

# TOO MANY WOMEN IN PRISON: A CASE STUDY OF AN EFFECTIVE TREATMENT OF FEMALE INMATES IN THAILAND

*Dr. Nathee Chitsawang\**



## I. INTRODUCTION

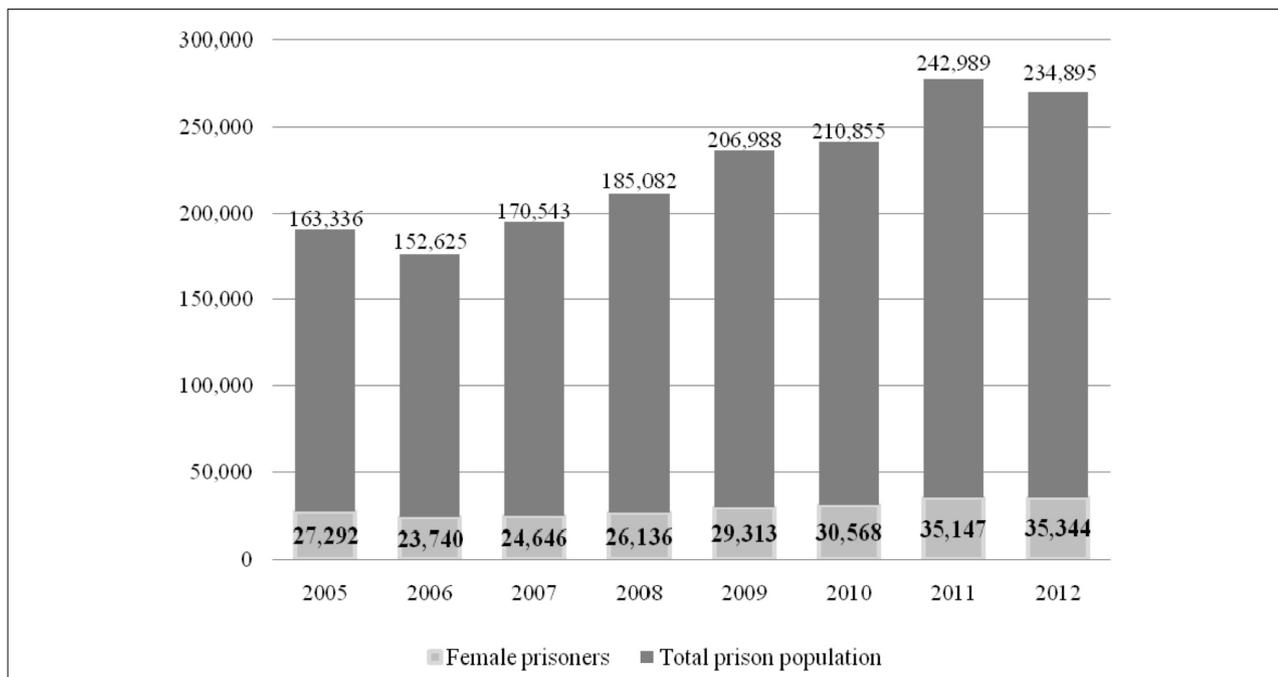
Thailand is generally considered as one of the countries which has a large number of women incarcerated in prisons and correctional institutions. Conversely, the prison capacity and the number of prison officers are clearly insufficient which together cause an unavoidable circumstance in the Thai prison system: “too many women in prison”.

The objectives of this paper are to discover the effective treatment programmes of women prisoners in Thailand which might offer some good examples for the programmes provided to female prisoners in other countries. Furthermore, in the final part, this paper discusses another possible step to alleviate the prison overcrowding problem, which not only helps to improve the treatment programmes of women prisoners, but also assists with the implementation of the Bangkok Rules in Thailand.

## II. FEMALE PRISON POPULATION IN THAILAND

About 20 years ago, the female prison population in Thailand was quite small. During that period, it seemed that the Thai prison system did not confront many complicated problems about the treatment of women prisoners. At that time, the focus of the prison authorities was on the male prisoners, who were the majority of the total prison population. Nevertheless, the situation has changed in the last decade as the number of female prison inmates has increased in particular since 2006.

Figure 1: Number of Female Prisoners Compared to the Total Prison Population, 2005 — 2012



Source: The Centre of Prisoner Statistics, Planning Division, Department of Corrections

\*Deputy Director, Thailand Institute of Justice, Ministry of Justice, Thailand.

153RD INTERNATIONAL SENIOR SEMINAR  
VISITING EXPERTS' PAPERS

The reason why there have been many women behind bars in Thailand is that in the past 15 years the number of female-committed crimes has dramatically increased, affecting the prison administration and the treatment of female prisoners directly, in particular when the prison settings and physical conditions of most facilities were designed for male prisoners, who have dominated Thai prison system for a long time. To illustrate, the prisons and correctional institutions for men in many provinces initially had a small, separate unit to keep the women in custody at the total capacity of about 30 — 60 prisoners in each prison, but in reality nowadays this figure might rise to 200 — 300. Therefore, the same old prison settings do not have enough space to incarcerate the increasing female prison population. Besides, the former treatment and rehabilitation programmes provided to the female inmates seem quite inadequate. Although there are various new female correctional institutions or more units built for female prisoners, it is obvious that they are still not sufficient.

As the female prisoners are detained in an overcrowded place designed for men, there are, therefore, some real difficulties. For instance, the female inmates apparently lack opportunity to gain access and participate in various rehabilitation programmes, education and vocational training, religious and mental development programmes, pre-release programmes and so on. Compared to the male prisoners, they have their own specific areas, i.e. the education and vocational training units, the prison canteen and a central area for doing some physical exercise and other activities. It is clearly seen that the rehabilitation programmes and treatment activities for female prisoners who are incarcerated in men's prisons are inadequate. At present, 68 men's prisons have their own zones or units specially separated for the custody of female prisoners. Among these, 9 of them have permanent and complete buildings. Furthermore, there are 8 female correctional institutions which are establishments for women in several parts of Thailand.

Although Thailand has various women's prisons situated in different regions of the country to provide the female prisoners with the same level of appropriate and meaningful treatment programmes as male inmates, there are also some obstacles. In the first place, it is argued that female prisoners must not be sent to the correctional facilities far away from their homes, creating difficulty for them to keep contact with their families and children because of the huge travelling expenses which can have negative impacts on female prisoners and the relationships within their families, in particular the ongoing development of young children. In addition, in cases of the pregnant inmates and prisoners with babies or young children, they do not want to be away from their children. As such, the prison authority has to create special programmes for taking care of prisoners' babies and the children residing in prison, as well as the programmes for the mothers behind bars at the same time.

Apart from the obstacle of the custody of female inmates, there is also a serious challenge in terms of the shortage of female prison officers since the total number of female prisoners has increased, but the government, on the contrary, does not have any plan to increase the manpower for the public sector. More importantly, some of the female officers do not perform the custodial task of female inmates. In fact, approximately 70% of them work in offices doing administrative jobs, such as dealing with finance and accounting as well as producing paper documents. They are normally used to replace the understaffed male officers who have to work inside custodial units. Consequently, there are only about 2 — 4 female staff working in a female unit within men's prisons where more than 100 female inmates are detained. In some large female inmate units, there might be 7 — 8 female officers working in a 700 — 800 inmate unit. Under these circumstances, the female prison officers have to work in genuine hardship, with difficulty and at risk for catching numerous diseases behind bars. On top of that, it seems very hard for the female staff to have a chance to launch any treatment programmes to develop and rehabilitate the female inmates because each day they must spend most of their time keeping the inmates in custody without prison riot or escape. As for the rehabilitation programmes, they tend to be done by outside people to help the prison officers.

### III. EFFECTIVE TREATMENT PROGRAMMES

It is worth mentioning that due to the royal kindness and gracious works of *HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn* and *HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha*, who have explicitly acknowledged the importance of correctional work and have initiated many treatment programmes in particular the initiatives for female offenders, there are various rehabilitation programmes in Thai prisons in order to enhance

all fundamental aspects of female prisoners' lives, including vocational and education training programmes, mental development and welfare. To put it briefly, these programmes aim at preparing the prison inmates to be ready for their new lives after release and cover the areas of:

- Education — the educational programmes range from the basic level, vocational education, degree level at the Open University to some courses on foreign languages
- Vocational training — there are varieties of vocational training programmes for female prisoners, such as handicraft making, cooking, fashion design and Thai massage
- Recreation and mental development — basically, the recreation activities behind bars include art, music and sport. Some examples of the projects are the Art for All Project, prison choir, female boxing, etc.
- Changing and improving the lives of inmates

Besides the treatment programmes involving many activities — education, vocational training, recreation and sports — recently Thai female prisoners have also been provided with rehabilitation based on the idea of changing and improving the inmates' lives, especially through the Kamlangjai Project and Sufficiency Economy Project, which can be useful for the inmates during the pre-release period.

Interestingly, from my point of view, there are several noticeable features of the treatment programmes of women prisoners in Thailand. In the first place, as previously mentioned, female prisoners had not been the primary focus of Thai prison system in the past; most of the treatment programmes provided to female prisoners, therefore, tended to be the same programmes or the similar projects given to male prisoners. In many cases, the programmes were actually planned and launched initially only for male inmates and were then expanded to a group of female prisoners. The following part, which discusses some examples of the effective treatment programmes in Thailand, supports this point because many of them are the programmes provided for both male and female prisoner groups.

Secondly, many successful treatment programmes for female prisoners were created with the help and cooperation of other agencies, from both the public and private sectors. These can be considered as one of the key factors leading to the effective implementation of the programmes provided in prisons. As mentioned earlier, when the Thai prison system has experienced the prison overcrowding crisis and the shortage of prison officers, it seems almost impossible for the people in Thai corrections to perform the rehabilitation work successfully by their own efforts.

Among all rehabilitation programmes which have been implemented, the often-quoted examples of the outstanding programmes for women prisoners in Thailand are:

#### **A. Music Therapy**

Music Therapy is a project participated in by both male and female prisoners, particularly those who committed crimes against the Narcotic Laws as it is believed that the choir singing can provide the prisoners with some mental development. To join the programme, a group of female prisoners from 5 women's correctional institutions have been trained to sing in a choir by the instructors from a Christian organization. It is argued that the music can help them to better train their own minds and improve many social skills. Normally, choirs of approximately 40 — 100 inmates are composed of the women prisoners from various institutions. They are often allowed by the prison authorities to perform the choir concerts outside prisons on numerous special occasions which have received positive responses from the public. Because of this, the inmates can be proud of their capability and finally see their own values. In addition, when they are released, the instructors from the Christian organization usually provide them accommodation in a halfway house and find jobs or academic institutions for them to work or further their studies.

#### **B. Art for All**

In 2005, HRH Princess Sirindhon established the *Art for All* project in order to provide an

alternative way of rehabilitation to inmates by teaching art. In cooperation with the Art for All Foundation, the Thai Department of Corrections has arranged Art Camps in many prisons and correctional institutions, supporting all inmates to learn and spend time on art activities, such as drawing, singing, playing Thai musical instruments, and so on.

The Art for All Foundation was initiated in 1997 by the Dean of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, in cooperation with ESCAP, and the Office of the National Culture Commission, which established an art programme by using art as a vehicle for developing the art skills and talents of both handicapped and non-handicapped individuals, who all take part in activities ranging from music and the visual and creative arts to dance, drama and literature. They are encouraged to use their imaginations and to explore new ideas. It is a project which promotes humanitarian values and does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race or religion.

The project firstly began in Klongprem Central Prison in 2005 where 120 inmates, both male and female, from various ethnic, religious, and educational background, and having committed various offences, were selected to attend the Art Camp programme in order to develop their art and social skills by resolving differences and improving their relationships with each other.

Within the Art Camp, everyone could see an atmosphere of mutual support and a favourable environment filled with smiles, laughter, applause and joyfulness of inmates, owing to the fact that they could learn how to share, give and take, and listen to other people. More importantly, they could recognize the value of themselves as human beings.

### **C. Educational Development**

Basically, the major objectives of prison education are to keep inmates meaningfully busy, to improve the quality of life in custody and to achieve something useful, i.e. skills, knowledge, understanding, social attitudes and behaviour that will last beyond prison and may lead to employment or further training. Therefore, education in prisons has been universally recognized as a global trend in international corrections. It is believed that education for all is a right, and restriction of one's freedom does not suspend that right.

In Thailand, educational programmes for inmates are acknowledged as crucial and indispensable activities in every prison. Each correctional facility must manage its space to set up an education unit, school or classroom which offers various learning courses to inmates. The course syllabus must be approved by the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education, ranging from courses for illiterate people to many high-school or vocational-education courses. Basic education can alleviate some of the problems caused by low levels of literacy and verbal ability, and social education may help inmates to cope better with frustration.

As for the higher education, from 2005 — 2006 the Department of Corrections was actively cooperating with Sukothai Thammathirat Open University, the most well-known Open University in Thailand, to provide the inmates with actual formal education. Then Mahasarakham University also came to join with the DOC in holding the academic classes which were all similar to the classes outside for normal students. Many inmates have been interested in signing up for all of these courses.

Moreover, Mahasarakham University has initiated a project to offer Master's Degree courses in 2011. By doing so, the inmates and prison officers can participate in the same classes. The qualified and recruited inmates will be transferred to Mahasarakham Provincial Prison to participate in this programme. Apart from the lessons and courses, to support the education in prisons, the DOC has established many projects to help the learning inmates, especially in terms of academic resources. For example, *Prom Panya Libraries*, which adhered to HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's belief that inmates should gain their fundamental rights to learn and to be able to catch up with the outside world through reading, have been established, in collaboration with Matichon Newspaper Group, an extensive collection of books and magazines covering various fields, ranging from education, arts, literature, religion, health and living.

Another project to support educational programmes for inmates and to offer inmates a chance to

spend their years of incarceration productively is the *Self Access Learning Centres*, which is a collaborative project with Ruamrudee International School. These centres are separated into three sections, the library, computer stations and classrooms, which serve as facilities for the inmates' independent study. Inmates are encouraged to make use of an array of resources and to turn to prison officers or volunteer tutors for advice and support. At present, 54 centres have already been running nationwide.

#### **D. Prison as a Home of Meditation**

Thai prisons have adopted an alternate approach to bring calm to the minds of inmates, and to let them start thinking over and learning from the mistakes in their lives, as well as to change their behaviours as they enter a new world. This approach is "*Dhamma practice and doing meditation*".

Between 2003 and 2007, meditation and dhamma practice had been introduced to inmates at large with the famous slogan: "*Prison as a House of Dhamma*". It was the application of Buddhist teachings, in particular regarding the mental treatment and rehabilitation of inmates, by letting them engage in meditation and dhamma practice, and by learning religious principles to understand themselves and live peacefully as well.

Four years after it was first introduced in prisons across the country, dhamma lessons have proved useful in calming aggressive behaviour. Many inmates said that they could have peace of mind by meditation, especially when they had the opportunity to learn to meditate.

The four-month motivational course of the Department of Corrections, called the "*Dhamma Practice Programme: DPP*", which was launched in June 2005, is among a growing list of alternative and diversionary criminal justice programmes designed to change the behaviour of inmates, which can lead to less misconduct in prison, fewer repeat offenders and lower prison costs. The aim of the programme is to reform the minds of Buddhist inmates in prisons around the country.

In 2006, the Department of Corrections signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with eight organizations in support of the DPP: Maha Dhera Association; Maha Chulalongkorn Buddhism College; Maha Makut Rachavitayalai Buddhism College; Wat Sai Ngam Meditation Centre; Department of Religions; The Office of National Buddhism; the Centre for Ethical Power Promotion and Development and the Centre for Ethics Promotion of the Office of Civil Service Commission.

An evaluation of each training course has been done by many agencies, for example, the Department of Corrections, the participating prisons and detention centres, the Ministry of Justice, The Office of National Buddhism, the Centre for the Promotion and Development of Morality and National Solidarity, Sai-ngarm Temple and other temples where participating prisons are located. Obviously, many inmates who were enrolled in the first dhamma course all agree that participation in the DPP helped them to become calmer because they can control their anger and find the right way to deal with it.

#### **E. Sports Behind Bars**

Sport offers various benefits, both physical and mental, to players. Considering the physical aspect, playing a sport can contribute to one's physical well-being and build up immunity against all diseases. At the same time, in terms of the mental aspect, sports can calm one's muddled thinking. Sports can help the players relax and have fun playing games, as well as promoting good and positive thinking. Besides, in the social world, playing sports can help people make new friends and spend time in much more useful ways. It also teaches people to learn good sportsmanship; how to lose, win and forgive in games, and how to treat each other with respect.

When the Department of Corrections has introduced sports to people behind bars, in particular by giving chances to inmates to play sports, the inmates' lives have been changed in a sense that in the past they tended to spend their free time doing prohibited activities, i.e. gambling, fighting, finding the way to escape and wasting their time day by day. But now the inmates can concentrate on playing and practising sports which, therefore, is considered as a "positive security". Moreover, one of the results is that sports can help inmates to have physical and mental strength. They do not have time to muddle and plan for any escape.

153RD INTERNATIONAL SENIOR SEMINAR  
VISITING EXPERTS' PAPERS

In 2004, there was a special sport competition for inmates in order to find the winners as the representatives of "Corrections Club" to attend and compete in "Thailand National Games Sport Competition". Accordingly, the first *Sports behind Bars* competition was set up at the Central Correctional Institution for Young Offenders in Thanyaburi. The inmates who had won in each region of the country would come to compete in Bangkok in two kinds of sports: boxing and *sepak takraw*. Since then, "Sports behind Bars" has been held every year and has gradually added more types of games to the competition. It could be said that the project could give birth to many rising stars of amateur boxing in Thailand.

However, it is believed that the most successful amateur boxer in history is Samson Sor Siriporn, who was crowned the World Boxing Council female light-flyweight champion by defeating a Japanese fighter. Samson also became Thailand's first world boxing champion while behind bars. In 2007 she was released from prison on parole and is now working in the world of professional boxing.

Samson Sor Siriporn, the former light-flyweight World Boxing Council (WBC) Female Champion is the perfect example showing the successful outcome of the rehabilitation programmes for female offenders in Thailand. In 2002, the Department of Corrections created a new idea for training female inmates to be boxers by establishing a boxing camp in the Women's Correctional Institution for Drug-Addicts because of the belief in searching for their hidden talents. After being operated for several years, the Department has started the female boxing tournament between prisons, and occasionally invited professional boxers from outside to enhance the experience of female-inmate boxers. Finally, the boxing match on 3 April 2007 led to the victory of Samson, who was the first female world champion while incarcerated. It could be said that Samson's new life has inspired other female inmates to pursue the path to success with the opportunity given by the Department of Corrections.

#### **F. Mother and Children Projects**

This type of project seems different from the above-mentioned treatment programmes because of the fact that it was actually set up for women prisoners. In fact, this specific initiative can highlight the special needs of female inmates behind the prison walls. It was the gracious work of HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha who initiated the "*Quality Pregnancy*" project at the Central Women Correctional Institution by asking the Thai Red Cross College of Nursing to provide educational services to improve the conditions of pregnant inmates to prepare them for giving birth and raising their babies. Also, the project "*Raising Good People Starting from the First Year*" was set up to provide knowledge about child-rearing and proper child development, and to simultaneously encourage the mothers to assume quality parental roles for their children. It is believed that the inmate mothers will have close ties with their children, promoting good relationships, creating good consciences and a sense of responsibility for their children.

#### **G. Improving Health Conditions and Developing-Mind Projects**

Besides the provision of specific projects for the pregnant inmates and their children, HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha is also interested in the improving the health conditions of the elderly inmates, especially the health of their eyes. Accordingly, she initiated the programme called "*The Gift of Sight is the Gift of Life*" at the Central Women Correctional Institution with support from the Rutnin-Gimbel Excimer Laser Eye Centre to provide eye check-ups, eye glasses, pterygium and cataract surgery, as well as eye care tips for preventive measures.

Moreover, she also believed in the fundamental necessity of developing the state of mind of prison inmates. "*The Body and Mind Development with the Seeds of Life and Kindness Project*" was launched because of the belief that the way to help the female inmates to return to having full lives and really being able to stand on their own is to be able to realize their own value, the finding of their desire and their potentials within themselves. It is considered to be the development of mind and body for internal capital of each individual including the nurturing of the seeds of love and kindness to grow in the mind, which will be the foundation for living their lives in prison and after release.

The Body and Mind Development with the Seeds of Life and Kindness Project is aimed to develop the value of self of women inmates to realize their potentials to change themselves in creative ways to free their lives from the chain of thinking, belief, social context and the lure of temptation from the

consumerist society that tries to gain control over them.

#### **H. Vocational Training Projects: Teacher behind Bars; Café Restaurant; Fashion Lady**

The vocational programmes for female inmates have been continuously developed and produced satisfactory outcomes. One of them is *Chuan Chom Thai Restaurant*, which was first launched at the building in front of the Central Women Correctional Institution as a dining place serving Thai dishes prepared by female inmates. The most famous dishes, which have been tasted and recommended by many food columnists, are *Phad Thai* (stir-fried rice noodle) and *Khai Pa Loh* (sweet stewed egg and pork). Also, there are hairdressing and barber shops with spa and massage services provided by female inmates, as well as the prisoners' product shop in the same area as the vocational training centre. Recently, all same styles of services have been operated in other women's correctional institutions around the country and are very well-known among customers for their high quality of service.

Furthermore, the project "Teacher behind Bars", or *Kru* (teacher) *Kon Kook* (inmate) in Thai, has been launched to promote social acceptance towards prisoners and ex-offenders. By doing that, female inmates are brought into the local areas to provide ordinary people with teaching of vocational knowledge and skills acquired in prison. The training courses include Thai cooking, homemade bakery, Thai massage and painting. The comprehensive strategy is to give opportunities to female prisoners to perform productive activities outside prison so that the public would gain a growing understanding and acceptance of inmates. As far as the project has carried out, many people are interested in attending the courses and usually give the Department favourable feedback.

Also, as it is widely accepted that women tend to be interested in clothes and fashion, the "Fashion Lady" project was carried out by providing the female inmates with fashion designing and dress-making courses trained by fashion experts. Later, there was an event called "Lady Designer" to let the talented female inmates show their outstanding dresses. The clothes designed and made by the inmates were worn on the runway show by leading models in Thailand and other famous people in society who wanted to show support to the female prisoners.

#### **I. Kamlangjai Project: Bringing the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to be Applied in Prison**

Apart from inspiring and helping female inmates in prison to receive better care and treatment for themselves and their babies, to have good health and hygiene, to get higher education and vocational training and to give the inmates great inspiration for changing their behaviours and attitudes towards offending, another apparent benefit of the Kamlangjai Project initiated by HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha also includes the pre-release programme preparing the offenders to return to live peacefully in society. In other words, the Kamlangjai Project attempts to narrow the gap between prison and community life so that prisoners can gradually re-adjust to their normal lives outside the materially deprived settings more effectively. By doing so, the re-entry programme is provided in the open prisons whose environment appears almost similar to the external society.

It is believed that this is an innovative initiative in terms of the fact that most pre-release programmes in the past seemed to be carried out in closed prisons which have a secure perimeter and protected environment, while the Kamlangjai Project, on the contrary, focuses on the treatment of prison inmates in open prisons by providing them with a training programme based on the "*Sufficiency Economy*" philosophy, which teaches them a new way of thinking, as well as vocational training in particular agricultural skills in order to finally result in a total reduction in recidivism of inmates.

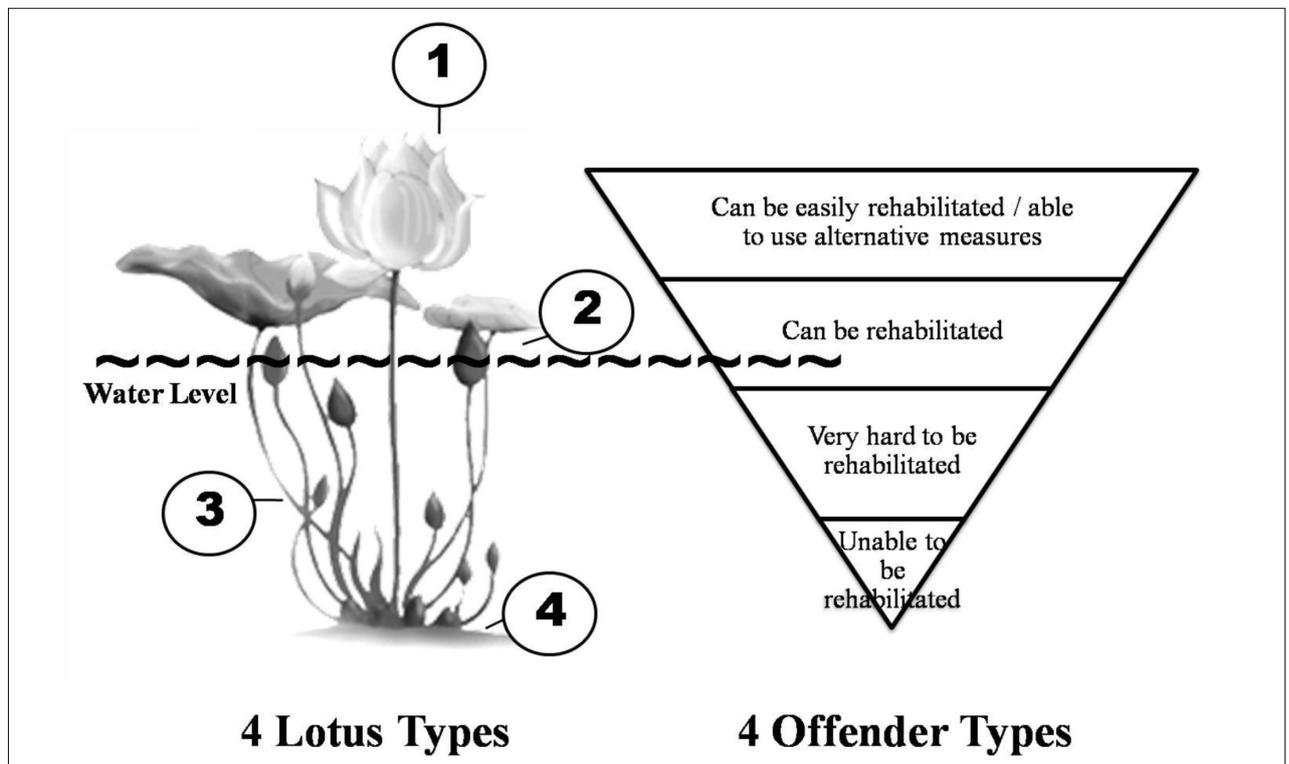
Generally speaking, the first impact of the Kamlangjai Project is an improvement in prisoners' attitudes and their ability to become self-sufficient. To put it simply, prisoners can realize that they cannot wait for assistance from other people but they must try to stand on their own two feet. In addition, the prisoners are able to apply what they have learned to daily activities such as making life plans, balancing income and expenditures, cutting excessive spending, reducing costs by producing home-grown products, and planning for the future. On top of that, the Kamlangjai Project arranges group sessions among prisoners in which they develop coaching strategies and share opinions and experiences. This helps them to gain a deeper understanding of a "*self-sufficient*" way of life. This shift in thinking is the real achievement of the Kamlangjai Project because it is this way of thinking which can actually help them after release. Wherever they go and in whatever job they do, they will be better

prepared to handle situations and make better decisions. At present, the project has been carried out in four open prisons: Khao Rakam Open Prison, Doi Rang Open Prison, Khao Plong Open Prison and Khae Noi Open Prison. Among these four open prisons, “*Khae Noi*” is the only open prison for female inmates. It is situated in Phetchabun Province in the lower northern part of Thailand.

#### IV. FOUR TYPES OF “LOTUS”: FOUR PRISONER GROUPS

From the previous part which gave some examples of the successful treatment programmes of female inmates in Thailand, there might be some reasonable doubts about the possibility of those programmes, whether they could really rehabilitate the women offenders or not, and to what extent. To offer a possible answer, I will explain a key concept called “*the 4 lotus types*”. It is one of the principles of Buddhism using the metaphor of the lotus flower as people. By so doing, all people will be classified into four different groups based on their wisdom and the ability to learn and understand.

Picture 1: The Metaphor of Offenders as the Four Lotus Types



As illustrated in picture 1 on the left side, there are four types of lotus flowers at different positions: 1) the lotus above the water level; 2) the lotus at the water level; 3) the lotus under the water; and 4) the lotus at the bottom of the sticky mud. According to one of the Buddhist teachings, these four lotus flowers at different positions can refer to each group of people as well as the prisoners.

##### A. The Lotus above the Water Level

The first lotus, above the water, can get the rays of sunshine and bloom easily like a genius who can understand what she or he learns easily. Similarly, in terms of the offender it means that he or she can be rehabilitated easily. In some cases, diversion or alternatives to prison can be used.

##### B. The Lotus at the Water Level

The second lotus bud at the water level needs some time to grow out above the water level, to get the sunshine and bloom. This is like a person who does not understand at first but will understand after the second, or maybe third, attempt. Compared to the offender type, this person can be changed after receiving several treatment programmes but might need more time and efforts than the first prisoner group.

### **C. The Lotus under the Water**

The third lotus, under the water level and coming out from the mud, it needs a long time to grow out above the water before getting the sunshine and blooming. This is like a person who does not understand when he or she tries to learn but must try again and again, like never giving up. Finally, he or she is able to understand. This type then refers to a prisoner who finds it very hard to change himself or herself to become a law-abiding citizen.

### **D. The Lotus at the Bottom and under the Mud**

Lastly, the lotus under the mud does not have the ability to grow out from the mud, so it is simply a food for fish and tortoises. This is like a person who tries very hard in his or her studies but has no ability to understand. This is similar to an inmate who is unable to be rehabilitated and therefore tends to be dangerous to the society as there is a high possibility that he or she will reoffend.

From the concept of four types of lotus linking to some different groups of prisoners, it can be argued that the treatment programmes will be highly effective and successful when they are provided to the first and second groups of prisoners (like the lotus flowers above the water and at the water level). Fortunately, it seems that the majority group of women prisoners in Thailand can be categorized as the first and second lotus types, which means that they can gain many benefits from the treatment programmes. Also, there are some female inmates who can be given alternative measures instead of being sent to prisons. Therefore, if the prison system has a good categorizing system of the female prisoners, the treatment programmes will be more successful. Also, it can lead to more use of diversion measures which can help the prison overcrowding problem in Thailand.

## **V. ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BANGKOK RULES**

Although there are various effective treatment programmes for female prisoners in Thailand, it is crucial to point out that they are not enough. The most serious problems of female prisoners still exist: prison overcrowding and the shortage of prison staff. It is believed that these treatment programmes will not be able to succeed in the future. Also, the difficulty in achieving the implementation of the Bangkok Rules in Thailand will increasingly arise if there are still more and more female offenders sentenced to imprisonment. Therefore, the Thai prison system must increasingly use alternative measures or diversion to select those women who should not be sent to prison so that they receive alternatives to imprisonment.

Currently, there is no effective measure for providing alternatives to prison in the Thai criminal justice system. Consequently, it is seemingly unavoidable for female offenders to be continuously sent to prisons or correctional facilities. In fact, even when the laws allow using the alternatives to imprisonment (for example probation and detention in other places which are not prisons/correctional institutions under the Criminal Procedure Code, section 89, paragraphs 1 and 2), these practices have not been adopted seriously or used often enough. As a result, the number of female prisoners in prisons keeps growing every year.

The lack of widespread implementation of the alternatives to prison comes from the fact that the wider society and people in the criminal justice system do not truly understand the crucial importance of these measures for providing female prisoners with special treatment due to the limitation of custodial settings, their physical differences and the social roles of men and women, particularly the pregnant inmates and female prisoners who have to raise their young children in prison are treated more poorly than the male inmates.

Nevertheless, it is believed that due to the Bangkok Rules, Thailand will increase its efforts to use the diversion or alternatives to prison more often because it is obvious that the major obstacle to putting the Bangkok Rules into practice is the overcrowding of the female prison population in Thailand.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Female prisoners in Thailand have been provided with many treatment programmes, including education and vocational training, recreation activities, health and mind development, as well as the provision of ways to change their attitudes and ways of living. However, although the Thai prison system has tried continually to conduct many effective treatment programmes for female prisoners, and to give all inmates another chance in their lives in order to have successful reintegration, it seems that their treatment and custody cannot be developed as effectively and successfully as possible because of prison overcrowding and insufficient staffing. Hence, the necessary step to improve the situation is increasingly to apply alternative measures to prison or diversion from the criminal justice system, which will also be useful for the implementation of the Bangkok Rules in Thailand.