombo District in the Western Province, Sri Lanka. The people who are living in this area belong to,upper class families. The upper-class families are involved in cultivation while middle-class families are employed in governmental and non-governmental sections.

Sampling Method and Sample Size

Families were selected using a purposive sampling method based on the severity of the problems and nature of the needs of the participants. According to this research, five case studies were selected for the sample. The data was collected from the respondents who were facing conflict with their family members.

Data Collection Process

The primary tool used in the research to collect information was semi-structured interviews and case studies. Semi-structured interviews were taken from professionals working for the well-being of these families including counsellors, psycho-social workers and relevant field workers. The case studies were taken from selected people, who are suffering from family conflict and mental health disorders. The researcher and helping group met the persons who were involved in the case and interviews.

Data Analysis

"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing,and reporting patterns within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in detail. However it also often goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic" (Boyatzis, 1998).

This study used thematic analysis as a data analysis method. The researcher made themes according to the research questions and developed the data analysis. Case studies were analyzed in the same way and at the same time when the interview results were analyzed. This method created a more robust and more flexible background for the data analysis.

Limitations of the study

This study was conducted during the pandemic period. Every person was following the social distancing guidelines, because of Covid-19. During the discussion they were much more willing

to talk about their economic problems rather than psychosocial needs and coping mechanisms. When, mental health related professionals were interviewed, they expressed their own opinions and sometimes they did not discuss real life situations. These things created difficult situations for the researcher.

4. Analysis of data

From the data obtained in this study, it is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected people at all levels of society. The existing problems are socially, economically and psychologically classified and given below.

Social Needs

Social needs are very important for human existence. A person's well-being can be built by satisfying his physical, mental and social needs. But the Covid-19 epidemic created social isolation in the society. It was a new experience for people. In the face of this social distance, those infected with the virus were also isolated from society. One person said, *"I recently became infected with the Covid-19 virus. My friends do not like to meet and talk to me as usual."* With this situation loneliness was created among the people and they suffered a severe mental breakdown. They were also labeled in the society. This study has revealed that people living in a family face various stressful situations as well as conflict situations due to social distance.

Economical Needs

Sri Lanka has collapsed economically in the face of the Covid-19 epidemic. People have lost their livelihoods and sources of income. They have to go beyond their normal lifestyle and find additional money for health care. In such a situation, people's income is not adequate to meet even the daily food needs of children. Many people say, *"This income is not enough for all the family work.*" People who work to earn a living on a daily basis miss out on those opportunities due to travel restrictions. Another person said*, "I work in a small shop near my house. I make a*

little money and can manage our needs. But these days the shops are closed due to the pandemic. I do not know. What am I doing?"

Psychological Needs

It is clear that the Covid-19 epidemic has made people stressful over living economically and socially. A lifestyle that is different from the normal one has been created and having to move away from each other is the main reason for creating the stressful situation. Mental illness has developed in people who could not tolerate this condition. Also, family members who are involved in various negative activities such as drug abuse are under severe pressure. Another respondent stated, *"Some persons need psychiatric treatments. But some are not aware of that and they don't like to take treatments. After that we can provide counselling while talking the treatment and the other professional interventions are most important.*

In this way, the problems and needs that the people experience can lead to family breakdown due to conflicts within the family. This situation also causes long-term physical and mental distress. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased anxiety among people who already struggle with anxiety disorders such as germ phobia and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders (Asmundson et al., 2020). Studies indicate that loneliness, long periods spent at home, poor health status, deterioration of relationships with family, high-level concerns about Covid-19 including sleeplessness, deterioration of household and work conditions, and academic difficulties are all associated with psychological distress (Yamamoto et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020)

Table 1: Formal and Informal Coping Mechanisms

Formal	Informal
Counsellors – (Buddhist Counselling)	Within the family members
Psychiatric Ward of the Hospital	Religious Leaders

Gramaniladari of the area	Elders of the family
Police Station	Open discussion with family members
Psychiatric Social Worker	

Source: Field Survey (2021)

People who are severely affected physically, mentally and socially by the coronavirus try to find various methods to improve their condition. These methods can be categorized as formal or informal. It depends on the knowledge, attitude and needs of the individual. But according to this study, more and more people are trying to solve their problems through informal methods. The monks and elders of the village temple come together and make various interventions for the needy families. One interviewee said, "*Our monks always help me to reduce burden in my mind. I think any one cannot help me.*"

The main reason why some people try to solve problems through these traditional informal methods is that most people do not have proper awareness. Individuals do not seek treatment, especially because of social stigma and isolation about mental stress and mental illness. According to the information obtained from the field, there is a great deal of involvement of government agencies as well as the private sector in minimizing the physical and psychological and social needs and problems of human beings. It was revealed that it is very important to create a good mental background especially in individuals. Accordingly, counselling should be done primarily. Buddhist counseling comes first in terms of religious intervention. One respondent said, *"Always madam in the hospital, I can talk to her about everything in my life"*

Buddhist Teachings

The main purpose of this study is to identify the root causes of conflict in the families of people affected by the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic, and to study the methods used by individuals to cope with the mental illness. Among those methods, this study aims to examine the importance of Buddhist counselling on the nature of the families studied.

Religious intervention is very important for people who are suffering from depression due to a catastrophic situation. The reasons for this are clear from the study of human being's faith and devotion to religious leaders. In such a context the importance of Buddhist counselling is emphasized. The minds of the people are formed through the sermons of the Buddha based on the opportunities that exist in the character of the Buddha and the various situations that arose in society during the time of the Buddha. With the teaching in the Dhamma that life is built on the karma of man, man tries to build his life. The Noble Eightfold Path in the Buddha's discourse explains how to develop and practice man's *seela*, *samadhi* and wisdom. Accordingly, in such a case, especially in Buddhism, the teaching that *Sathimatha*, or meditation, is the basic practice that can build mental strength. It is one of the most important therapeutic methods in Buddhist counselling. It is very important to act very wisely in the event of such a catastrophe. Buddhist counselling explains to human beings how to deal with the economic and social problems that they have to face. This study revealed that due to this, it is possible to reduce the mental stress that people face and that Buddhist counseling is very important. This will reduce the risk of conflict within the family and help to build up family well-being.

5. Conclusion

The Covid-19epidemic has become a global crisis. Man is in a very depressed situation because of this situation. This period can be considered as a time when economic, social and mental well-being is in complete disarray. In such a case man seeks various methods to secure his life and get rid of his problems. These methods can be formal or informal. Among them, religious relief based on merit, sin and karma are expected. In such a case a great deal of service will be done through Buddhist counselling. Therefore, this study reveals that professional Buddhist counselling is very important to minimize the problems that arise in families. It helps make the family function more effectively as well as improves and social order in the society.

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Interview

Buddhist social work: Questioning the professionalism

Josef Gohori: *During discussions between scholars, practitioners, and Buddhist monks at the expert meeting on Buddhist social work held in Hanoi back in 2018, some participants emphasized the importance of professionalism, dismissing volunteerism as an aspect related to charity. Prof. Hoi Loan, in your book, you have described the change from charity to Buddhist social work. Could you tell us more about the relationship between professionalism and Buddhist social work? Do you think there is something we may call professional knowledge or professional skills which Buddhist monks need to obtain in order to practice Buddhist social work? In other words, is there something which is clearly different from charity works or engaged Buddhism seen ad charitable or volunteer actions?*

Prof. Hoi Loan Nguyen (Vietnam National University): I think that monks and Buddhists need to be equipped with professional social work knowledge and skills and social work practice methods so that they can gradually proceed with the transition from charity to social work. This is the only way we can avoid the situation when vulnerable people are dependent, relying on temples and other organizations. I believe professional skills will help monks to assist people to discover their internal strength, such as their active participation or active solving of their problems. Only in this way can we ensure sustainability and improve the effectiveness of the temples' assistance to people.

Thank you very much. That's a very important aspect. Many critics point out that the principle of giving, dána (Pali, Sans.: generosity, charity, alms giving, etc.) sometimes increases dependency without solving problem itself. Oyut-Erdene Namdaldagva from Mongolia is also one of the scholars who focuses on the professionalization in the Buddhist social work's context. Could you share your opinion with us?

Oyut-Erdene Namdaldagva (Mongolian National University of Education): There is a need for Buddhist social work to be recognized as social work professional practice. That's why I am

talking about professionalization. For example, in Mongolia, the public is not much aware of Buddhist social work activities. People regard the activities of monks and Buddhist organizations as a part of their spiritual or religious practice. Buddhist social work has a rich body of knowledge, skills and values. However, in order to practice Buddhist social work, Buddhist organizations and monks need on one hand, to establish an infrastructure of professional services, and on the other hand, to gain recognition of professional status.

I see. To be broadly recognized and valued in the society, to be a part of the welfare system, in your opinion, Buddhist social work should distinguish between charity (as a part of religious practice) and professional activity.

When we hear the word "professional," we often imagine work, job, or license. Or someone who is hired and paid. However, as Shibata pointed out in 1986, the word "profession" has its origin in a Latin word "profiteri," which means "to declare publicly." The original meaning was that you have to profess that you are devoted for something, you have to declare that you will continue following your goal or mission. Shibata puts the word in contrast with "specialist," saying that social workers should not only be just specialist.[1]Skills and knowledge are necessary to be a specialist, but do not guarantee that you are a professional. In this context, one might say that Buddhist monks are professionals declaring publicly their mission and devotion as followers of Buddha's teaching, however, they may lack some skills and knowledge necessary to assist people in their lives. In other words, that they are not specialists.

What about Thailand? There is a long tradition and broadly shared practice and experience of so-called "development monks" in Thailand. "Development monks" have been supporting and assisting individuals, families, and communities in Thailand for many years. However, Venerable Surakrai, you have launched the education program on Buddhist social work at Mahamakut Buddhist University. Where is the difference between Buddhist social work and the tradition of "development monks", which is often recognized as a part of charity or voluntary action? I believe this is related to our today's debate on professionalism.

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2 Shibata, S. (1986). Shakaifukushi shiso. In *Shakaifukushi genron*. Kyoto: Buddhist University Press. p. 77.

Ven. Surakrai Congboonwasana (Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand): If we mention the differences between these two words, we should understand first that the word "social work" in Thai is derived from the word "*Sangha*" in Pali language. It means to collect, to compile, to put together, to consolidate or to gather in the sense of social solidarity. It means consolidation of both mentality and material quality. Regarding mentality, it is the consolidation of the mind or consciousness whereas the consolidation of material quality means to have people gather, to solder together – not to split, not to leave someone behind but to live together peacefully.

No matter whether we call the monks who are involved in social welfare as doing "Buddhist social work" or being "development monks," they both are the same in terms of social welfare. The monks never refer to themselves as "development monks" or doing "the Buddhist social work," but they realize they are the monks who follow and act upon the Buddha's teaching.

For the Bachelor of Social Work at Mahamakut Buddhist University, the term "Buddhist social work" is preferred because there are many meaningful aspects in the development of social work, and one of those is to make something better than the old situation, such as the improvement of the body, the mind, the society and the wisdom. This includes social work, which is to consolidate the mind, to solder people together, or to make the society remain as the only one – not separate. Therefore, the meaning of social work is not only to give people something, not to give them services, not to give them money but also to consolidate the society. Buddhist social work is the assistance for humankind, so that they can rely on themselves. This is relevant to both the Buddha's teaching and principles of social work. We can apply them for the best results.

Thank you all! I believe our talk today helped us to see that the present debate on professionalism is multi-layered and, in many senses, reveals some commonalities between social work and Buddha's teaching. Listening to you, I thought that distinguishing between professional and specialist-related aspects may help us to shape the Buddhist social work concept. We tend to focus on necessary skills, theories, and methods. However, the philosophy and principles which underpin the practice are important as well. The other issues are the fact that practice by Buddhist temples and monks is not recognized as social work, but rather as a part of social welfare or a social welfare system as Hoi Loan and Oyut-Erdene pointed out. This might be the other important "layer" of the professionalism debate. Thank you very much again and I look forward to our future debates. Josef Gohori (Shukutoku University, Japan)

Did you find this interview interesting? Do you want to respond or share your opinion? Do you want to ask more questions? Please, feel free to contact us at **asiainst@soc.shukutoku.ac.jp**.

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The International Journal of Buddhist Social Work aims high-quality research and engaged scholarship and committing to diversity and inclusion in academic publishing. We encourage submissions from a diverse range of authors from across the world, with various backgrounds.

Only manuscripts of sufficient quality that meet the aims and scope of Buddhist Social Work will be reviewed and included in this journal.

The scope of Buddhist Social Work: Buddhist social work might be considered as an extension of the Buddhist social welfare services. The Buddhist social welfare service dates back to the time of the Buddha in 6 BC India, and it has a very long history and tradition. The Buddhist social work was derived from it very recently, which makes it a new and challenging area, however, the core part remains the same. The foundation of Buddhist social welfare and Buddhist social work is the Buddhist philosophy. Buddha encouraged philanthropy, charity, helping each other, supporting each other, and other virtues broadly shared across the Buddhist culture. The systematization of the Buddhist social work concept is not finished yet, however, the Asian Buddhist Social Work Research Network supported by ARIISW has developed the working definition as follows: "Buddhist social work is human activities to help other people solve or alleviate life difficulties and problems based on the Buddha nature. Buddhist Social Work always finds causes to work on in both the material, and social arena, as well as in human, or inner arena, working on both arenas in tandem. Its fundamental principles include compassion, loving kindness, mutual help, interdependency and self-reliance. The central value is the Five Precepts. The ultimate goal is to achieve the wellbeing of all sentient beings and peace."

<div align="right">Ven. Dr. Omalpe Somananda, editor</div>

(For more details see: Akimoto, T., Hattori, M. (eds.) (2018). *Working Definition and Current Curricula of Buddhist Social Work.* Faculty of Sociology VNU University of Social Sciences & Humanities, Vietnam, and Asian Research Institute for International Social Work, Shukutoku University, Japan.)

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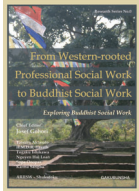
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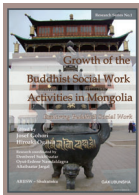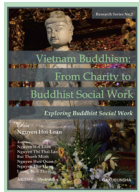
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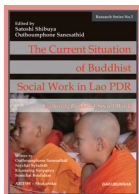
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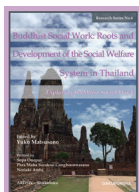
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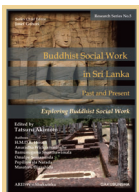
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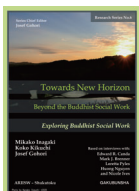
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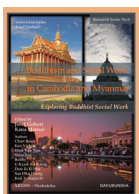
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