

Collective Violence Experience of Well-Adjusted Undergraduate Students Living in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand: A Qualitative Investigation

- Jirasuk Suksawat
- Arunya Tuicomepee
- Wacharee Supmee

Abstract. *Collective violence continually breaks out in every corner of the world; Thailand is no exception. The violence in the Southern provinces that started in 2004 has been persistent for more than 8 years now, with critical incidents such as gunfire ambush, bomb planting, arson, assault, and various approaches to instigate riots. These fatally violent incidents have great impacts on individuals, families, and society. In order to advance understanding of the impact of the violent experience on the people's well-being, this study examined the experience of collective violence among students native to the Southern border provinces of Thailand by means of a qualitative methodology. Key informants were 14 undergraduate students purposely sampled according to the set criteria. An interview format on collective-violence-related experience due to insurgencies was applied as an instrument. Data analysis employed a phenomenological qualitative method. Findings revealed four main themes: (1) violence assimilation through various news channels (family members, TV and newspapers in particular); (2) suffering and loss from insurgencies, including loss of mental stability (showing mental instability, paranoid, and panic), loss of beloved individuals and property (grieved, distressed, moved, angered, and quietly questioning), loss of freedom to live (limited or blocked freedom, discrimination by state officers, restricted travel), the family's loss of subsistence income, and loss of education opportunity; (3) physical and mental adjustment to cope with surrounding incidents, including adjusting daily routines of studying and living (evacuation from and avoidance of traveling from the risk zone, safe choices of inhabitation, adapting schedules and modes of travel to fit the changing situation), coping with stress (emotional support from intimate persons, relaxation with interesting leisure activities, observation of religious teachings, and avoidance of daily violence input); and (4) transforming collective violence to personal growth and maturation (e.g., acceptance of the reality, positive attitude toward surrounding troubles, understanding, greater compassion to the family and others, and lessened prejudice and higher tolerance toward peers from other cultures). In sum, the findings demonstrated, not only desperate scenes of victimization through the uprising in the Southern border provinces of Thailand, but also the bright underlying tone of harmonious living in reality through happiness pursuits with mental strength, coping with difficulties, and letting go of sufferings, as the result of growth from fair and the noble seeds that are ready to become healthy and mature sprouts later on.*

Keywords: Collective Violence, Students, Qualitative Study

Introduction

A violent incident that impacts a great number of people at the same time is called "collective violence." This term is defined as an intentional use of power or physical force by a group of people to threaten or harm other people, groups, or societies, leading to injury, death, psychological pain, hindrance of growth, loss or deprivation of certain rights, and failure to acquire something legitimately, for example social violence, political violence, or economic violence (WHO, 2002).

Collective violence is breaking out in every corner of the world and Thailand is no exception, as seen through such violent incidents in the Southern border provinces as gunfire ambush, bomb planting, arson, assault, and various approaches to instigate riots. The collective violence incidents in the Southern border provinces of Thailand have been occurring since 2004, with different levels of violence across time and space. This violence affects individuals in many ways. The student population residing in the areas of these provinces can be ranked near the top in the list of high-risk groups, as this group is at the transition from adolescence to adulthood, thus susceptible to rapid physical and psychological transformations. Encountering such violent insurgency in their hometowns can subject them to physical and mental impacts that could hinder their growth.

Previous studies indicated that collective violence leads to psychological problems, for instance, stress, anxiety and depression among witnesses and victims (Sagy, 1998; Punamaeki, 1996; Shale & Freedman, 2005; Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, & Johnson, 2006). In addition to psychological concerns, the affected people reported difficulties and disadvantages due to collective violence exposure (Chantana Rungklin, 2007). This is congruent with a report from Thailand's Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, indicating that the victims of collective violence in the Southern border provinces were prone to develop psychological conditions, such as panic, anxiety, depression, and stress, after violent incidents (Somchai Chakrapan, 2006, 2008). The psychological impact of violent exposure tends to manifest itself after the incident and can last for as long as decades. According to Watts (2000), who studied the psychological impact from atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, the victims were still suffering from nightmares of those events despite 55 years passing by. In addition, a comparative study (Yamada & Izumi, 2002) of the psychological effects on atomic bombing survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 20 years after the incidents found that survivors who lived in the city still showed anxiety and physical illness related to the great psychological disturbances. This is consistent with the study of Norris *et al.* (2002) on the effects of violence from terrorism among women who were victims and lived in the shelter camp in Pakistan from 1981-2001, for which the research team collected data from as many as 6,000 victims. The findings showed that 77% of the female victims of such violence suffered from psychological symptoms, such as stress, depression, anxiety, and insomnia. The existing literature on this issue typically yields the quantitative effects of collective violence through surveys and quantitative research methodology, but little in-depth insight into such effects has been offered, not to mention certain limitations.

Interestingly, past studies highlighted the importance of appraisal and a wider variety of coping strategies for understanding individual mental health outcomes. For instance, Jeasae *et al.* (2008) and Loewenthal *et al.* (2001) indicated that religious rites among Muslim students in the three Southern border provinces of Thailand positively correlated with happiness and the religious observation of Muslim people was related to recovery from grief. In other words, with effective coping strategies, the experience of collective violence does not always necessarily end up with illness. Recently, there is the growing recognition that in addition to the negative effects, encountering with excessive stressful events has potentially yielded a positive outcome. A series of studies have indicated that individual with collective violence can transform difficult to positive outcome. Simultaneous access to both deep and pain emotion and a cognitive healing process can result in a cathartic change that contributes to new personal, social, and spiritual awareness (Calhoun, 2010). This paper, therefore, aimed to look at collective violence experience from brighter perspectives. With a qualitative study design, the key experiences of the well-adjusted students that make growth and positive approaches possible are highlighted.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research strategy, conducted with the following steps.

Key Informants: 14 undergraduate students (males = 3, females = 11) from a public university in southern Thailand were purposively sampled according to these criteria: being native to the areas of the five southern border provinces, having high scores on the *Collective Violence Exposure Scale* and

Happiness Scales ($M+0.5SD$), clear articulation of their experience and willingness to participate in the study and share their information

Materials: Materials included the following:

(1) *The Collective Violence Exposure Scale* was adapted by the first author from the Comprehensive Trauma Inventory (CTI: Hollifield, Eckert, Warner, Jenkins, Krakow, Ruiz, & Westermeyer, 2005). The scale consists of 37 items covering 4 themes: (1) As recipients of news regarding death and injuries from collective violence from various media; (2) As witnesses of violence; (3) As traumatized victims of violence; and (4) As sufferers from social impacts, such as conflicts in communities or discrimination due to collective violence. The scale assesses frequencies of collective violence exposure within the past year, with two available answer choices: 0 = never and 1 = ever. The scale yielded a KR 20 reliability coefficient of .92.

(2) *The Happiness Scale* was developed by the first author from the *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire* (OHQ; Aryle & Peter, 2001). The scale consisted of 34 items and three factors (i.e., Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and No Negative Affect). The Happiness Scale yielded a Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient of .86.

(3) The interview guideline was reviewed by the second and third authors, and the local experts for content validity and was corrected accordingly before the data collection.

Data Collection: After receiving the approval from the Committee for Human Research, Chulalongkorn University, the initially selected students were screened with *The Collective Violence Exposure Scale* and *Happiness Scale*. The qualified students were provided with information about the study and their rights to participate in the study. Those who were willing to participate in the study were asked to sign the consent form and completed the happiness checklist. After that, the students who passed all the criteria on the checklist were invited and interviewed once, each for about one hour.

Data Analysis: The researcher transcribed the interviews from audiotapes and field notes. The data was subjected to an interpretive analysis. Thematic analysis of the concepts presented by participants was synthesized to provide an understanding of collective violent experience and its impact on well-adjusted students, and how they maintain their happiness after the excessive stressful event exposure. Interviews and field notes were compared across subjects to discover regularities and patterns by using thematic analysis. A coding scheme was developed and used to code all transcripts and notes. Using the coded data, the researcher identified categories and proposed tentative themes. These themes were linked and compared across transcripts. As themes were compared, the researcher illustrated the relationships of themes to one another, while looking for constitutive patterns. Trustworthiness was assured by checking and external audit by an expert panel (two quantitative study specialists and one academic and one local person) to review the accuracy of interpretation, in addition to summarizing supporting data at every step.

Results

Findings revealed four themes of collective violence among well-adjusted students, as presented below.

1. Fatally violent insurgencies

1.1 Assimilation of violence from the insurgencies: most key informants ($N=11$) specified two sources as the assimilation channels of violence: 1) their families, friends, and communities; and 2) media including TV and newspapers. Most of the informants admitted that reports from their intimate acquaintances caused more intense and greater collective sentiment, because this was something directly involving their loved ones or familiar individuals.

“Mostly through media, I think. I sum all up from television and newspaper. The images that I experienced never leave my eyes though time passes by. But the pain became less than when I first faced it on the spot.” (ID2)

“Within two days, I heard my dad’s friend was shot. He was a cop. One day, he took his red-whiskered bulbul to his friend’s house and was shot death.” (ID3)

1.2 Being surviving victims: All the key informants (N=14) had direct experience of violence or learnt about it indirectly through the experience of other family members or close relatives, such as hearing gunshots, bomb explosions, or being struck at a violent scene.

“When I was about to turn my head to see, it exploded. At that time, he was in the hut, or maybe an uninhabited house. There was a celebration. He just sat there and walked past it. I just turned to see. I was far away but could hear. The crowd formed up to see. Arms stripped, all body parts scattered.” (ID2)

“There were explosions in the previous week. My school is in the town center. Suddenly, I heard it explode. I was alarmed and didn’t want to leave school. I heard it once in the morning, and another one at noon. I was so wary.” (ID7)

“When I returned home once, there was an incident. My house has two floors. My older brother was not home. Three were upstairs, while my parents stayed downstairs. When it occurred, we had to run downstairs. We had been told not to be upstairs during the uprising, for they would normally shoot up.” (ID10)

Moreover, all the key informants (N=14) informed the interviewer that some of their family members and close ties were surviving victims of violent insurgencies, as they were living in the risk zones with high frequency of unrest. Some were targets of gunfire ambush, while others were accidentally hit, leading to injury and even death.

“My dad drove a tractor, a long vehicle for loading things or backhoe. There were only rice fields in that area. My dad saw a man. It was early afternoon. He hid in a bush, and my dad thought he was just a villager, but he was a terrorist. He shot my dad’s friend, who was on the tractor. Luckily, the bullet hit the glass, so he got off the vehicle. My father himself nearly got hit in the head.” (ID3)

“My dad is the village head. One day he drove alone and was shot on the way. No one knew about the shooter or his motivation, maybe because of my father’s position.” (ID9)

“And when he drove out, my father was playing with me. He didn’t shoot as he appeared behind our back, but he turned to shoot at us in the front. My father caught the sight, hit the bat and ran away (laugh), while I was standing still, petrified (laugh), not knowing what to do.” (ID11)

2. Suffering and loss from violent incidents

2.1 Loss of mental stability: most key informants (N=12) reported that they felt unstable, insecure, fearful and suspicious that they would experience the insurgency, in addition to loss of trust in others, suspicion towards strangers, and anxiety that they and their families would be accidentally hit or be accused as suspects.

“Alarmed, though it happens every day, or once in a while, or it doesn’t happen in my neighborhood, I’m still alarmed anyway when I hear the news, like the firings at the mosque several years ago. After that, when I was expected to visit my friend’s house, I had to pass that mosque. It was silent, desolate, and oddly grave. I didn’t know what happened, but I am panic.” (ID3)

“I sometimes fear, sometimes, when there is news, when it occurs too near our area. In some occasions, we were in the university, like when there was a report of explosion near the junctures. Then everyone was in the campus, knowing nothing. But we heard something in the morning, not knowing what sound it was, but we couldn’t help shuddering.” (ID5)

“...suspicious of everything, especially something like the incident in the city of Yala. The bomb was unusually powerful. If I had been there, I must have been struck. But if there had been only

firings, I might have survived. I'm so wary that I dare not go anywhere, especially into the high-risk zones. My dad also prohibits me going anywhere." (ID7)

"When I go out at night, to eat or to go home from the campus, I am hyper-vigilant. (laugh) I fear that I would be shot and that there would be a bomb." (ID4)

2.2 Loss of properties or beloved individuals: several informant students (N=7) related stories about grief and pain from losing their loved ones and precious properties, which had not healed with time.

"The image of the moment of that incident never fades though time passes by. The pain lessens than on that day when I saw it with my own eyes. It's like I hold to it as a reminder. I saw people dying for real, not a drama, but everything was a real life." (ID2)

"I cried a river. It was so sudden. It could have been easier to accept had it been natural death. Why had he to die in that incident? Look at his body! He was just 15. If he hadn't died, but just been trampled to ground, it would still have been much better. When everything was in chaos, how great he must have been suffering!" (ID6)

2.3 Loss of liberty and freedom to live: liberty and freedom to do a wide range of activities is limited.

2.3.1 Restricted freedom and concern about the other family members: the violent insurgencies forced the students (N=8) to live their life with limited freedom in the affected areas and to worry about the welfare of their families who lived in the risk zones.

"I'm worried about my dad and mom regarding this incident. My older sister has to ride motorcycle to teaching in a fearsome zone. She has to go herself from Nara to Srisakhorn, and there at a stop are military guards." (ID3)

"Being here, I miss them, miss home, but I'm scared. My family told me not to return if I'm scared. Just occasional return is all right. Sometimes my mom and older brother visit me here. My dad is worried about my mom too. She stays with my older sister in Raman." (ID4)

"At that time, insurgencies took place in Pattani, Yala, and Nara, sometimes at several places simultaneously. One day this town, another day this Amphoe. At first, I was scared and alarmed. What to do if it breaks out in my neighborhood? Were my relatives included? One in Takbai had passed away. How was my relative in that Amphoe? That province was near my house. Could my family live? It was like a whirlpool, a chaos." (ID6)

2.3.2 Discriminated treatment from state officers: Students living in the unrest areas were often discriminated against by state officers. Some (N=6) were maltreated by those outside their neighborhood, such as being looked down upon, labeled, misunderstood or stereotyped as terrorists.

"After finding nothing they wanted, they gave us money. It was like a contempt. They came in, rummaging the place, and then finding nothing bad they wanted. Offend and then mollify. Giving money to mollify. But it couldn't soothe us as we were forced and offended like that. Normally, shoes are taken off in the house area as it is the place we observe Salah, but they walked in right with slippers." (ID1)

"I don't want people outside the area or not native to 3 border provinces like us to view us as extremists or the uneducated. Not everyone is uneducated. Don't look down at us, the 3 provinces, as bumpkins. That hurts so much." (ID3)

2.3.3 Restrained travel: The insurgency impacted daily living, especially traveling to campus and returning home at the weekend or on holidays. The students (N=6) traveled at daytime for safety.

“Normally, when I had free time, I went home after my class. I could set off before 4 pm. But now I’m afraid and dare not go home. When coming to campus, I have to leave early at 6 am and keep going without haste.” (ID3)

“We try to set the time right when going somewhere, not too early in the morning or too late in the evening.” (ID4)

“My family is worried. At weekend, when I’m out with friends to the town, I have to go home quite early, unlike other teens. About 2 pm, I have to leave.” (ID12)

2.4 Loss of subsistence income: Most of the key informants’ (N=13) families made their living from working in rubber plantations. They had to start collecting rubber juice very early in the morning, so as to preserve the quality and amount of the juice. However, the insurgency affected their collecting habits and, thus, the quality of the juice. Their income inevitably diminished. In some areas of frequent unrest, their parents dared not go out to collect the rubber juice or sometimes needed to collect it untimely for fear of being targeted or accidentally hit, or even misunderstood by state officers.

“Previously, my family produced rubber sheets. They went out in the early morning and back at noon or in the afternoon. After the incident, we change to sell rubber juice as it take less time, but cheaper. This affects our lives because of reduced income. We have less freedom. We go out to the plantation late and are not able to stay long, and sometimes have to live under pressure. Soldiers have to stand guarding the plantation sometimes. I think it is stressful, for where there are soldiers is a risk spot.” (ID1)

“My mom used to sell youtiao in the morning after fajr around 4-5 am in the market. My grandma’s house is also in the market. After fajr, the elderly came to buy tea, and we could sell well. But after the unrest, part of our income is gone. From 7 kg., now we sell only 3-4 kg. and the period for selling is also reduced. From 5, now we have to struggle to start at 7.30, or else we can’t survive. We are not supported to make our living or so, it’s hard to tell. On Friday, we are not allowed to sell; they prohibit us going anywhere. The order is from people above.” (ID3)

“Previously, we collected rubber juice at 2 or 3 am, but not now. Now we start at 7.30 am because we are afraid. On Friday, we are prohibited to go collecting the juice. I’m not sure why. They reason that on Friday the Islamic have to observe Salah, so if we go out, our ears will be slashed and we’ll be harmed.” (ID4)

2.5 Loss of education opportunity: For example, some students (N=7) mentioned that schools were closed down instantaneously because of arson, semesters started unusually late, schools or some teachers were under suspicion, lessons discontinued due to lack of proper teaching staff or shorter education period.

“Now education of children from 3 provinces are poorer than those in the city. Talk about general education, children in these 3 provinces are so weak, except for in the quality school. They can’t speak Thai fluently and rarely have discipline. Though being educated, they can’t study to full potential because insufficient attendance. Teachers are scared, so they come to school late. They come to class at 8, start teaching at 9, and leave early.” (ID3)

“During the unrest, I was in high school. My school had to close for a few months. The principal was threatened, and the school was accused of hosting terrorists, the same as Takbai School, which had been ordered to close down.” (ID4)

“The incident affects the economy. The opportunities of development in each area lessen, so do the opportunities for youths, greatly decrease. But the entrance scores keep getting higher. This year, there are much fewer students entering my faculty, three times fewer. From 300 each year, now there are only a little more than 100. There are only 10 in each major.” (ID11)

3. Physical and mental adjustment to cope with surrounding events

3.1 Adjusting daily routines: All students (N=14) reported that they tried harder to study and strove more to overcome obstacles circling them from many directions, so as to acquire the fundamental skills and knowledge for their future lives, especially students who got financial support from several sources.

“At that time, other people thought that the Ustas (Islamic students) in Pornor (Islamic schools) were part of terrorism. It was like we were labeled by those who didn't know the truth. Only one person did wrong and we were grouped with him. One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel. We wanted to study. At that time we got inspired that we had to study and to reveal that all the ustas were not terrorists.” (ID1)

“I think an environment is important, too. I want to change myself. At first, I walked slowly, but now I have to run faster to catch up with peers. I have to fight hard as study is the most important thing now. I must do it, for I have already invested much in it. Only bachelor degree is not enough. Education is very important.” (ID2)

Besides, they needed to adjust other aspects of daily living, such as evacuating from and avoiding the high-risk zones (e.g., crowded areas, such as morning market and Thai-Buddhist communities, or at any place with the targets like soldiers), residing in safe areas (in the campus or within the house), and adjusting travel schedules to fit the current situation (travel at daytime and constantly changing modes and routes).

“In my neighborhood, some have moved out. Mostly, my direct trouble is that some of my friends are targeted, friends who are my classmates. They can't live there.” (ID8)

“Yes, most of men in that village have gone to Malaysia after the incident.” (ID10)

“I have to be more careful, such as not going to crowded places or going out during desolate period. Routes that are rarely taken must be avoided. Behind the university is a fearsome forest. After 8 pm, I must not go out. If I have assignments to finish, I'll stay overnight at the campus.” (ID4)

“If possible, go elsewhere only if it is utterly necessary to buy something there. I rarely step on the risk zone. Like in Pattani, if that area is risky, just avoid. The campus is safe. Everyone knows that from in front of the university to the inside is all safe. Mostly, the risk zones are morning markets and Thai-Buddhist communities.” (ID7)

“Sometimes I take a bus. Both sides are rubber plantations. Near Jor Ai Raong is the dark red zone. If there are frequent bombings, I won't take the bus but travel by train instead. Normally, I alternate.” (ID1)

“Sometimes, the van, but if I want to save money, I’ll take a train. The van is safer with less passengers, so less risk. Some train stations are small with a number of people going in and out and a lot of soldiers. They can be targets.” (ID2)

“Yes, shouldn’t do anything repeatedly. Routes and times returning home need to be alternated. Most of my friends also do the same.” (ID4)

3.2 Coping with pressure: the students informed about various methods of coping they used.

3.2.1 Emotional support from intimate persons: most students (N=12) mentioned that being loved and being encouraged by those who are intimate, such as family members, friends, and teachers.

“Despite some disastrous events, I still have good friends. A friend of mine, an exchange student from China, can still live and is a good friend to me.” (ID3)

“I miss my home. I’ve got encouragement from home. It’s only I who leave, so they have a lot of hope in me. They are waiting for me.” (ID8)

“When we are studying, our teachers try to motivate us to put effort and set high goals. That makes us try, try to study, try to achieve.” (ID9)

3.2.2 Relaxation with interesting leisure activities: several students (N=9) reported they were conversing with someone they trust; reading or listening to something religious.

“When I feel stressed, I call my mom to ask about her whereabouts. I usually stay here, so I call to ask about the situation there and chat with her.” (ID4)

“Reading about anything that makes us relieved. For me, I like psychology stuff, empowering, life development, something like that. Otherwise, I talk with friends whom I trust.” (ID3)

“I listen to Anasyid. You know it? They are religious songs. I’d rather listen to this type of songs than Thai songs. They are about supplications to God.” (ID9)

3.2.3 Observing religious teachings: most students (N=12) mentioned that they were embracing, enduring and putting up with the tests of Allah to prove their sincerity and strength of their faith toward Allah.

“Teachings. Our religious teaches us to endure with evil things, for they are the tests Allah sends us to test us.” (ID1)

“...in the Islamic perspective, it is the test from Allah to make us patient.” (ID3)

“The belief that that God makes us this way, the belief that fate destines us only to this point. We should think this way. Thinking other ways only makes it harder to accept. It is already destined.” (ID6)

3.2.4 Avoiding daily violence news: many of students (N=12) mentioned that they were avoiding receiving input about insurgencies through various channels, refusing to talk about news that one knew, trying not to recall the violent incidents that took place, and trying to console themselves that it would get better some day.

“I sometimes thought of it as a short film that already ended, kind of action film. I tried to lie myself, but it was real. At first, it was hard to accept. But long after that, it doesn’t occur with me. He hurt and died, making us relieved. He’s gone to a better place.” (ID2)

“Now I’m trying not to talk about it. Everyone in the three border provinces should think the same as I. If something like that happens, we choose not to discuss at all. However panic or overwhelmed I feel, I won’t sound it out because I fear what if I talk to someone who is a spy.” (ID4)

“I tried to compare when I was here, to compare between staying here and at home. I try hard not to receive any news, not listening to any. Go to study in the morning and back home in the evening. Nothing happens, so I think I am all right this way. Explosions and firings don’t break up every day (laugh).” (ID10)

4. Transformed collective violence to personal growth and maturation.

4.1 Accepting the reality: Although it was hard to accept the reality after the violence, it was a good start for some key informants (N=7) to learn to face the real world and live happily with whatever life vicissitudes they experienced.

“Knowing fully well that it happens every day. It must happen, so we’d better try to live with it.” (ID1)

“Before coming here to study, I had thought when I was here, at least I should prepare myself for what might happen.” (ID5)

“If we understand, we don’t be angry from inside. We must change this anger to something else. I find a way and study more and more. Then I’ll try to explain to them, try to make them realize if I have a chance.” (ID4)

4.2 Positive attitude toward problematic surroundings: for most key informants (N=11), studying hard served as an investment in future life for themselves and their family. They changed crises to chances, embracing every new experience. When they stopped to think, they realized some good things they had learnt from their violent surroundings.

“I think all the time while sitting that the incidents are just incidents. It can’t harm our thought. I think I still have to keep walking to the future. I must study, must have a family, and so many other things. If I kept so worried with the incidents to the point I couldn’t study and chose to stay home and indulge in thought like this, everything would be over. But when the incident becomes violent, I have to study so as to apply knowledge acquired for the benefits of my hometown.” (ID1)

“I’m also poor but have a chance to study here. As the youngest and the only one in the family to get educated, how can I allow myself to get discouraged? I can only fight.” (ID4)

“We must change crises to chances. How can we live if we can’t change a crisis. We must tell ourselves we will survive to the future. No one can help us if we are so down and don’t change ourselves. No one can change us.” (ID6)

“We don’t want this unrest to occur. No one wants. But when it occurs, we should find a way out. We don’t know who are the culprits, don’t know even the government knows this. But we have to be strong and keep walking.” (ID9)

4.3 More understanding and compassion toward others: That the key informants (N=7) had to live with others in the midst of the violent insurgency was considered something good, as understanding and compassion toward one another in their families and communities grew and they could perceive other merits, such as patience, harmony in the family and community.

“It makes us patient and teaches us to love one another and to care for others.” (ID3)

“The incident keeps growing more violent. Previously, it occurred just in some areas, but now it occurs everywhere until it’s hard to predict where it will occur again. But the villagers unite more. When anything happens, they disperse the news and help any unfortunate family. In the past, we rarely had time for one another in the family, but now we do on Friday because we have to stay home all day. This day turns out to be a happy day with the whole family.” (ID4)

“Sometimes I am sympathized with the families that have been affected, and empathized with them, too. I don’t want this incident to affect anyone anymore. I wish that it stopped at this point but I don’t know whom I should go to tell.” (ID9)

4.4 Reduced prejudice and greater tolerance towards friends from different cultures:

Cultural pluralism, religious difference, reduced prejudice, and greater tolerance towards friends from different cultures enabled some key informants (N=8) to perceive certain underlying merits within the violent unrest. Awareness of differences without discrimination was a good start to solve any fixation and plant good seeds to grow up in the future.

“They enclosed the village to guard for security, but later they can get along well with villagers and many activities have been held between villagers and soldiers. They give education materials and sports instruments to villagers. Sometimes, there are Buddhist-Muslim activities at sub-district administration office, and soldiers also take part in it.” (ID1)

“Like this one coming from the sub-district center, he is so and so. This one is from Satul. He speaks so fast and in southern dialect all the time. I speak Naradhiwas dialect, so we have to communicate with the Middle standard or Malay. It is pressure, for they switch again to their dialects. But now I can tolerate that.” (ID3)

“As we are in the university of Buddhists and Muslims, we can talk to one another when we suffer. I can understand them. They have rights to suspect us, but they just can’t help feeling so. If we maintain our harmonious relationship, nothing can split us. The same as our friends coming from afar, they understand that not all Muslim hate them, just some. We can live together, whether Buddhist-Thai or Muslim-Thai.” (ID7)

Discussion

According to the findings, the well-adjusted students experienced collective violence by assimilating it through close individuals and various media, consistent with the study by Chantana Rungklin (2007), who found that stress of the personnel at Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus, correlated significantly with news input about the unrest and direct experience as surviving victims. This led to suspicion toward strangers, anxiety about the current situation, higher vigilance, panic and insecurity about their lives and properties, grief, and trauma from loss of properties and loved ones. This finding is in accordance with the study of Norris *et al.* (2002), which found that 77% of the women victims from violent terrorism suffered from psychological symptoms, including stress, depression, and anxiety, and the study of Sagy (1998) revealing that those living in the zone with violent dispute over secession showed a high level of anxiety compared with those living far from the disputed area. From this study, despite an 8-year gap between the violent event and the present, the feeling and memory about it still persists, congruent with the result from the study of Watts (2000) that those experiencing and affected by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, during WWII still had nightmares about the event, even though 55 years had passed. These effects inevitably affected their mental stability and quality of life (e.g., loss of freedom and liberty in life, loss of income, and loss of educational opportunity, which is in line with the research by Bukkaree Petchnu (2003), who found that most Muslim students lacked opportunities for higher education and good choices of career, in addition to the limitations of agricultural livelihood with unstable prices of produce, thus affecting their income.

Such impacts, however, led to adjustment, both physical and psychological, to cope with and live with the violent unrest. The results showed that the key informants adapted their daily routines - studying harder, avoiding travel into danger zones, cutting off from daily violent input, sheltering in the safer campus, alternating their travel times and modes to fit the changing situation, and evacuating from the danger zone in case of emergency, which conforms with the finding of Chantana Rungklin (2007) that the unrest forced the personnel of Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus, to adjust themselves as a safety measure, such as adapting their work schedules according to the situation. Beside certain adjustments, coping with pressing stress is also important. This study showed that the students resorted to emotional support from intimate individuals, like parents or trusted friends, relaxation through leisure pursuits of their preference, including reading the Koran and listening to Alsyid, and, most important, strengthening their mind with understanding and profound observation of religious teachings, as well as applying them to their lives, so as to develop strong faith and motivation to fight through a harsh life. This is consistent with the finding of Rohani Jeasae *et al.* (2008), that observation of religious rites among Muslim students in three Southern border provinces of Thailand positively correlated with happiness and that of Loewenthal *et al.* (2001), that religious observation of Muslim people was related to recovery from grief. This study gave an insight into positive changes in well-adjusted students' perception of life spiritual matters (deep engagement in religious beliefs and practices) and interpersonal relationships after the collective violent experience. This study demonstrated this positive phenomenon, despite some limitations, for example, an unequal number of gender (male = 3, female = 11). In addition, key informants included only voluntary, well-adjusted students with a certain score of violent exposure and happiness ($M \pm 0.5$ SD). Thus, the findings of this study may not be comparable with a study of students encountering with collective violent experiences in general.

Conclusion

The students not only reported about negative effects of collective violence, but positive ones as well, including learning to live harmoniously within their families, communities and the pluralistic society, positive outcomes of physical and psychological adjustment to changes they encountered, empathy and compassion toward their families and other people around them and reduced prejudice and higher tolerance to those from different cultures. These led to positive attitudes towards surrounding problems in the face of the collective violence and helped solve irrational and unrealistic expectations, enabling them to answer the questions in their lives and live congruently with the reality, with a mindset that was strong, unrelenting and ready to let go and find happiness within. This can be compared with high quality seeds that are ready to grow and mature. These findings are consistent with the summary of Rohani *et al.* (2008), that internal factors of a person are the most crucial key to happiness for people in the three Southern border provinces and the study of Penprapa Parinyapol (2009), that people in the Southern border provinces had the means to cope with stress: meditation, change in mindset, behavioral modification, and forgiveness.

Acknowledgement

This paper is part of a doctoral dissertation of the first author under supervision of the second and third authors. The dissertation project was supported by the 90th Anniversary of Chulalongkorn University Fund (Ratchadaphisek-somphot Endowment Fund).

References

- Argyle, M., & Peter, H. (2001). *The Oxford Happiness questionnaire: A compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being*. Headington Campus: Gipsy Lane, UK.
- Bukkaree Petchnu (2006). *Factors related to social unrest in Muslim community of Southern Thailand: a case study of Muslim students' opinion*. Unpublished Masters thesis. Kasetsart University.

- Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2006). The foundations of posttraumatic growth: An expanded framework. In L. G. Calhoun & R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Chantana Rungklin (2007). The relationships between perceived information of violence attitude, stress and organization of commitment of the staff of Prince of Songkhla University in the violent Southern part of Thailand: a case study of Pattani Campus. *Unpublished Masters thesis*. Kasetsart University.
- Desmonod, M. D. & MacLachlan, M. (2006). Coping strategies as predictors of psychosocial adaptation in a sample of elderly veterans with acquired lower limb amputations. *Journal of Social Science and Medicine*, 62, 208-216.
- Hobfoll, S. K., Canetti-Nisim, D. & Johnson, J. (2006). Exposure to terrorism, stress-related mental health symptoms, and defensive coping among Jews and Arabs in Israel. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74, 207 - 218.
- Loewenthal K. M., Cinnirella M, Evdoka, G, & Murphy, P. (2001). Faith conquers all: Beliefs about the role of religious factors in coping with depression among different cultural religious groups in the UK. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 74, 293-303.
- Norris, F. H., Friedman, M. J., Watson, P. J., Byrne, C. M., Diaz, E., & Kaniasty, K. (2002). 60,000 disaster victims speak: Part I. An empirical review of the empirical literature, 1981-2001. *Psychiatry*, 65, 207-239.
- Penprapa Parinyapol (2009). Stress and interventions for people in unrest areas. *Education Journal*, Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus.
- Punamaeki, R. L. (1996). Can ideological commitment protect children's psychological well-being in situations of political violence? *Child Development*, 67, 55-69.
- Rohani Jeasae et al. (2008). *Happiness and factors related to happiness of people in three Southern border provinces experiencing unrest*. Princess of Naradhiwas University.
- Sagy, S. (1998). Effects of personal, family, and community characteristics on emotional reactions in a stress situation: The Golan Heights negotiations. *Youth & Society*, 29, 311-329.
- Shale, A. Y., & Freedman, S. (2005). PTSD Following terrorist attacks: A prospective evaluation. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 162, 1189-1191.
- Somchai Chakrapan (2006). *Happiness Index: the solution for the Thai society*. Bangkok: Department of Mental Health.
- Somchai Chakrapan (2008). *Fight the Southern crisis: Light in the tempest*. *Public Health news. Lerdsin Hospital Library*. Retrieved on 18 August, 2008, from <http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9510000080479>.
- Watts, J. (2000). Japan's hibakusha battle: The effects of US nuclear bombs. *Journal of Nursing*, 16, 1009.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2002). *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Yamada, M., & Izumi, S. (2002). Psychiatric sequel in atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki two decades after the explosions. *Social Psychiatrist Epidemiology*, 37, 409-15.