

Thailand Situation about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD in Thailand)

Chusak Janthayanond
President, Association of Parents of Thai Persons with Autism

Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder In Thailand

The definition of ASD in Thailand was based on The Persons with Disabilities Quality of Life Promotion Act B.E. 2550(2007), The Persons with Disabilities Education Act B.E. 2551(2008) and subsequent Ministerial Regulation B.E. 2551 (2008) which classified types of disabilities as follows:

1. Impairment of vision
2. Impairment of hearing or communication
3. Impairment of physical ability or locomotion
4. Impairment of mental ability or behavior or autism
5. Impairment of intellectual ability
6. Impairment of learning ability

In principle, [Autism](#) was defined as a [disorder of neural development](#) characterized by impaired [social interaction](#) and [communication skill](#), with restricted and repetitive behavior. These signs are normally found before three years of age of autism including Asperger Syndrome (AS).

ASD infants typically grow normally during 12-18 months and then begin to lose social and communication skills. The ability to imitate disappears. There is usually poor expressive language skills, including the triad of facial expression, word and gesture. The children do not socialize with others on play ground, relationship and interactions.

Early treatment for ASD in Thailand underlined upon Medical program with family involvement, and then on going with intensive education, basic or alternative education, pre-vocational, vocational programs and higher education.

A certificate issued by a Doctor of Medicines is required for the registration of an ID card for Persons with Disabilities.

Statistics

Recent diagnose revealed that autism spectrum disorder has increased to about one in every hundred children.

The Director-General of Mental Health Department, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand reported the statistics on prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in Thailand at 180,000 in 2007.

The National Statistical Office's survey of disability showed that statistic of mental behavior and autistic persons in 2007 were about 372,000.

The National Office of Empowerment of Persons with Disability, Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Security reported the statistics of autism and mental disability to be about 50,000 in 2010.

The Minister of Ministry of Education revealed statistic of students with autism to be about 5,000 in 2010

The Association of Parents of Thai Persons with Autism (AU Thai) and its network reported their members in Thailand are about 5,000 in 2010.

Summary of Statistics: 2010

Office	Year	Number	Type
Mental Health Department, Ministry of Public Health	2007	180,000	ASD
National Statistical Office	2007	372,000	Mental Behavior and ASD
The National Office of Empowerment of Persons with Disability, Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Security	2010	50,000	Mental and ASD
Ministry of Education	2010	5,000	In Service
Au-Thai Network	2010	5,000	Country-wide

Summary of Laws Related to Persons with Autism

1. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007 emphasized that all Thais shall enjoy equal rights and access to public services. As such, it contains many sections ensuring the protection and promotion for the well-being of persons with disabilities. For example, Sections 54 and 80 indicated that persons with disabilities shall enjoy the rights to access to social welfare and public facilities, and the government has responsibilities to provide social welfare and public service for the better quality of life of persons with disabilities. Section 30 specified that “Unjust discrimination against a person on the ground of the difference in origin, race, language, sex, age, disability, physical or health condition, personal status, economic or social standing..... shall not be permitted. Section 49 regarding education indicated that all persons including persons with disabilities have equal rights to access to 12 years free education supported by the government (the government has launched a 15-year free education policy for all Thai children since May 2009).

2. The Persons with Disabilities Quality of Life Promotion Act B.E. 2550 stated the rights of persons with disabilities include Autistic Persons and is a comprehensive rights-based law for persons with disabilities. It contains several measures to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities such as employment, social welfare and services, facilities in building, vehicles for persons with disabilities, and strong anti-discrimination section. This act assigned the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to be the focal point. This act has been developed from the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act B.E. 2534(1991). Three major changes were made. Firstly, disability is divided into 6 types comparing with 5 types of the 1991 law. Secondly, the definition of disability is based not only on ‘body function’ and ‘activity limitation’ but also ‘participation limitation’. Thirdly, the benefits on medical, educational, vocational, and social participation are increased. For example, the medical rehabilitation benefits increased from 13 items to 26 items. Examples of these medical benefits are music therapy, basic learning for school, life skills, dental care, developmental training kids, etc.

The Persons with Disabilities Quality of Life Promotion Act B.E. 2550 (2007) stipulated that the State must provide welfare allowance for disabilities and autism. Accordingly, the Government has subsequently issued the regulation stating that every registered person with a disability is entitled to a “Disabilities Allowance” of 500 Baht per month. In 2009, 262,669 persons with disabilities were provided with such allowance. The Government forecasts the number of beneficiaries to increase to 440,000 persons in 2010. Moreover, those disabled persons who are over 60 years old are also entitled to an “Old Age Allowance” of 500 Baht per month, in addition to the Disabilities Allowance.

The Thai government recognized that children with disabilities need special treatments and cares, thus establishing “Homecare Centers” for all types of children with disabilities and are categorized by children’s sex and age, located in Nonthaburi and Khonkaen Provinces.

Furthermore, the Thai government realized that social welfare services for children with disabilities are very essential for empowering them to live in society with dignity, equality and self-reliance. Such services are also extended in form of support to Non-governmental organization providing similar empowerment projects and services for autism such as Autistic Thai Vocational Center, which is an Au-Thai Network.

3. The Persons with Disabilities Education Act B.E. 2551 (2008) is intended for persons with disabilities to be able to access free educational services and other resources for all levels and to improve Thai education system to enhance the quality and independent living of life of persons with disabilities through empowerment programs.

The Thai Government also provided main support in education system to registered persons with disabilities including autism, including:

- Free education for children with disabilities and autism as from early intervention, primary education, secondary education, vocational education and higher education. (15 Year)

- Right to choose method of services ranged from formal education, non-formal education and alternative education. For example, the parents can set up “Home School” or “Learning Center” for children with autism .

4. The 3rd National Plan on Quality of Life Development of Persons with Disabilities, 2006–2011 is an integration and guidance for disability development practice for all authorities concerned.

5. Thailand was actively involved in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) since the beginning. It was among the first countries that signed the Convention on the date that the CRPD was ready for signature. Certain laws and policies related to the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities have been put in place while various pieces of legislation in the country are still under review. Those that still contain elements of discrimination against persons with disabilities will be pushed forward for amendment. Meanwhile Thailand is also stimulating social awareness of the CRPD to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedom of all persons with disabilities.

Promotion of Family and Community Involvement.

Family and Communities are encouraged to involve in managing social welfare services for the target groups including children with disabilities in their communities.

1. Occupational Training Programs

The Autistic Thai Foundation provide occupational Training programs for children with autism are offered not only in the homecare centers, but also institutions outside.

The Disability Fund support Financial programs For Autism Family to set a their own enterprise.

2. Pilot Projects Regarding the Establishment of Autistic Life Skills Center (ALC)

The government had set up and successfully implemented the Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) program during 2004-2008. Au-Thai Network, through Autistic Thai Foundation, subsequently initiated the Autistic Life Skills Centers (ALC) in 8 provinces under the support of Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and Khun Poom Foundation . The ALC is expected to serve as centers for:

- 1) sharing experience forums for the development of FCBR;
- 2) information center for autism family
- 3) Training center for persons with autism

The Association of Parents for Thai Persons with Autism

The Association of Parents for Thai Persons with Autism (AU-Thai) is officially recognized as the national public organization for persons with autism and their parents by the National Office for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (NEP), Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. AU-Thai had since in 2005 promoted the set up of provincial autistic clubs. Currently, there are parent clubs all over Thailand, and more than 50 provinces are members of the AU-Thai.

AU-Thai Objectives

1. To be a center for sharing information regarding persons with autism among its members and general public on how to support and take care of persons with autism.
2. The creation of a positive understanding and acceptance of persons with autism as members in society. To achieve its goals, AU-Thai provides necessary and appropriate

education and vocational training for them.

3. Collaboration with government agencies and concerned organizations to support persons with autism as well as other social activities.

Outstanding Achievements of AU-Thai during 2009–2010

1. Played an important role in pushing the government to announce the policy that “every person with disability has the right to learn”. The representatives of the Association participated in reforming the education system of persons with disabilities as well as being an Education Fund Committee for persons with disabilities.

2. Since 2003, the association has been collaborating with the Office of the Basic Education Commission to develop the education system for persons with autism, educating teachers, parents and volunteers on how to take care of persons with autism. To date, there are 200 mainstream class rooms (Inclusive Classroom and Parallel Classroom) in schools all over Thailand.

3. Has been collaborating with concerned organizations developing courses of nonformal education for persons with autism and using them as pilot course. At present more than 20 nonformal education centers over Thailand use those courses.

4. Sent the representatives as a task force to draft the Education Act for persons with disabilities and raised issues such as educational media distribution, accessibility to education system and how to support private schools which provide education for persons with autism.

5. Played an important role in pushing organizations to take care of the management of special education over Thailand. It is called the Bureau of Special Education Administration under the Ministry of Education. AU-Thai representative has also been serving the Bureau as its committee member.

6. Has been collaborating with the Office of Higher Education Commission to support and provide higher education for persons with autism in some universities including continuing efforts to increase the numbers of related professionals in the universities, such as vocational teachers and also encouraging universities to provide scholarships for those interested.

7. In collaboration with special education centers in 60 provinces, provided budget and resource persons for training on how to take care of children with autism to their parents, teachers and volunteers.

Working on Social Welfare with a Network of PWDs

1. Being a key organization to develop the National Rehabilitation Act for persons with disabilities. The Association raised few key issues e.g. the vocations of autistic persons, self-advocacy concept, welfare for persons with severe autism, autistic life skill centers as well as strengthening the organization of PWDs and their families. Those issues are included in the 3rd and 4th National Rehabilitation Acts for persons with disabilities.

2. Strongly voiced for the acceptance of national organizations for persons with disabilities by National Office for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security.

3. The Association was invited by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to participate in the development process of a one stop service system for persons with disabilities.

4. Acted as a national committee and sub-national committee members pushing public welfare policy for persons with disabilities and autism.

5. The Association and its network has been organizing the workshop for the past ten years on how to take care of persons with autism. In total, more than 10,000 participants had participated in the workshop.

6. Together with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, established an Autistic Service Center as a pilot project in Khonkaen Province. The project provides services such as vocational training for clients over 12 years old, not only in Khonkaen Province but also nearby provinces.

7. Has been keeping in touch with the government in order to propose the policies related to persons with autism. Success cases were more than 5,000 autistic persons and children with other disability types all over Thailand under annual budget allocated by the government through Khun Poom Foundation.

8. Played an important role in drafting the 2007 The Persons with Disabilities Quality of Life Promotion Act B.E. 2550(2007). Benefits included ranged from having a committee for the improvement of the quality of life of PWDs, an accessible registration system, an identification system for disability, and budget for improving the quality of life of PWDs and public welfare for PWDs and their families.

9. Joined “The Strong Network of Persons with Disabilities Project” with Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and CPDT-Thailand to promote and support the setting up of parents of autistic persons clubs. Currently, there are more than 50 parents clubs over Thailand.

10. Played an important role in pushing the National Health Act which was in force together with DPI-Thailand, for the foundation of children with disabilities in Health Insurance .

11. Together with The National Health Security Office , provided guidance for health services for PWDs. The Association acts as a focal-point organization and provides consultation to parents of persons with autism.

12. Cultivating awareness on people with autism in various provinces in Thailand such as Khonkaen, Lampang, Bangkok and Lopburi in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health.

13. Collaborating with Department of Mental Health organized Autistic Awareness Day for the first time ever. More than 2,000 participants including autistic persons and their families joined the event. Subsequent events had been organized in other provinces as well.

.....

December 2010

: 1ST Asean Autism Congress , Bangkok ,Thailand

www.autisticthai.org

www.autisticthai.net