



Child protection practitioners' perceptions of working with children whose rights were violated due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020

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Abstract

Title: Child protection practitioners' perceptions of working with children whose rights were violated due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020

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This micro-ethnographic study aimed to explore the current understandings and perceptions of child protection practitioners working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in protests in Thailand in the year 2020. The research strategy has been a qualitative approach. The interpretive framework used in this study is a postmodern perspective. The data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview with three child protection practitioners who are the competent officials of the Thailand Child Protection Act (2003) as the primary source of data.

The thematic analysis of the data led to five overarching themes presented in three categories of participants' perceptions- the perception of the children's right to protest, the perception of the execution of the competent official roles and responsibilities in working with such children, and the perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest. Firstly, this study found that the competent officials perceived that the right to protest is essential for children since children use protests to make adults listen to them and influence the social changes with their own actions. Each participant's perception of childhood influenced the competent officials to perceive the children's right to protest differently. Secondly, when it comes to executing the competent official's roles, this study found that the competent officials perceived that they could perform just a light role as a mediator, and being a social worker is beneficial for them to work with such children. Lastly, the participants perceived that it is the state's undeniable responsibility to protect children's well-being when they attend protests and promote children's right to participate in a democratic society.

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ขอบคุณมากมาย แบบใหม่ แบบสับ (with love)

Golf, Phongsathon Chankaew

Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CRC	The Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCY	Department of Children and Youth
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
MSDHS	Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
NHRC	The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand
SWPC	Thailand Social Work Professions Council
TLHR	The Thai Lawyers for Human Rights Center
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter one

Introduction

Background

In 2020, student-led protests against the military-backed government were spreading all over Thailand. Initially, unprecedented waves of flash-mobs were formed individually in various universities and secondary schools after Future Forward Party, which is the second biggest opposition and pro-democracy party from the 2019 election, was dissolved by the constitutional court (Peck & Blake, 2020). The election ended five years of military rule. However, the constitution drafted by the former junta government reinstated General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, the former junta leader who seized the country's power by a coup in 2014, back as a Prime Minister again (Beech, 2020). As the protests unfolded, the students in different universities and secondary schools came together to push the three core demands: the resignation of the prime minister, the amendment of the constitution, and the reformation of the monarchy (Peck & Blake, 2020). The last demand is the most controversial since the king and monarchy are seen as "sacred" in Thailand. Consequently, the criticism and defamation of the king and monarchy can result in imprisonment of three to fifteen years, according to article 112 of the Lèse-majesté law of the Thai Criminal Code (Harmer, 2020).

In this study, the term "children" aligns with the definition of "children" found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, §1) and the Child Protection Act (2003, §4) of Thailand to encapsulate "Every human being below the age of eighteen years, but does not include a person who becomes sui juris through marriage." The education system in Thailand has four levels, namely pre-school, elementary, secondary education, and tertiary and higher education. The secondary education system is divided into two levels; lower and upper secondary education with approximate age thirteen - fifteen and sixteen - eighteen years old, respectively (OECD, 2018, p. 175). Therefore, to be aligned with the meaning of children in CRC and Child Protection Act (2003) of Thailand, the secondary school children mentioned in this study are thus defined as children between thirteen and seventeen.

Secondary school children are participating in the protests. They are not only asking for the core demands but also have their own interests and requests for the reformation of the Thai educational system. The children mentioned several experiences in school that made them join the protests. Experiences of sexual abuse by teachers (Tostevin & Mahira, 2020), the outdated curriculum, the use of teaching methods that do not motivate, "archaic and petty rules" regarding children's haircuts and uniforms (Phasuk, 2020), the discrimination against LGBTQi pupils, among others. In addition, the children claimed that teachers do not show respect to various gender identities of the pupils (Kuhakan, 2020). The young protesters refer to themselves as "Bad Students", which is their own definition of themselves as they refuse to be "good students" conforming to the Thai education's conventional norms of expecting children to obey and follow adults' directives (Phasuk, 2020). They ask for "an end to all forms of harassment against students demanding democracy, revocation of obsolete and abusive school regulations, and educational reforms with students' full participation" (Phasuk, 2020). The protests have spread to secondary schools across the nation, with students tying white ribbons, writing their opinion on placards, and raising the "*Hunger Games*" - style three-finger salute during morning assemblies, a symbol of the pro-democracy protest. The protesters claimed that "school is the first dictatorship" (Kittisilpa, 2020).

Protest aims to "bring change through peaceful means" (Daly, 2013, p. 768). It is not just only in the form of demonstration-like activity, but it can be in different ways of expressions, for instance, walk-outs, sit-ins, and boycotts (Roberts & Garton, 2009). Nishiyama (2020, p. 502) describes that children express their political views and perform their protests via three key spaces: on the street, online, and in schools. Online platforms, like Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram, allow children to efficiently and creatively exercise their civil and political rights (Nishiyama, 2020). Children can share their views, express their opinions, reach out to those with whom they have mutual interests, and call for action (Nishiyama, 2020, p. 502). Children are going out on the streets calling for a change of dominant societal discourses and are shaking political establishments (Nishiyama, 2020, p. 502). They are also using the schools to express their political views and contend with the oppressive culture embedded within (Nishiyama, 2020).

Lansdown (2011), Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2018), and Nishiyama (2020) notably highlight the right to participation in article 12 of the CRC as the starting point of discussion in recognizing children's right to participate in matters that affect their lives. In order to enable children to fully participate in the political sphere, Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2018, p. 278) argue that the subsequent articles which recognize children's civil and political rights, including rights to freedom of expression in article 13, freedom of thought, conscience and religion in article 14, and freedom of peaceful assembly in article 15, in which it denotes the right to protest (O'Kane, 2013, p. 6), should be brought into consideration. Lansdown (2011, p. 35) recognizes the right to protest as an "important vehicle" to get children to reach a destination where they can express their views and exercise their rights. The Human Rights Commission recognizes the right to protest as vital as the right to vote (Daly, 2013, p. 768). Since children in most parts of the world do not have such rights in the national political arenas, it is critically important for them to protest to enjoy and express their civil and political rights (Daly, 2013, p. 768). Accordingly, the Committee on the Rights of the Child affirms that children's right to protest should be protected in a similar way it is protected when it comes to adults (Daly, 2013, p. 783). However, there is a need to protect children in the context of protests, in the regard that children have particular conditions in which adults have to support and prioritize the right to participation rather than use the need for protection as an excuse to exclude them from politics (Daly, 2013; Nishiyama 2020).

Problem statement

Globally, the increased number of children participating in protests has changed adults' perception of children's capacity and agency. Children have shown that they can protect and defend their human rights and bringing change to their society (Daly, 2013; Nishiyama; 2020). However, in former protests (Arab Spring and Palestinian uprising), concerns have been raised regarding the possibility of children being in dangerous situations with state authorities (Daly, 2013, p. 772). For instance, in Syria, between 2011 and 2013, children were injured and killed by security forces at numerous demonstrations (Daly, 2013, p. 773). Similarly, in Thailand, there is a price children who participated in protests pay unintentionally. The Thai Lawyers for Human Rights Center (TLHR, 2020a) established that after the beginning of the students' protests in January until October 10th 2020, the police followed at least twenty-nine students to their homes and schools. Meanwhile, one hundred and three children reported that they were harassed or intimidated by teachers, school administrators, or the police due to their protests. The harassments included banning protests and any forms of political expression in the schools, hitting the children on their heads and hands, confiscating mobile phones, and white ribbons, and other forms of disciplinary actions and intimidation (TLHR, 2020b). At least three children

disclosed that they were physically abused by their family members, expelled from homes, and got their monthly allowances cut by their parents due to their participation in the protests (Chaiprasit, 2020). Eight children, aged sixteen and seventeen, were charged under several allegations of sedition, Lèse-majesté, and violation of the emergency decree (TLHR, 2021). The children who actively participated in the protests in Thailand have been exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions by the parents, the teachers, and the Thai authorities represented in school administrators and the police.

Although Thailand ratified the CRC (1989) in 1992 and should amend and update its policies and implementations of children's rights to align with the CRC's, children's civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom of peaceful assembly do not explicitly appear in Thai laws. The comments of the Committee on the Right of the Child addressed to several State Parties indicated the lack of acknowledgement of article 15 at the domestic level and called it "obstacles" for children to obtain their civil and political rights (Daly, 2013, p.784). In reality, children have been exposed to many forms of abuse and restriction from exercising such rights. This brings the Committee to emphasize state parties' responsibilities to improve their laws in conforming with children's civil and political rights recognized in the CRC and protect children's safety in protest. Daly (2013, p. 786) points out that state parties have to educate state officials and employees to understand children's right to protest and their responsibilities to facilitate the exercising of such rights and protect them from possible harms which might occur.

Thailand's child protection mechanism mainly depends on the state bodies irrespective of social welfare provisions, residential care facilities, and the justice system (Wechayachai, 2008). On the other hand, children who participate in the protest distrust and refuse to receive help from such government representatives (Chaiprasit, 2020).

The Child Protection Act (2003, §30) defines roles, responsibilities, and powers of "competent officials" to protect children and ensure their well-being when welfare assistance and protection is needed. The competent officials have to be appointed by the minister of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. A social worker who has at least two years of experience working with children is eligible to be appointed as a competent official (National Child Protection Committee, 2004). Therefore, "child protection practitioners" in this study refer directly to the social workers who are appointed to be competent officials under the Child Protection Act (2003) in which they are required to protect children from abuse. Munro (2002, p. 61) argues that defining child abuse is not easy since it "depends on our beliefs about acceptable and unacceptable ways of treating children, the beliefs that have been changed over time and considerably different between groups". Similarly, the understanding and perception toward children's capacities, maturity and roles in society are also extensively different across cultures and subcultures (Daly 2013, p. 771). Thus, the lack of acknowledgement of children's civil and political rights in domestic laws coupled with the difficulty to understand child abuse and children's right to participation can put social work practitioners in the child protection field in challenging situations during practice.

Purpose and aim

The purpose of this study is to explore the current understandings and perceptions of child protection practitioners toward the situation when children were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in protests in Thailand in the year 2020. I strongly hope that the study's findings will be beneficial and hopefully be included in child protection practitioner training courses in the future.

Research questions

The main research question of this research study is how child protection practitioners perceive working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020.

I am interested in exploring three areas regarding the perception of the child protection practitioners– the perception of the children’s right to protest, the perception of the execution of the competent official roles and responsibilities in working with such children, and the perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest. The answers to the secondary research questions addressing these three areas will provide the answer to the main research question. The secondary research questions are:

1. How do child protection practitioners perceive and understand children's right to protests?
2. How do child protection practitioners understand their roles and responsibilities in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests?
3. What are child protection practitioners' understandings of the changes that should be made in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests?

Chapter two

Literature review

The introduction part has presented the problem; furthermore, it justified the importance and relevance of this study topic in children's rights and social work fields. The earlier part highly focuses on literature that originated outside Thailand. In avoiding the repetition of the information, thus, this chapter presents the review of literature that is studied in the Thai context in which is divided into two-part to describe the studies of Thai children in protests and the child protection system in Thailand.

Thai children in protests

Since Thailand was revolutionized to a constitutional monarchy instead of an absolute one in 1932, 14th October 1973 is considered to be the date of the first and biggest uprising led and performed by students (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Muakchim, 2021). That is until 6th October 1976 where Thammasat Massacre ended the political attentiveness of Thai students and youth for more than 40 years (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Muakchim, 2021). The awakening of student political attentiveness in the protests against the government in early 2020 has captured Thai scholars' attention because of the involvement of both university and high school students.

Muakchim (2021) studied the factors affecting the political attentiveness of Thai youths. She describes social media as a powerful tool which that children use to change the conventional way of having master-mined leaders into organic flash-mobs. Muakchim (2021, p. 260) emphasizes that today's children could access various knowledge resources that contribute to their critical thinking and insightful questions toward authoritarianism in Thai culture, which has have not provided enough spaces for them to speak or express their political views.

To be more specific, Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul (2021) studied with the high school students –which is parallel with the secondary school pupils of this study- in Khon Kaen province, the northeast region of Thailand, to obtain their reasons for participating in the protests in 2020. Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul (2021, pp. 405-408) divided the influential factors for children to participate in the protests into two types, reasoning and decision-making factors. Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul (2021, pp. 408-409) found four reasoning factors: (1) right and freedom factor, (2) school factor, (3) political factor, and (4) family factor. They have also found three other decision-making factors, including individual (1) ideology, (2) social media, and (3) risk perception. After reading their study, I combined those factors and reinterpreted them into four reasons that pushed children to protest. Firstly, the frustration and anger toward the country's political situation caused by the 2014 coup d'etat. The final straw that pushed children to protest was the dissolution of the Future Forward Party by the constitutional court (Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021, p. 406). This political party was seen as the hope of the new generations (Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021, p. 406). Secondly, the intolerance of authoritarianism and oppressive culture in Thai schools were perceived as the national politics's root problems (Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021, p. 406-407). Thirdly, the lack of independence of Thai political institutions, such as the influence of the monarchy, which is referred to in this study the word some institution, on politics, the unjust constitution drafted by the junta government, which benefited the pro-military party to win the last election in 2019 (Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021, p. 407). Lastly, the advancement of the internet and the influence of social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, contributed to children easily accessing information that was not published via

mainstream channels. This led children to connect and create online campaigns before going to the street protests (Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021, p. 409). These four reasons caused children to feel that growing up to be just voters will not be enough to ensure their control over the future.

Lertchoosakul (2021) studied with a larger group of university and secondary school students from eleven provinces all over Thailand to seek what motivated them to be politically active. Besides the similar points stated in Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul's study (2021), Lertchoosakul (2021) emphasizes that secondary school students perceive the monarchy as the root cause of the political problems and uneven country development. The students mentioned the contradiction of the given King's Philosophy, self-sufficiency economy, that they are forced to learn in schools and the luxurious lifestyle of the royal family members and people low quality of life and level of country's development in comparison with the huge amount of budget funded to the monarchy by taxpayers each year (Lertchoosakul, 2021, p. 9). Moreover, the students linked the remaining patriarchal system and domestic violence culture in Thailand directly to the current king since there was information shared on social media and across the internet about the violence against the king's ex-wives and children (Lertchoosakul, 2021, p. 9). Lastly, these children felt that the abduction of the Thai pro-democracy activist, Mr. Wanchelerm Satsaksit, in Cambodia, was directly linked to the monarchy (Lertchoosakul, 2021, p. 10). So, the students felt that speaking out for Wanchalerm is the way to protect their political rights (Lertchoosakul, 2021, p. 10). Thus, Lertchoosakul's (2021) study shows that children can relate their daily life experiences with the country's establishment and polity. Therefore, children in Thailand have the desire and capacity to be involved in politics and contribute to social changes in the hope of securing a more friendly political environment for them to grow up.

The arisen concerns when children participate in protests

Suvorarith (2015) found out that the concerns toward the violation of children's rights due to their participation in protests were also raised during the political conflict between yellow shirts and red shirts. There were three major concerns indicated in this study. Firstly, the risk of children being manipulated by adults. Secondly, the risk of children imitating political behavior and expressions from adults (Suvorarith, 2015. p. 161). Lastly, the risk of physical and mental abuses, such as the report of sexual abuse cases and the death of two children from the blasts that happened in the protest areas (Suvorarith, 2015. p. 162). I found that the results of Suvorarith's study portrayed the status of children who participated in the protest as *adult followers*, not as human beings with agency. The way adult protesters promoted children to be assertive and to express their political views by speaking up on the stage or writing letters to protest leaders were perceived as a concern that would bring negative impacts on children (Suvorarith, 2015. p. 161).

However, I have not found any scholarly article addressing the concerns for children participating in the protest in Thailand. UNICEF (2020) was the first children's rights related organization to issue a statement addressing concerns about possible harm children might encounter in the protests and asking to end all forms of violence and restrictions on children to exercise their political rights. The CRC Coalition Thailand (2020) issued a statement calling the Thai government and relevant adults to create a safe environment and protect children's right of participation and freedom of expression without any forms of violence. The statement was issued after the dissolution of the mass demonstration at the Pathumwan intersection by the police, where water cannons contaminated with chemical substances were used. The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC, 2020) also released a statement underlining

the risk of children being manipulated by adults and absorbing aggressive and violent behaviour from the protests. Hence, instead of addressing the importance of protecting children's right to protest and expressing their political views freely, the NHRC suggested solely not to bring small children to the protests.

Child protection system in Thailand

Child Protection Act of 2003: the establishment of child protection system in Thailand

Thailand ratified the CRC (1989) in 1992. Thus, the country has been obligated to amend its laws in conformity with the CRC by upholding the children's best interest as a bedrock principle of its national law (Wechayachai, 2008). Later in 2003, the legislation of the Child Protection Act (2003) was a significant turning point of Thailand's child protection work since the national and regional child protection mechanisms in the country were established, accommodating a multidisciplinary approach at every level (Wechayachai, 2008). The law describes children as people below eighteen years of age following the definition of the CRC. In addition, the law explains the acceptable and unacceptable ways of treating children and indicates relevant authorities and different groups of adults in society to be responsible for children's well-being in various ways (Child Protection Act, 2003)

Structurally, three measures are imposed by the law, which is inseparably linked to (1) welfare assistance, (2) security protection, and (3) student behavioural promotion (Wechayachai, 2008, pp. 46-47). First, the welfare assistance measure aims to support children and families to achieve well-being and quality of life in accordance with the minimum standard of child-rearing registered in the MSDHS's ministerial regulation. Then, if the welfare assistance is not adequate, the second measure which is the security protection measure has to be taken (Wechayachai, 2008, p. 46). The second measure aims to protect children who are at risk of being abused in which state authorities can intervene in the family sphere (Wechayachai, 2008, pp. 46-47). Finally, the last measure aims to collaborate with the teacher and social worker to help children with social and behavioural problems starting from inside school fences (Wechayachai, 2008, p. 47).

A competent official: a critical mechanism of the Child Protection Act of 2003

According to the Child Protection Act (2003), a competent official is a vital component in facilitating the three measures. There are two types of the competent officials. The first type is automatically appointed by their positions, such as MSDHS's Permanent Secretary, provincial governors, and district directors (Child Protection Act, 2003, §24). The second type is whom the MSDHS's minister appoints (Child Protection Act, 2003, §4) in agreement with the National Child Protection Committee (2004)'s regulations regarding the criteria for the appointment of competent officials. The law provides competent officials with overarching power to provide welfare assistance and security protection for children (Wechayachai, 2008, p. 47). In addition, the competent officials are eligible to interview, give recommendations to, and require essential information regarding children's lives from parents or adults responsible for children. Furthermore, the officials have the power to remove children from homes or any premises where they faced a dangerous incident by following the process of immediate response, fact-finding, and assessment to decide proper protection measurements with a multidisciplinary approach (DCY, 2017a, pp. 36-38).

Munro (2002, p.52) describes that in England, the definition of abuse is not limited to the damage caused by parents or carers but includes system abuse. System abuse refers to "actions

and inactions of the operation of legislation, officially sanctioned procedures, or operational practices within systems or institutions that cause damage to children and families” (Munro, 2002, p.52). On the contrary, when looking back to the Child Protection Act of 2003 and the child protection manual officially published by the Department of Children and Youth (DCY, 2017a). It shows that child protection laws and policies in Thailand strive to help children abused by their parents or carers. So, the competent officials' power aims to intervene when carers' rights conflict with children's rights and welfare.

Challenges and problems faced by the competent officials

However, although Wechayachai (2008, p.46) argues that the Child Protection Act of 2003 provides clear roles and responsibilities for competent officials to protect and promote children's well-being, at least two studies portrayed the competent officials' challenges at a practice level. Siri (2014) studied the problems of the competent officials of the Child Protection Act of 2003. Siri (2014, p. 126) found out that the competent officials' imposed acquisitions and recruitment process are similar to charity work. Most of the competent officials initially have their own permanent jobs and roles besides competent officials, so they could not fully play competent officials' roles. This caused the lack of discretionary authority, workload and shortage number of competent officials, and disruption in executing the competent officials' roles (Siri, 2014).

Likewise, The Situation Analysis of Child Protection System in Thailand (DCY, 2017b) reported four major concerns affecting the competent officials in playing their roles. Firstly, the relevant organization policies did not support the competent officials to exercise their roles practically (DCY, 2017b, p 84). The competent official is the additional role appointed by the law, not a certain position in the organizations, so it heavily depends on the organization where the competent officials affiliated with whether they allow their staff to play the competent official roles or not (DCY, 2017b, p 84). Accordingly, the competent officials did not get extra paid or even counted in working time when exercising the competent official roles in some organizations (DCY, 2017b, p 84). Secondly, there was a role confusion of the competent official since one staff can be a competent official of more than one law - the approaches to law enforcement and the assessment principles are different in each law (DCY, 2017b, p 84). Lastly, the lack of a supervision system led to the competent officials' lack of awareness and skill when working with children and families (DCY, 2017b, p 84). Accordingly, some competent officials were sued by parents, which led to the discouragement of executing competent officials' roles in the Child Protection Act of 2003 (DCY, 2017b, p 84). Currently, there were 1,063 competent officials who MSDHS's minister appointed, but just only 513 competent officials executed this role in their practice (DCY, 2017b, p 84).

To understand this better, an applicant's required qualifications in applying for official training course will be presented. To be eligible to apply for the course, the applicant's educational background has to be not below a bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, law, medicine, or education with at least two-year experience working with children (National Child Protection Committee, 2004). However, presuming the applicant did not obtain their bachelor in one of the mentioned fields, they still have to possess a bachelor's degree in any field (National Child Protection Committee, 2004). In that case, they are expected to have at least four-year experience working with children and have to present the experience approval letter from their respective organization (National Child Protection Committee, 2004). Moreover, the last competent officials training course in 2017 was a thirteen-day long training (Phra Prachabodi Institute, 2017). Thus, it means that a person with any educational background with thirteen-

day of training is eligible to be a competent official according to the Child Protection Act of 2003.

The prior studies portrayed many obstacles and challenges in performing the competent official's roles in practice. However, the studies about child protection and the competent officials under the Child Protection Act of 2003 in Thai literature are scarce, with zero studies relating to the competent official roles in protecting children in a political protest context. Therefore, it brought my interest to study how these mentioned problems and challenges would affect the execution of the competent official's roles in the specific situation where children were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in the protest.

Chapter three

Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework I used to guide my direction to understand the collected data and discuss the results of this study.

The relation of perception about childhood and children's right to protest

Children worldwide show their capability and exercise their agency by leading and participating in political activities. They use social media platforms, schools, and streets to protest and express their political views (Nishiyama, 2020; Muakchim 2021; Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021). In Thailand, Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul (2021) and Lertchoosakul (2021) studies show that children who attended the protests in 2020 were not brought up to protest or manipulated to express themselves politically. Still, in contrast, they went to protests by their own discretion and chose to express with their thorough considerations (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021). At the national level, research shows that although the right to peaceful protest has been recognized in the Thai constitution since 1919 and protected for every citizen in the kingdom, even adult citizens have faced many difficulties and challenges in exercising this constitutional recognized right due to the law confinement (Preechasilpakul, Kongjaroen & Boonchuay, 2020).

Children were still overlooked in the provision of such rights; although several international and regional treaties had recognized the right of free assembly and association to protest before the establishment of the CRC (Daly, 2013, p. 782). The recognition of children's autonomy and rights explicitly and specifically in international law was one of the main reasons for the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) formation to ensure that children would not be overlooked in the provision of such rights (Daly, 2013, p. 782). The right to protest is particularly vital for children since children do not have the right to vote and have fewer spaces than adults to enjoy and express their civil and political rights in most parts of the world. (Daly 2013, p. 768). Accordingly, the Committee on the Rights of the Child affirms that children's right to protest should be protected in the same way it is protected when it comes to adults (Daly, 2013, p. 787). Thus, Daly (2013, p. 772) argues that states have responsibilities to protect children when they protest and facilitate the conditions for them.

Daly (2013, p. 770) argues that the notion about children's capacities that traditionally perceived children as less experienced and less developed cognitively than adults hinder children from exercising their right to protest. Similarly, Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2018, pp. 280-283) describe the predominant "developmentalist discourse" and the perception of a "carefree period of innocence" about childhood exclude children from the political arena and distance them from sharing responsibility as active citizens in society. The developmentalist discourse believes that children's cognitive and intellectual capacity develop step by step following the chronological age (Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2018, pp. 280-281). Therefore, understanding children's capacity is tied to their age or maturity and viewed through the lens of adult competency (Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2018, p. 281). Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2018, p. 281) argue that the perception of childhood as a carefree period of innocence distances children from sharing social responsibilities like adults is the way of protecting children in this critical period

of life. This leads to usually consider children vulnerable, incompetent, and dependent on adult protection (Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2018, p. 282).

Daly (2013, pp. 772-776) describes two potential dangers children possibly experience when attending protests: the physical dangers and the risk of manipulating children into protest activities. In terms of physical hazards, Daly (2003, p. 792) points out that the Committee on the Right of the Child's recommendations to stated parties to train relevant authorities, especially police and security forces to understand children's right to protest and to be aware of the vulnerable state of children.

However, Daly (2013, p. 775) digresses that, when it comes to protests, the risk of being manipulated or taken advantage of is not limited to children but also affects adults; however, no authority will restrain adults from participating in protests due to this excuse. Moreover, using children's capacity as the only justification for allowing children to participate in protests would mean that many adults should not be permitted to exercise the same right (Daly, 2013, p. 775). Thus, It is no longer acceptable to use capacities as an excuse to exclude children from exercising their political rights (Daly, 2013, p. 770).

Both Bosisio (2008) and Santrock (2010) studies elicit children's capacity, at different ages, regarding the ability to have complex thoughts and forming their views. Lansdown (2010, p. 12) points out that even young babies speak a complicated language. Therefore, adults should pay attention to the various ways of communication – play, body language, facial expression, and art– children use to express their needs (Lansdown, 2010, p. 12). Also, they need to provide access to adequate information and a safe space where children can form their views (Lansdown, 2010, p. 12).

When it comes to political conflict situations, Hart (2008, pp. 281-282) points out that when adults uphold the innocence concept of childhood, they interpret children's violent political expressions as a result of brainwashing instead of child liberation endeavour from extreme oppression. Hart (2008, p. 281) argues that growing up in a high power imbalanced environment where children firsthand experience oppression will activate their political understanding at an early age. Therefore, Hart (2008, pp. 281-282) suggests that prioritizing the "environment" – where children live – and "context" as critical parts of forming children's cognitive development, especially in politics, is essential to help adults understand children's agency and competence when it comes to political conflict situations. Similarly, the recent publications of Nishiyama (2020) and Rodger (2020) suggest "rethinking" children's rights, agency, and mobilization when it comes to attending protests. In the sense that children have shown their agency, claimed their rights, and mobilized those who have mutual interests to join with them, asking for social change in different and creative ways (Nishiyama, 2020; Rodger, 2020).

Lansdown (1997, p. 23) concedes that children are inherently more vulnerable than adults and need to be protected by committed and willing adults around them; however, adults cannot use those inherent vulnerabilities of children to presume they lack the capacity to be involved in matters affecting their lives. In parallel, Daly (2013, pp. 771-772) argues that children have particular conditions in which adults have to support and prioritize the right to participation rather than use the need for protection to exclude them from protests.

However, adults usually use the need for protection to justify their so-called good-intention intervention on behalf of children or even see it as the child's best interest (Lansdown, 1997, p. 22). Those adults' dominance interventions can be changed in the positive form; as Young et

al. (2012, p. 179) state, “power can be named responsibility, control can be named care and rules can be named protection.” In this regard, Lansdown (1997) argues that although the responsibility to take care of children has expanded from within the family sphere to the broader community, there will be other adults with statutory power who will constrain the possibility of children to express their needs, namely court officials, and social workers, among others.

Child abuse as a socially constructed concept

To understand the situation that children were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests, the concept of child abuse will help to conceptualize the form of violence that children faced when they attended the protests.

Perception toward defining abuse has developed from malevolent practices causing damage to children, such as fractured bones, to causing psychological and intangible effects. It may include any action that violates the right of the child even if it may not harm the child physically (Munro, 2002). Munro (2002, p. 56) argues that child abuse is pervasively perceived as being socially constructed. In other words, it means that acceptable and unacceptable ways of treating children and the actions needed to protect children and their rights are perceived differently in different societies and different times (Munro, 2002, pp. 50-51). However, there is consensus at an international level in which countries agree upon what calls child abuse as it is defined in article 19 of the CRC as "any forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse" (Munro, 2002, p. 51).

To categorize the form of child abuse, the British Department of Health and Social Security (1988, as cited in Munro, 2002, p. 53) divided it into physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Physical abuse refers to the action that causes bodily harm to a child. Emotional abuse refers to the continuous ill-treatment that frequently causes a child to feel worthless, unloved, inadequate, frightened, or in danger. Sexual abuse denotes forcing or enticing a child to participate in sexual activities, whether consent or not. Finally, neglect refers to a parent or carer's action or inaction, resulting in failing to provide a child's basic physical and psychological needs.

Munro (2002, p. 52) explains the British National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse (1996) broadening child abuse definition to include system abuse which is "actions and inactions of the operation of legislation, officially sanctioned procedures, or operational practices within systems or institutions that cause damage to children and families." However, Munro (2002, p. 52) describes that child welfare and child protection services typically focus on helping suffering children from the hands of their parents or carers so, the damage done by the wider aspect of society is overlooked.

The Child Protection manual published by Thailand's Department of Children and Youth (DCY, 2017, p. 17) categorized abuses similarly to the British Department of Health and Social Security but added exploitation as a distinguish type which means "any activities that take advantages of and harm children's welfare and security in any matters." Department of Children and Youth (DCY, 2017a, pp. 36-38) elicits that competent officials are eligible to interview, give recommendations to, and require essential information regarding children lives from parents or adults who take care of children, and separate children out of home or wherever a dangerous incident occurs to them by following the process of immediate response, fact-finding, and assessment to decide proper protection measurements with a multidisciplinary approach. The earlier research of Siri (2014) and DCY (2017b) point out that competent

officials under the Child Protection Act of 2003 lack discretionary power which results in limiting competent officials executing their roles.

Munro (2002, p. 52) clarifies that when claiming child abuse as a socially constructed concept, it does not mean behaviours shown or treatment applied to children are socially constructed, but it is the understanding of how children should and should not be treated. Munro (2002, p. 57) describes two distinct schools of thought in child abuse literature. The first accepts that child abuse's meaning is difficult to get the social consensus while the latter thinks there is some social consensus on child abuse definition (Munro, 2002, p. 57).

Thus, understanding abuse as a socially constructed concept was useful to carry out this study in order to see the current perception of the competent officials toward the situation where children were violated due to their participation in protests – is there any consensus and what is still a grey zone for further discussion on the definition of child abuse in this culture sharing group of the competent officials?

Social work ethics in a political conflict situation

Banks (2015, pp. 782-783) writes that the social work profession requires and expects a social worker to uphold professional values and behave in an ethical way; thus, social work ethics is an important part of social work education and practice that social workers have to learn.

In some countries, social workers are in the frontline in social welfare and public health services. They have statutory power legitimated by the law, working directly with marginalized and vulnerable people in different social situations (Healy, 1998, p. 904). The competent officials of this study are social workers with statutory power. It means that they have an inherent power by their profession in which they can use either to maintain service user's wishes or to devalue the person they work with if they use that power in an inappropriate way (Healy, 1998, p. 904). Subsequently, their professional value can be undermined, and service users could be in danger if there are no professional ethics to control or guide how social workers fulfill their role in accordance with their professional purposes and principles (Banks, 2015, p. 783).

On an international level, there is a global statement of ethical principles (IFSW & IASSW, 2018) generated by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). It is promoted as an international instrument for social work practitioners around the world to follow. Banks (2012, p. 60) describes three clusters of complex values underpinning social work across different countries that have been shared in the current social work literature, which are: respect for the dignity and worth of human beings, promotion of welfare and well-being, and promotion of social justice.

In Thailand, the Thailand Social Work Professional Council (SWPC, 2017) established Social Work Professional Ethics which clearly indicates the influence of the global ethical principles of IFSW and IASSW (2018) and the ASEAN Social Work Code of Ethics (ASEAN Social Work Consortium, 2015), which aims to standardize the national values according to the regional and international ones. In SWPC's Social Work Professional Ethics (2017), three similar values underpin the social work profession in Thailand to the shared values by Bank (2012, p. 60), and the rest are: respect for human rights, promotion of professional integrity, and respect in diversity. Therefore, the social work ethics in Thailand were primarily influenced by the international values and expected social workers in Thailand to integrate with the global professional agenda in working with people.

In the countries where political conflict happened, it is challenging for social workers to maintain their ethical way of practice. Halmos (1978), Leonard (1997), and Healy (1999) point out that social workers need to be able to tackle their personal beliefs or political preferences, which might influence their profession either intentionally and unintentionally when working with people who think differently from them. The study of Ramon et al. (2006) shows that social workers who work in the political conflict areas of Northern Ireland, Israel, and Palestine experienced emotional stress, fear, bias toward or against national and religious identities, which led to difficulty in working with colleagues and service users who were perceived to be the enemy. Ramon et al. (2006, p. 445) present that social workers in political conflict areas such as Israel and Ireland were criticised for taking a neutral stance on political violence, which led to the limit their role to merely as survivor helpers. However, it was perceived as the best thing the social workers could do to meet professional values while maintaining their resilience in a threatening society (Ramon et al., 2006, p. 445).

Therefore, highlighting the ethical aspect of practice in a political conflict situation has helped to understand the situation the competent officials of this study may have handled working with children who attended political protests in Thailand.

Chapter four

Methodology

This research aims to look into competent officials' perceptions and understandings of children's right to participation in protests and the phenomenon that children were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions through the competent official's eyes. Lunenburg and Irby (2008, p. 88) point out that qualitative research strategy is suitable for a research project that "looks deeply into the world of individual and phenomena". For this reason, the qualitative strategy was utilized in this research to answer the research questions.

In this chapter, the employed methodology to answer this study's research question is presented. The chapter is organized into seven sections: (a) philosophical assumptions, (b) research design, (c) selection of participant, (d) instrumentation, (e) data collection, (f) method of analysis, and (g) ethical consideration.

Philosophical assumptions

Creswell & Poth (2018, p. 47) indicate that we as researchers "always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research". They describe four stances that researchers employ to set the direction of the study: researcher's view of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows the reality (epistemology), the values-stance taking by the inquirer (axiology), and the procedures used in the study (methodology). They also highlight the importance of indicating those stances explicitly in the research. Bryman (2016, p. 36) presents two fundamental philosophical distinctions toward ontology and epistemology in a qualitative research strategy that conforms to my beliefs. In term of ontological consideration, he explains that the meaning of social phenomena and entities are continually co-constructed and re-constructed by social actors. Similarly, those produced meanings of social reality also influence social actors to interact with one another in society (Bryman, 2016, p. 33-34). According to epistemological consideration, he explains that the knowledge of each individual about the reality of the social world is different. Thus, the way to understand the meaning of people's world and social actions is to interpret it from their point of views (Bryman, 2016, p. 30). In relation to axiological consideration, as a child protection social worker myself, I also carry some knowledge and background, which may somehow influence the process and the result of the study. I believe the presumption that child protection practitioners' perceptions are society's production. The reality they perceive will also construct and influence the understanding of children's situation and their role and responsibilities toward such children.

Creswell & Poth (2018, p. 50) point out that these assumptions mentioned above will be applied in the research through the use of an interpretive framework, which can be beliefs or paradigms that researchers bring to the process of research. In this study, a postmodern perspective was deployed. The postmodern perspective denies the concept of universal truth and criticizes the presence of a metanarrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 63). Thus, a researcher should use multiple perspectives, including race, class, gender, and other group affiliations, to understand the context and the voices of those who are the owner of the information. (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 63).

Research design

In this research, I employed micro-ethnography as a research design. Micro-ethnography is an alternative method that allows a researcher to conduct ethnographic work in particular aspects of the studied group instead of conducting full-scale ethnography (Wolcott, 1990). It aims to understand people's holistic cultural system requiring a researcher to be in the setting of people's daily lives for an extended period of time (Wolcott, 1990).

Wolcott (1990, p 48) argues that to be ethnographic is to "commit to looking at, and attempting to make sense of, human social behaviour in term of cultural patterning". Conformingly, this study's topic directly relates to child abuse and child participation, issues that are understood and interpreted differently by social groups in different cultural settings (Munro 2002, p. 61; Daly 2004, p. 771). My research studied a population that share the same culture and relate to one another as a social worker and competent official under the Child Protection Act (2003) of Thailand. Thus, underpinning the cultural interpretation aspect by carrying out this study through micro-ethnography helped answer the research question better by showing how the competent officials in the same-culture understand the issues that can be understood differently by different culture groups.

Moreover, the informants of this study and I have the mutual characteristics of being Thai nationals and Thai speakers, having social work educational background, possessing social work license, and working in the child protection field. It means that I share some culture and knowledge within this group of informants. For these reasons, I omitted the participant observation, one of the main characters of the full-scale ethnography, since I already know how the child protection system works in Thailand, and am not an outsider looking into this setting. An ethnographic interview was solely used instead as a tool to understand the informants' attitudes, norms, beliefs, and values from their own narratives.

Accordingly, due to the time constraint in a master's dissertation, a limited number of key informants were interviewed. In addition, as reasoned above, the participant observation section was omitted, and micro-ethnography was deployed to answer the research question of this study.

Selection of participants

Sampling technique

I used purposive sampling to recruit the participants. Purposive sampling is defined as the way in which a researcher uses the background of the population as clear criteria to recruit participants considering their direct reference to the research question (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 175; Bryman, 2016, p. 416). Accordingly, three competent officials who meet the inclusion criteria were interviewed in this study.

Child protection practitioners in this study refer directly to the social workers who are appointed to be competent officials. Thus, in order to be chosen as the data informants, the following criteria were given: (a) being a social worker, (b) holding a social work degree, (c) possessing a social work license, (d) having being appointed to be a competent official under the Child Protection Act 2003 of Thailand, and (e) having a good personal relationship with the researcher.

The criteria (a) – (d) were imposed because of the direct reference to the research question and problems raised within this study. The last criteria (e) was set during the participant selection process, having learned that a personal relationship and trust between a researcher and the informants are very important in order for the targeted informants to decide to participate and express their opinions freely.

Participants recruitment

After the inclusion criteria were set, I identified the competent officials whom I know from my former practice. Then, I called them to provide sufficient information about participants' involvement in this study. After they expressed their interest to participate in this study, the information letters were sent out individually via the Line application, which provides end-to-end encryption (E2EE) for chat messages. The information letter¹ was adapted from NSD's information letter template (NSD, u.å.). Thereafter, the meeting to introduce this master thesis project and the interview guide that would be used in the interview session was held. I met two participants physically and one participant digitally via zoom meeting. This meeting was approximately 30 – 45 minutes. At this meeting, the participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions regarding the thesis project, their participation, and feedback on the interview guide because I have to ensure that the participants have informed consent and clearly understand their participation and involvement in this study before the interview session takes place.

Profile of the participants

To minimize the risk of the informants' identity identifiability, I will present their general profiles instead of individual details. All participants have social work positions in Thailand and are well-matched with the set inclusion criteria. They are experienced child-protection social workers who have been working in this field for 10 to 32 years. There were no participants in this study who have direct experience working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests in 2020. Three of them were chosen from three types of organizations in which children who were exposed to various forms of restrictions and violence could receive services from them.

Instrumentation

The interview guide² that was used in this study contains three parts: introduction, the questions to obtain the answer for the research question, and closing.

The introduction part aims to provide the essential information of this study and gain the informants' oral informed consent before interviewing. The second part is similar to its name since it aims to obtain the research question's answers. The first group of questions asks the informants' general information about their general roles and responsibilities in organizations and the length of their experience in the child protection field. This study was limited to look into the three areas of the understanding of the competent officials as mentioned earlier in the secondary research questions part in chapter 1. Thus, three groups of questions were asked to obtain - the understanding of children's right to participate in the protests, the understanding of competent officials' roles and responsibilities, and the understanding of challenges and

¹ See the information letter in the Appendix A

² See the interview guide in Appendix B

opportunities in working with such children. Lastly, the closing part intends to provide information on how the given data will be stored and organized after the interview.

In developing the interview guide, I first developed sets of drafted questions and provided the participants with the opportunity to comment on them. The sample questions were discussed in the same meeting where participants were recruited.

Data collection

The data collection was conducted using semi-structured interview conducted with three competent officials as the primary source of data. The interviews took place in the spring of 2021 in Thai language. The approximate time of the interview was 1.45 - 2 hours. The informants were given a choice on whether to meet me physically or digitally via Zoom. Finally, two interviews were carried out physically at two different places chosen by the informants, while another one was conducted digitally. Before the interview session got started, the informants were given detailed information and were provided with the opportunity to give their informed consent orally without voice recording.

I used pen and paper to record the informants' answers. Thereby, anonymity was provided to the informants since the answers were registered while the informants' names and any other forms of identification were not present. After proceeding with the interview, the records of interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word file and kept in Onedrive secured with the email to access it provided by the University of Stavanger and the password known only by me. The informants were given the opportunity to meet with me again to review the interview transcriptions and comment on them. Informants were again given a choice between a face-to-face meeting or a Zoom meeting. In the end, all of them decided to participate digitally via zoom meeting that took around 45 minutes to 1 hour. I shared the screen of the interview transcription files and read them to the informants so that they could provide comments.

Trustworthiness

In this study, the concept of trustworthiness is used as an alternative measurement to validity and reliability. Guba (1985) and Guba & Lincoln (1994) suggest four criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish the credibility of findings, I adopted the respondent validation technique to ensure that the understandings of the informants' perceptions presented in this study are most consistent with their accounts. I invited all participants to discuss the interview guide and provide feedback to the set questions. During the interview sessions, I used paraphrasing skill to ensure that my understandings of the given answers were accurate. After the interviews, all participants were provided with the opportunity to comment on the interview transcriptions. This is important because it's necessary to ensure that the interview transcriptions are accurate and consistent with the participants' opinions. In terms of transferability, this study's results were oriented to the specific culture-sharing group within the competent officials who are social workers, limiting the generalization of the findings to broader groups of child protection practitioners. By ensuring the dependability criteria, all records relating to this study were kept safely in Onedrive but did not rely on an accessible manner since confidentiality was the most prioritized concern. My supervisor was the only person I shared the informants' characteristics and the interview transcriptions with during supervision. Lastly, I attempted to remain objective and clearly indicate the theoretical perspectives and methods used that have shaped this study. I hope readers will find this study trustworthy.

Method of analysis

I used thematic analysis described by Braun & Clarke (2006). I chose this method because it allows me to find the answers to my research question. This analysis helped me interpret the culture patterning that informants gave via the interviews into codes and themes. The analysis consists of six-step. These are getting familiarized with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

In the first step, I familiarized myself with the interview transcriptions by reading them repeatedly and writing down the ideas that pop-up for coding. After that, I generated the initial codes through Nvivo by reading each interview transcription to identify the interesting aspects of the data. The way I coded is by giving meaning or label to the segments of data. The coded extracts were collated in each code. I started the third step by using my secondary research questions to be the three overarching themes to answer the main research question. Then I grouped codes into potential themes and collated all relevant coded data extracts into each potential theme. In the fourth step, I used mind-maps to visualize each code and theme (overarching themes and sub-themes). I read all data extracts in each theme to see whether or not it's coherent and consistent throughout the data set. In this step, I found out that some themes overlapped with another, so I decided to combine them together. In step five, after combining some themes, I reread the whole collated data extracts within each theme again. Instead of using the secondary research question as three overarching themes, I renamed them to reflect the meaning of the entire data to answer the main research question but still be in the area limited to the secondary research questions. After that, the thematic analysis report was written up, as you can see in the finding chapter.

Ethical considerations

Since the issue that I studied relates to the ongoing political unrest in Thailand, this led to many ethical considerations that I had to take into account.

Firstly, I had to address my inner biases and prepare myself before the interviews. In order to show respect to my interviewees, it was essential for me to keep quiet and let the people say their words, including those who have different opinions from me. Thereby I could gain the data that best rely on their views and understandings of the issues.

Secondly, the informants might feel uncomfortable giving their opinion freely, especially for those who work in government agencies. Practically, during the initial phase of my participant selection process, I found out that it was difficult to find competent officials who are willing to participate in the interview. When I initially contacted competent officials in a government agency who did not know me, they would request for me to send a letter to get permission from their agencies. It means that the agencies will know who are the informants of this study. I was afraid that it might result in research participants who are unable to express their opinions fully and freely. Further, it is against the principle of confidentiality and privacy, which are prioritized concerns of this study. Accordingly, that is why I selected the informants with whom I have personal relations, which had been established from my former practice in the child protection field. I needed to ensure them that their identities would be anonymized. In order to do this, I choose to interview all of them without recording their voice and video but by writing down their responses. In this writing, I was using pseudonyms for my interviewees to anonymize their identities. Due to the fact that I did not record the voice and video of my interviewee, I did not need to obtain consent from the Data Protection Official in Norway.

Lastly, the process of gaining informed consent started at the first call that I contacted the informants. After that, the information letters were sent, and the meeting to introduce this study and discuss the interview guide was organized individually with all informants. Before the interview sessions got started, I asked them again to obtain their oral informed consent. Therefore, with the information letters and individual meetings with each participant that I explained earlier, I ensured that all informants understood the objectives of this study, how their participation will be involved, and how the information they provided would be used and organized.

Chapter five

Results and analysis

Throughout the thematic analysis, I found five overarching themes answering my research question about the competent official's perceptions of working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020. Therefore, this chapter presents the thematic analysis results by dividing the themes of competent official's perceptions into three categories in following the secondary research questions. These categories are (1) perception of the children's right to protest, (2) perception of the execution of the competent official roles and responsibilities, and (3) perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest.

Perception of the children's right to protest

In this category, I found two themes, including (1) children are different from adults, and they should be allowed to protest under certain conditions, and (2) children are the same as adults, so the same laws applied.

Children are different from adults, and they should be allowed to protest under certain conditions

All the participants shared a view that the right to protest and express political views are children's rights, which is beneficial for both children and society.

Participant C: Children have the right to participate in political expression activities irrespective of how young they are. Everyone is equal to this right because it is a fundamental and inalienable right for children to express their views. So even though it's childish opinions or whatever, we have to listen.

Each participant shared different reasons to support their argument on how attending protests and expressing political views can benefit both children and society at large. For example, participant A perceived that attending protests will be an experience for children to recognize that their voices matter, and it is the way children could make their voices louder. Participant B perceived that protest is a way children, as active agents, can make a change from the insufferable situations that they had experienced. Likewise, participant C perceived that protest is a way for children to ventilate their frustrations.

Participant A and Participant B shared their perception on children's participation in the protests as a process contributing to groom "today's children" to be the "future adults of the nation.", which is represented by the excerpt of participant A;

Participant A: I think participating in a protest or calling out will be an experience for children. It makes them learn that they can contribute to social changes. It provides them with the power and self-realization to create a better society. Moreover, it will make society more aware of their voices. We can't deny listening to them since they are the power of the nation as we always say that "today's children are the future of the nation." So, starting to listen to children from today is essential for all of us in society.

However, although all participants insisted the right to protest is a children's right and reiterated the importance of listening to children's voices and taking them seriously, two participants shared some concerns relating to the developmental capacity of children and the perception of innocent childhood. Therefore, they suggested that some restrictions should be imposed to protect children in a political protest context, including minimum age limitation, assigned spaces especially for children, and the suggestion of well-designed forums as an alternative platform for children to express their views.

Participant A shared concern about children's immature cognitive development. In participant A's opinion, the right to protest on the street should be limited solely to those children who have reasonable thoughts and concrete cognitive development. Therefore, participant A suggested imposing the "proper age" for children who should be allowed to participate in the protest on the street.

Participant A: I think children have a right to protest, but it does not mean that all groups of children, such as a group of young children. It may be necessary to define which age children can exercise this right, what is the most suitable age that children have reasonable thought and have concrete cognitive development.

In Participant C's perception, children were brought to protest by adults, and adults held the protests that children attended. Hence, participant C expressed the disagreement and anger for adults in bringing children into the protests that violence from the police could be anticipated. Instead, participant C suggested that a separated space only for children should be set because it would protect them from being used as adult's advantages and absorb a politician way of expression that can contaminate the "purity" of children.

Participant C: I think it'd better separate the space for children out of the adults, who reach maturity and have complex and abstract thoughts. [---] I was so angry when I saw a father holding a kindergarten kid in protest. When the police dissolved the demonstration, I was not angry with the police because they did their job, but I was angry with the father and the protest organizers. We have seen children coming to call out. Sometimes, they said something which I felt it's precocious than the children's thought. The way they express themselves is like a politician. I think it's not something that children should be taught. When I think about children, it connotes virginity. The messages I expected to hear from them are like, for example, I want to study at a school with highly qualified teachers. I don't particularly appreciate how the teacher punishes my friends [...]. I want to see a platform like this. I think this is a purified platform for children.

Participant C agreed that children should speak for themselves, in their language, to advocate for their rights. In participant C's perception, the best way for children to fight for their rights, while their safety would still be protected, is to use the formal establishment platform such as, Children and Youth Committee, or the alternative forums where those who are in power such as, policymakers and ministers are present to listen to children.

Participant C: (---)The Children and Youth Council of Thailand is one of the spaces for children to express their needs. I was at the conference where the young girl was invited to tell her stories of being sexually abused, and school bullied. I felt pity ; this girl should have talked in the session where the minister could hear her voice.

The concerns presented above related to the concern toward children's safety and security when they were on the street, as all participants witnessed in the news that the way police dissolved the demonstrations could detriment children's safety. This was a mutual concern shared by all participants, and it was the first concern replied when asking about children participating in the protests. All participants conceded that children are a vulnerable group. Thus, they believe that children should be protected and cared for with particular attention while they were on the street participating in the protests.

Participant A: Actually, it's not just children who need to be protected from the violent measures of the state, but whoever they are, the state should not be allowed to violate them with any violent actions. But children are a vulnerable group. They need special care amongst protesters. They should not face any danger due to participating in the protests.

Children are the same as adults, so the same laws applied

It is not just only violence on the street that children faced. All participants were asked about the perception of the situation that children had been exposed to several forms of restrictions and violence due to their participation in the protests. All participants agreed that what teachers, polices, and parents had done in question number 3.5.1 - 3.5.3 of the interview guide violated children's rights and could be categorized as child abuse. But when it comes to the law enforcement that children had been charged with violating the lese-majeste and sedition laws and emergency decree, Participant A and Participant C perceived that it's acceptable since children violated what inhibited by the laws.

Participant A perceived that there was no exemption for children who violate the law since "the law is equal to everyone and children are not above the law".

Participant A: At first, we have to understand that children violated the law. The law is equal to everyone, and children are not above the law. So if nine-year-old children were charged with violating the lese-majeste, we could say that the police violated the law because the law protects children who are under ten years old from any criminal penalties. But, in this case, children are above ten years old, so what can we do?

Participant C viewed that law enforcement against children has to be done to preserve the law's sanctity.

Participant C: I watched some videos [that children criticized the king and monarchy], and I felt that it was too rude. You have the right to speak but not to defame. So, I think law enforcement has to be done to preserve the law's sanctity.

Unlike the rest, participant B perceived that the laws were deployed to restrict children from expressing their views freely and believe that children have critical and complex thinking in doing such things.

Participant B: [...] people think scrutinizingly before doing such things, and I think these children do the same. I believe that they know what they are doing. They would think that if they were not, one of the voices that have been risen, I meant if no one stands up, there would be just like before, in their parent or grandparent ages. [---] I feel that these allegations are quite harsh. I'm sure that these laws were used to restrict the

accomplishment of children's rights. Thereby, they try any possible ways to inhibit children and allege them by the laws.

Perception of the execution of the competent official roles and responsibilities

In this category, I found two themes, including (1) competent officials as mediators and (2) the importance of being a social worker in executing the competent official's roles and responsibilities.

Competent officials as mediators

Through thematic analysis, I found that when the participants were asked to explain their general roles and responsibilities, they shared the roles of protecting children's security, providing welfare assistance, and advocating for children's rights. However, when explicitly asked to adapt their roles and responsibilities by the law to work with children who were exposed to various forms of restrictions and violence due to their participation in the protests, the participants thought they could be just a "mediator" in this case. In their views, the mediator's work is to facilitate the session where children's voices would be heard, and the way in which children should be treated in accordance to the law will be explained to the adults who are in the possible positions to abuse them, including parents and teachers. This mediator role seemed to be limited to act into two settings, home, and school, not included where children participated in the street demonstrations and alleged by the laws.

Each participant differently indicated challenges to execute the competent official's roles and the reasons why they could perform just narrowly as a mediator relating to the new phenomenon when children who needed protection and welfare provision got involved with political protests.

Participant A perceived that the situation where children's rights were violated in houses and schools due to their participation in political protests did not like the traditional child abuse case that participant A used to handle. Thus, participant A got confused about where and how to start the protection and welfare assistance process.

Participant A: Actually, the law describes that anyone who learns the incident that a child needs assistance and protection must notify a competent official. The point is, in this case, how do we reach that child? Can we just walk inside schools and ask: are there any children who need help due to participating in the protests? Is it possible to do that? So, I think the way to reach these children is not the same as acting as a competent official in other cases. For example, in my organization, when our staff learns about the incident relating to child abuse, he/she will notify me. But in this case, how can we start? But if children walk to me and ask for help, then it is okay.

Similar to participant A, participant C perceived that the situation that children needed protection and welfare assistance due to the political protests led the competent officials confused and did not know how to deal with it. However, in contrast with participant A, participant C did not worry about where and how to approach these children. Instead, participant C insisted that a competent official could walk into the schools and houses where children's rights were violated to perform the competent official roles. Still, the involvement of this issues with politics confused the competent officials in performing their roles.

Participant C: In the case that parents or teachers maltreat their children, a competent official can walk into the houses or schools to protect children. The competent officials

are responsible for educating those who look after children inappropriately, explaining how to treat children properly. It is our job. However, in this case, competent officials might get confused when the issues involved politics. So, they did not know how to do it, and then they did nothing.

Participant B described that even though a mediator is the best role a competent official could play in this situation, it is not easy to execute this role. Participant B elaborated why competent officials, especially those in the government agencies, "did nothing" when it comes to this issue. The main reason is that the competent officials themselves lack discretionary authority and are violated by the nature of working in government agencies. So, if the competent officials protected or helped these children who were perceived as the opposition to the government, the trouble would happen first to the competent officials. Thus, participant B perceived that competent officials were weakened and too scared to stand up for children who participated in the political protests.

Participant B: [---] I'm not brave enough to stand with these children, although they are also included in the group that I have to protect according to the Child Protection Act, you know that the impact will happen to me first if I do something to support them. The people who are above me will understand that I support children who are against the government. I believe that many competent officials also think like this. [---] I have to wear the competent-official hat, but I have another bigger hat as being a government officer. This bigger hat intrinsically influences me and makes me know that I do not have the real power to protect these children. Every action adopted from the Child Protection Act has to be approved hierarchically by the one above me. That is the nature of working in government agencies. I'm just a subordinate. I would say that when competent officials' power is restricted, how can we protect children?

The importance of being a social worker in executing the competent official' roles and responsibilities

Participant A and Participant C highlighted the importance of being a social worker in executing the competent official's roles and responsibilities. Participant A and Participant C mentioned that they disagreed with the issue that children criticized the king and monarchy and approaches they used to protest. But, participant A and Participant B did not see it as a challenge in working with this group of children. Instead, they felt that encountering issues that contradict their beliefs is part of a social work profession and providing services to clients irrespective of their political preferences is a fundamental value of social work.

The excerpt below is an example of how participant C prioritized the non-discrimination value of social work and handled it when working with the service user who asked: are you a yellow shirt or a red shirt?³, In the time that the country experienced political polarization conflict. In participant C perception, the differences in political preferences would not hinder the service users from receiving social services. So, to keep a good atmosphere between service users and a social worker was essential.

Participant C: When the political situation was divided into yellow and red shirts, there was a client that I worked with who asked me: if I was a yellow or red shirt. So, she would know how to talk to me. I replied: I definitely knew that you were a red shirt. So,

³ "Yellow shirt" and "red shirt" refers to the polarization of Thai political conflict between 2006 – 2010 (Thabchumpon, 2016)

I asked her; how would you feel if I answered you that I am a yellow shirt? She replied that she would be uncomfortable. Then, I said: so, we shouldn't be talking about this issue because whether you are a yellow shirt or a red shirt, I still have to work with you. It is not related to what colour we are. Whether a competent official or a social worker, we must not discriminate against people who have political differences from us.

Participant A highlighted that being a social worker is beneficial in helping participant A implement competent official roles since the profession shaped participant A to respect and be more tolerant of people's diversity. Participant A pointed out that when comparing a social worker and a lawyer executing competent official's roles, participant A perceived that a social worker looked more holistically into a person's social context.

Participant A: I think being a social worker helps me in executing the competent official roles. Because the competent official roles mainly collect facts or evidence, evaluate all information, and then think about proceeding with the legal process. But to be tolerant of diversity and different opinions and reasoning are a matter of the social work profession. So it helps me understand the social context. I think it's imperative to have such background knowledge in working with children. Because as I see it when lawyers executed the competent official role, they are good at reasoning and judging what is right or wrong, but children and family's social and cultural context were missed.

However, all participants conceded that it is not that easy to work when things contradict their beliefs. Accordingly, they shared mutual concerns about the competent officials who might use their personal beliefs overriding their professional responsibilities. The excerpt from participant A can well illustrate this issue.

Participant A: The hardest thing, in my opinion, is to manage yourselves with contradictory beliefs when working with this group of children. I believe that so many competent officials disagree with these children, and they could not manage their roles and beliefs, especially those in government agencies. They are highly royal and respect the monarchy. Some of them are ultra-royalists in which they cannot divide it with their professional roles.

Perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest

Throughout the thematic analysis, I found one overarching theme reflecting the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of political protests, which is *ensuring the state's obligations to protect children in a political protest context*. All participants perceived that it's the undeniable duty of the government to protect children in every matter. However, they have different opinions on the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest. The changes include changing the law to recognize children's right to protest and express their political views, providing training for the secondary school teachers on children's rights, and better involvement of the NGOs to work with children.

Ensuring the state's obligations to protect children in a political protest context

To ensure children's right to protest and express their views altogether with protecting their well-being when participating in the protests, all participants stated that the government could not deny executing its responsibilities to provide adequate services to children. The quote from participants C below represents this point of view of all participants.

Participant C: Since you are the government, your duty is to take care of people's well-being. You have to make people believe that you are responsible for the benefit of the people without discrimination, regardless of their political differences.

All of the participants agreed that the Child Protection Act (2003) clearly describes the characteristics of the child who is in need of protection and welfare assistance. Therefore, they understand that this group of children is already included in the law. However, to ensure that competent officials will be brave enough to initiate their roles, Participant B underlined the importance of the written policy addressing the obligations of the practitioners to work with children whose rights are violated due to their participation in protests. Moreover, to endorse the competent officials in helping this group of children, participant B suggested that the law should be changed to recognize the children's rights to protest and express political views.

Participant B: the Child Protection Act clearly describes what kind of children should receive what kind of help. For this group of children, I believe that the government has to adjust because it is a new problem that arises in Thai society. We should ensure that those who have policy-making power see these children as our target groups under the Child Protection Act. [---] I think recognizing the right to protest or express political views for children literally in the law is also essential. For the practitioner, we need to have the reference in implementing our work. We are afraid to initiate any implementation when there are no written policies or addressed messages from the ministry executive regarding this issue.

Participant C addressed that the obligations in promoting children's rights are not limited to competent officials but also to all adults. Participant C viewed that the government should provide training for the secondary school teachers on children's rights and the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC). Participant C pointed out that the teacher's duty to promote children's participation in a democratic society via school activities is mentioned in section seventh of the Child Protection Act (2003). So, teachers have to recognize the obligations and duties that the law requires them to do.

Participant C: Section seventh of the Child Protection Act stated that teachers must promote cognitive development activities for children. So how can you teach them? Why students have to elect the school president and student committee? This section of the law has to be adapted to make teachers realize that to protest and express political views in school is children's right.

Lastly, to mitigate the issue of children's distrust in the government representatives, Participant A suggested that the government should involve more NGOs to work with children as an alternative way for the government to help children whose rights are violated due to their participation in protests.

Participant A: For the government, although you are the number one enemy in the eyes of these children, you need to know that you have a duty. Even if children reject you, you have an obligation to help. You can not excuse that; because they don't want us to help, then we can't do anything. However, you can coordinate with non-governmental organizations, supporting them behind. You have to ask what do NGOs need, what kind of support they want. This is your duty, and you can't deny it.

Chapter six

Discussion

This part discusses the results of this study. It is divided into three parts following the secondary research questions to answer the main research question: how child protection practitioners perceive working with children exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020.

How do child protection practitioners perceive and understand children's right to protests?

The first category of the competent officials' perception relates to the perception of children's right to protests.

Children are different from adults, and they should be allowed to protest under certain conditions

Daly (2013, p. 768) argues that the right to protest is particularly vital for children since children do not have the right to vote and have fewer spaces than adults to enjoy and express their civil and political rights in most parts of the world. From the thematic analysis, each participant differently highlighted the importance of attending protests for children. Participant A perceived that protests could make children's voices louder, and children would learn that their voices matter by attending protests. Participant B perceived protests as where children can make a change for a better society with their own actions. Participant C perceived that protests help children to vent out frustrations. From these given answers, I found that all perceptions of the participants relate to the importance of listening to children's voices. In other words, the participant's perceptions led me to believe that children protested because they felt that their voices had not been heard and taken seriously by the adults. Therefore, I argue that the participants of this study perceived that the right to protest is essential for children since children use protests to make adults listen to them and influence the social changes with their own actions.

Daly (2013, p. 770) argues that the notion about children's capacities that traditionally perceived children as less experienced and less developed cognitively than adults hinder children from exercising their right to protest. The thematic analysis result shows that participant A concerned about children's immature cognitive development, which led to the need for the proper age imposition for children to participate in protests. Participant A indicated that the right to protest does not belong to small children. It is limited solely to children who have reasonable thought and have concrete cognitive development. Thus, I argue that perceiving children through the expectation of adult's capacities would set the conditional criteria for children to exercise such rights, resulting in excluding so many children from participating and expressing their political views.

Daly (2013, p. 770) contents that if capacity were used as a sole justification to allow children to protests, it would result that so many adults would not be permitted to exercise this right as well; thus, It's no longer acceptable to use capacities as an excuse to exclude children out from exercising their political rights. Therefore, drawing the perception of participant A, I agree with Daly (2013) that whether the minimum age is set or competence is used to allow children to

protest, it is transmitting a significant message that if children do not have a rational idea or concrete cognitive development, they will not be entitled to the right to protests.

Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2018, p. 281) argue that the perception of childhood as a carefree period of innocence distances children from sharing social responsibilities like adults is the way of protecting children in this critical period of life. The thematic analysis result shows that participant C's concern relates to the perception of innocent childhood. Participant C perceived childhood as a virginity period of life. In terms of virginity, Participant C came with expectations on what children should talk about and how they should act or express their opinions. From participant C's perspective, what children should talk about is limited to the issues that happened at home or school areas. So, when children talk about politics, such as criticism of the government and monarchy, it was perceived as something "precocious than the children's thought". In other words, it is something to worry about because it contaminates the virginity state of childhood. So, to preserve the purity state of childhood, participant C preferred children to have separated spaces out of adult or use the formal platforms, such as The Children and Youth Council of Thailand, or other well-designed forums where children can express their needs to adults who are in power to advocate for policy changes. Thus, I argue that perceiving children through the concept of innocence childhood would allow children to protest and express their views just only within the well-designed forums or the appointed places that adults see fit for children.

Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul (2021) and Lertchoosakul (2021) studies show that children who attended the protests in 2020 were not brought up to protest or manipulated to express themselves politically. Still, in contrast, they went to protests by their own discretion and chose to express with their thorough considerations (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021). From the thematic analysis results, Participant C was afraid that children would be manipulated or even taken as a tool or advantage in obtaining adults' political agenda when attending protests. Accordingly, in participant C's opinion, who to blame is not children but those adults who bring children to protests or teach children to talk and express themselves politically. In this matter, I view that the concept of innocent childhood that participant C used to understand the situation where children participated in protests denies children's agency and capacity to form their views. In other words, it led me to believe that participant C did not trust in children's ability to think and understand political issues by themselves. Implicitly, children are seen solely as passive status who are taught to understand or brought to do things, not active participants who have the capacity to decide and act politically, especially in protests. Therefore, I argue that participant C's understanding of children's rights and agency in participating in political protests is far behind on how children understand themselves and act politically in their real lives. In fact, children themselves, both globally (Nishiyama, 2020) and locally in Thailand (Lertchoosakul, 2021; Rattanaburanon & Sripokangkul, 2021), have already chosen how they wanted to express their inadmissibility and reject the authoritarian and oppressive culture they have experienced in school and society by using online platforms and going out on the streets as protesters instead of those formal channels that participant C suggested.

Daly (2013, pp. 771-772) argues that children have particular conditions in which adults have to support and prioritize the right to participation rather than use the need for protection to exclude them from protests. All participants agreed that children are more vulnerable than adults, and they were at risk of being abused and actually had been abused when they protested. It means that the dangers children might experience when they attended protests or expressed their political views in Thai society were absolute and could not be overlooked. However, unlike

the rest, participant B believes that children possess the capacity to think and act independently. From participant B's perspective, children know what they did and thought deliberately before doing things. Thus, despite using the need for protection to exclude children from participating in protests, participant B used the vulnerability state of childhood and the notion of future adults to justify the needs of children for protection to participate safely in protest. Drawing the different perceptions of participant B from the rest, I found that all participants conceded in following with Daly (2013) that children have particular conditions, the inherent vulnerabilities, that should be considered to ensure their safety when they protest. But how the participants understood and used such particular conditions when children protest is different; they can use it to be the restriction from or the promotion to greater children right to protest. In this matter, I agree with the perception of participant B, which shows that in promoting children's right to protest and ensuring that they can safely protest, the inherent vulnerabilities and agency of children could be embraced simultaneously.

Children are the same as adults, so the same laws applied

Hart (2008) points out that when adults uphold the innocence concept of childhood, they interpret children's violent political expressions as a result of brainwashing instead of child liberation endeavour from extreme oppression. Drawing the thematic analysis results, while participant A and participant C disagreed with how children protested, on the other hand, participant B perceived it as an emancipatory approach to the oppression that children have faced. When it comes to law enforcement that children were alleged by several allegations due to their political expression and the involvement in protests, while Participant A and C perceived it as normal as other cases that children commit the crime would be alleged, Participant B differently perceived the allegations against children as a way to inhibit them from exercising their civil and political rights. Thus, I argue that when the competent officials did not uphold the innocence concept of childhood but believe in children's capacity, it influenced his or her understanding of children's behaviour and the approach they adopted to protest differently. As in participant B's perception, law enforcement is counted as another form of oppression that adults in power react to the exertion of children's liberation.

According to Munro (2002, p.56), child abuse is pervasively perceived as being socially constructed. In other words, it means that acceptable and unacceptable ways of treating children and the actions needed to protect children and their rights are perceived differently in different societies and different times (Munro, 2002, pp. 50-51). From the thematic analysis, the competent officials shared their consensus agreement that the actions from the teachers, school administrators, police, and parents to restrict children from expressing their political views are counted as child abuse. Still, they lost that consensus when the law alleged children who criticize the king and monarchy. It means that there are two groups of perceptions toward law enforcement against children. The first group (participant A and participant C) believes that law enforcement against children is acceptable since children violated what the law inhibits them from doing, so there is no action that should be taken. The latter (participant B) perceived that the law enforcement against children is unacceptable since the law is used to restrict children's right to protest and express their political opinions freely; hence, the law needs to be changed to respect such rights of children. Thus, I argue that even though the competent officials in this study are in the same culture sharing group, it shows that the law enforcement against children who participated in protests and expressed their view against the king and monarchy in Thailand is still an arguable area for further discussion whether it is an acceptable or unacceptable way of treating children.

From all the discussion above in the first category, drawing the perception of participant A and participant C, I found the inconsistency in understanding children's right to protest through the notion of children's capacity and innocent childhood concept. Whereas participant A and participant C used the difference in the capacity of children compared to adults to restrict at least some children to protest normally on the street, they did not use it to protect children from being prosecuted by the laws. In other words, children are perceived as immature and incapable to act and think deliberately and independently by themselves. On the contrary, children are perceived as mature and capable enough to be prosecuted if they speak something the laws inhibit them from doing.

Conclusion

This study found that the competent officials perceived that the right to protest is essential for children since children use protests to make adults listen to them and influence the social changes with their own actions. However, the competent officials conceded that the inherent vulnerabilities of children are particular conditions that have to be considered to ensure children's safety when they protest. The competent officials understood and used the children's particular conditions differently; they could use it to be the restrictions or promotions to greater children's right to protest. I found that the perception of childhood the competent officials possess influenced the competent officials to perceive children's right to protest differently. The competent officials who perceived children's right to protest through the expectation of adult's capacities would set the conditional criteria, minimum age limitation, for children to exercise such right. The competent officials who perceived children's right to protest through the innocent childhood concept would set the condition to allow children to protest and express their views only within the well-designed forums or the appointed places that adults see fit for children.

In contrast, the competent officials who did not uphold the innocent concept of childhood and perceived children right to protest through adult's capacities did not mention any restriction to hinder children from protesting. In addition, I found that when the competent official did not uphold the innocence concept of childhood but believes in children's capacity, it influenced in understanding the approaches children adopted to protest and the situation that the laws persecuted children differ from the rest of the participants; the approaches children adopted to protest were perceived as an emancipatory way to the oppression that children have faced, and law enforcement was counted as another form of oppression that adults in power react to the exertion of children's liberation. While the rest of the participants who disagreed when children criticized the king and monarchy and the approaches they adopted to protest understood that the law persecution against children who participated in protest is as normal as other cases that children commit the crime would be alleged.

How do child protection practitioners understand their roles and responsibilities in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests?

The second category of the competent officials' perception relates to the perception of the execution of the competent official roles and responsibilities with children who were violated due to their participation in the protests.

Competent officials as mediators

Department of Children and Youth (DCY, 2017a, pp. 36-38) elicits that competent officials are eligible to interview, give recommendations to, and require essential information regarding children lives from parents or adults who take care of children, and separate children out of home or wherever a dangerous incident occurs to them by following the process of immediate response, fact-finding, and assessment to decide proper protection measurements with a multidisciplinary approach. The thematic analysis results show that when the competent officials in this study were asked to adapt their roles and responsibilities to work with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in protests, they perceived that they could be just a mediator. The mediator's role in their perceptions is to negotiate the need of children and adults who are in a possible position to abuse them. In other words, in the other child abuse cases, the competent official could do more than just a mediator if based on the given power described by the law. Thus, I argue that the mediator is just a light version of the execution of the competent official's role.

Munro (2002, p. 52) explains the British National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse (1996) broadening child abuse definition to include system abuse which is "actions and inactions of the operation of legislation, officially sanctioned procedures, or operational practices within systems or institutions that cause damage to children and families." In addition, during the literature review, I found that the definition of child abuse in the Child Protection Act (2003) of Thailand does not cover the form of system abuse. The thematic analysis results show that the new phenomena that children were violated due to their participation in the political protests bring confusion to the competent officials and limit them to perform just a mediator within limited areas of the house and school fences, as well led to the inaction of the competent officials in working with such children. In participant A's perception, the situation where children were violated due to their participation in the protests did not like child abuse cases that participant A used to handle. Moreover, there is an arguable area of law enforcement against children that the participants perceived differently- an acceptable and acceptable way of treating children. All of these results led me to believe that the perception of traditional child abuse and the lack of system abuse definition in the Child Protection Act (2003) limits the competent officials' understanding of the areas where a child possibly be abused and where the professionals intervention should take place.

The earlier research of Siri (2014) and DCY (2017b) point out that competent officials under the Child Protection Act of 2003 lack discretionary power, which results in limiting competent officials executing their roles. The result of the thematic analysis shows that participant B also mentioned the lack of discretionary power that hinders the competent officials from protecting children who attended protests. The distinguishing result of this study is the arisen point from participant B that the competent official was also violated by the nature of working in government agencies which led to the fear of backlash from the government. The fear intrinsically imprinted the sense that nothing the competent officials could do to protect children

who got involved with politics. So, I argue that a mediator was the best role that the competent officials attempted to perform in the situation that children who needed help protested against the government, and where the government also restricted the competent officials to perform their roles.

The importance of being a social worker in executing the competent official' roles and responsibilities

Banks (2015, pp. 782-783) writes that the social work profession requires and expects a social worker to uphold professional values and behave in an ethical way; thus, social work ethics is an important part of social work education and practice that social workers have to learn. Drawing the thematic analysis results, participant A and participant C highlighted the importance of being a social worker in executing the competent official roles and responsibilities. When the competent officials' personal beliefs contradict service users', the competent officials utilized social work values, especially non-discrimination and respect for diversity principles, in their child protection practice. Thus, I argue that the competent officials perceived that social work discipline and its professional values are beneficial for them to work ethically with children who attended political protests and might have different political preferences from them. In addition, all the competent officials shared their mutual concern that the competent officials who disagree with such children might let their personal beliefs overriding their professional responsibilities, resulting in discriminating children from receiving social services. Accordingly, the result of the thematic analysis led me to believe that there are no ethical principles or codes of conduct, specifically for the competent officials. To ensure that children will receive the needed social services irrespective of their political preferences, I argue that the ethical guidelines for competent officials in working with children in both general child protection cases and political conflict situations should be imposed.

Conclusion

This study found that the competent officials perceived that they could perform just a light role as a mediator to work with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in protests. I believe that the perception of traditional child abuse and the lack of system abuse definition in the Child Protection Act (2003) limits the competent officials' understanding of the areas where a child may be abused and where the professionals' intervention should occur. The result of this study reiterated the lack of discretionary power of the competent officials that also found in earlier research of Siri (2014) and DCY (2017a). Nonetheless, the distinguishing result of this study is the arisen point that the competent official was also violated by the oppressive nature working in the government agencies, which led to the fear of backlash from the government if they help children who were perceived as the government's opposition. The fear intrinsically imprinted the sense that nothing the competent officials could do to protect children who got involved with politics. However, I believe that being a mediator was the best role that the competent officials, who are the government's subordinates, could perform when children who needed help protested against the government. Lastly, the competent officials perceived that social work discipline and its professional values are beneficial for them to work ethically with children who attended political protests and might have different political preferences from them.

What are child protection practitioners' understandings of the changes that should be made in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests?

The third category of the competent officials' perception relates to the perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest.

Ensuring the state's obligations to protect children in a political protest context

The recognition of children's autonomy and rights explicitly and specifically in international law was one of the main reasons for the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) formation to ensure that children would not be overlooked in the provision of such rights (Daly, 2013, p. 782). The thematic analysis results show that in the competent official's perception, the domestic laws relating to children's rights are essential to endorse them to protect children. All participants always mentioned the Child Protection Act (2003) as the reference in implementing their works and based their opinion on when it comes to practical issues. Of course, there is the need to apply the existing laws into practice but still very challenging at the practice level, as discussed earlier. In this regard, participant B suggested changing the domestic law to recognize children's political rights as the way to help competent officials protect children who were violated due to their participation in protests better. Thus, I argue that in participant B's perception, the recognition of political rights explicitly and specifically for children in the domestic law will at first highlight children's autonomy as a bearer of rights. Moreover, it will endorse the competent officials' practice of protecting children who were exposed to violence and restrictions due to their participation in protests. I agree with participant B that the existing laws need to be changed to better recognize the children's right to protest since the status of Thailand as a state party signing the CRC requires the country to improve the national laws in accordance with the CRC.

Daly (2003, p. 792) writes that the Committee on the Right of the Child gave the recommendations to stated parties to train relevant authorities, especially police and security forces to understand children's right to protest and to be aware of the vulnerable state of children. The perception of participant C pointed out the important roles of school and teachers in creating a safe environment for children to participate in democratic activities starting in school. Since in the Thailand protest context, schools and teachers could be dangerous for children at the same time. Thus, the children's rights and CRC training for the teachers is essential in Participant C's point of view. Likewise, I view that if teachers do not understand that children have and are eligible to exercise their political rights in school, there would be a high risk of children's rights violation, whether intentionally or unintentionally, due to the lack of awareness and understanding. So, I argue that the recommendation of participant C helps extend the understanding of "authority", which is not limited solely to authority with crowd-controlled equipment but also include teachers who are very close to children almost every day in their lives.

Daly (2013, p. 772) argues that states have responsibilities to protect children when they protest and facilitate the conditions for them. The thematic analysis results show that the participants have different suggestions and perspectives on who to work with and who should be responsible for protecting children in a political protest context. However, all of them agreed with Daly (2013) that it is the state's undeniable responsibility to protect children's well-being when they attend protests and promote children's right to participate in a democratic society.

Conclusion

All participants perceived that it is the state's undeniable responsibility to protect children's well-being when they attend protests and promote children's right to participate in a democratic society. However, they have different opinions on the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest. The changes include changing domestic law to recognize children's right to protest and express their political views, providing training for the secondary school teachers on children's rights and CRC, and better involvement of the NGOs to work with children.

Chapter seven

Conclusion

This research sought to answer how child protection practitioners perceive working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020. The three secondary research questions were asked to answer the main research question. The three secondary research questions are;

- How do child protection practitioners perceive and understand children's right to protests?
- How do child protection practitioners understand their roles and responsibilities in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests?
- What are the child protection practitioner's understandings of the changes that should be made in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests?

This chapter presents the conclusion of this study into three categories following the secondary research questions. These categories are (1) perception of the children's right to protest, (2) perception of the execution of the competent official roles and responsibilities, and (3) perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest.

Perception of children's right to protest

This study found that the competent officials perceived that the right to protest is essential for children since children use protests to make adults listen to them and influence the social changes with their own actions. However, the competent officials conceded that the inherent vulnerabilities of children are particular conditions that have to be considered to ensure children's safety when they protest. So, the participants who perceive children's right to protest through adult's capacities and uphold the concept of innocent childhood resulted in imposing the restrictions to allow children to protest under certain conditions; minimum age limitation, well-designed forums and separated spaces for children to protest. Moreover, this study found that the perception of childhood that the participants believe also influenced in understanding the approaches children adopted to protest and the law allegation against children differently.

Perception of the execution of the competent official's roles and responsibilities

This study found that the competent officials perceived that they could perform just a light role as a mediator to work with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in protests. The lack of discretionary authority of the competent officials and the oppressive culture working in the government agencies were found as the causes to restrict the competent official to execute their roles. The competent officials perceived that social work discipline and its professional values are beneficial for them to work ethically with children who attended political protests and might have different political preferences from them.

Perception of the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest

All participants perceived that it is the state's undeniable responsibility to protect children's well-being when they attend protests and promote children's right to participate in a democratic society. However, they have different opinions on the changes that should be made to protect children in the context of a political protest. The changes include changing domestic law to recognize children's right to protest and express their political views, providing training for the secondary school teachers on children's rights and CRC, and better involvement of the NGOs to work with children.

Recommendations for policy changes

I agree with all the recommendations proposed by the participants as presented above. However, based on the thematic analysis and discussion, it is possible to offer the following recommendations. Firstly, due to the lack of system abuse definition in the Child Protection Act of 2003, I recommend that the Child Protection Act should be changed to welcome the children's right to protest and express political views and include system abuse definition explicitly in the law. Secondly, due to the lack of ethical guidelines for the competent official, I recommend that the ethical guidelines for the competent officials in working with children- both general child protection cases and political conflict situations- should be imposed to ensure that children will receive needed social services irrespective of their political preferences.

Recommendations for future researches

This study found out the different perceptions of the competent officials under the Child Protection Act of 2003 in working with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in protests in Thailand. Future researches may focus on studying how those perceptions may influence the competent officials in their actual practice. I think the full-scale ethnography to observe the competent official working with these children would help produce fresh knowledge into the field of child protection in a political protest context in Thailand. In addition, as the participants in this study pointed out the importance of being social workers in implementing the competent official's role, further researches may focus specifically on the competent officials who have other backgrounds besides social work, such as a lawyer, among others. To study specific challenges and beneficial areas of each professional background that can influence their implementation as competent officials.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information letter

The letter of information about the master thesis project on the topic:

"Child protection practitioners' perception on working with children whose rights were violated due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020."

This is an inquiry about participation in a master's thesis. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Mr. Phongsathon Chankaew, a master student of the European Master in Social Work with Families and Children Program, University of Stavanger, Norway, is responsible for this master's thesis.

Professor Mikhail Gradovski, Professor of Social Pedagogy, Institute of Social Studies, University of Stavanger, Norway, is a supervisor for this master's thesis

Why are you being asked to participate?

This study's main purpose is to explore the current understandings and perceptions of child protection practitioners toward the situation that children were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests in Thailand in the year 2020. In this regard, "child protection practitioners" refer directly to the social workers who are appointed to be competent officials under the Child Protection Act (2003). The inclusion criteria to recruit competent officials to participate in this study are those who are:

- Being a social worker
- Appointed to be a competent official under the Child Protection Act (2003)
- Having a social work educational background
- Possessing a social work license

What does participation involve for you?

The research design requires participants to meet with me three times. The first meeting will be approximately 30 – 45 minutes. The aim is to introduce this master thesis project and the interview guide that would be used in the interview session in the second meeting. At this meeting, you will be provided with the opportunity to ask questions regarding the thesis project and feedback on the interview guide. This is because I have to ensure that you have informed consent and understand clearly about the participation and involvement in this study. The second meeting is to conduct the interview session, which will be approximately 1.30 – 2.30 hours. The approach to record the interview in this study is to use a pen and paper to take notes instead of using voice recording. With this approach, the third meeting to revise the interview transcription has to be held because it is necessary to ensure that the interview transcription is accurate and consistent with your opinions. In this meeting, you can suggest any comments that you see fit before the interview transcription will be analyzed, which will take approximately 1 hour.

In summary, if you agree and willing to participate in this study, there will be three appointments which each appointment will take at least 30 minutes.

How will I collect the information?

In this study, I will deploy a semi-structured interview to collect the information. I will prepare the set of questions relating to research questions prior to the interview. Besides the prepared questions, I may ask more questions to dive deeper into some issues according to your answers. You can choose between seeing each other physically or via Zoom meeting that we will interview online for your convenience. Your answers will be recorded manually. I will use a pen and paper to write down the answer you give to me without identifying your name or anything that can refer to you.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how I will store and use your personal data

There are two people involving in this master thesis, including me and Professor Mikhail Gradovski, my supervisor, who will have access to your personal data. I ensure that everything you tell me will only be used for this research project and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team

Your identity will be anonymized so that it will not be possible to trace that you are the source of information. I will type the interview note into a Microsoft word file and put only the interview month and year. Your personal information that can refer to you will not be on it. The Microsoft word file of interview transcription will be kept in Onedrive in which the email to assess to this online storage space provided by the University of Stavanger. There is just only me who can access the file via the University of Stavanger's email.

After I transcribe the interview, I would appreciate it if you could have a look at the text in which we could have another Zoom meeting or face-to-face meeting that we can read through the texts together, and you can provide me with any comment that you see fit.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on *June 4 2021 (the due date of thesis submission)*. I will delete the interview transcript as soon as I get the final grade from the University of Stavanger. The grade will be issued on the last of 30th September 2021.

If you have questions about the project or want to complain me regarding this master thesis project, please contact Professor Mikhail Gradovski, by email: mikhail.gradovski@uis.no

Yours sincerely,

Phongsathon Chankaew

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

"Child protection practitioners' perception on working with children whose rights were violated due to their participation in the protests in Thailand's in the year 2020."

By Phongsathon Chankaew
Supervised by Professor Mikhail Gradovski

Introduction

My name is Phongsathon Chankaew. I'm a master student in Social Work with Families and Children Program. I'm conducting the master thesis under the supervision of professor Mikhail Gradovski of the University of Stavanger, Norway, on the topic: Child protection practitioners' perception on working with children whose rights were violated due to their participation in the protests in Thailand's in the year 2020. This study's main purpose is to explore the current understandings and perceptions of child protection practitioners toward the situation that children were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in protests in Thailand in the year 2020. The researcher strongly hopes that the findings will benefit and can even be included in the contents of the child protection practitioner training courses in the future.

In this interview, I will ask you questions about your understanding of the situation that you, as a competent official, have to work with children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in the protest in the year 2020. I will ask you specifically in the three areas of understanding - the understanding of children's right to participation in the protests, the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the competent official in working with such children, and the understanding of challenges and opportunities in the areas of protecting children and ensuring their right to participation in a protest.

I ensure that everything you tell me will only be used for this research project and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Also, your identity will be anonymized so that it will not be possible to trace that you are the source of information. Thereby, I will use a pen and paper to write down and record the information you give to me without identifying your name or anything that can refer to you. So, I kindly ask you to be patient with me if I ask you to repeat or correct my written note. Before the interview, I'm going to ask you these questions to obtain your oral informed consent instead of having your signature on the written informed consent or recording your voice.

1. The questions to obtain the oral informed consent
 - 1.1 After reading the information letter about my master thesis project and listening to me explaining in following this interview guide, do you give consent to participate in this master thesis project and use the information you will provide according to the project's aim as I informed?
 - 1.2 Do you have any questions to ask me before we are going to start?

The questions to obtain the answer for the research question

2. General information
 - 2.1 Could you tell me about your general roles and responsibilities in your organization?
 - 2.2 How long have you been working in the child protection field?

3. The understanding of children's right to participate in the protests
 - 3.1 What do you think about the current political protests that children have led and participated in since the early of 2020?
 - 3.2 What do you think about the children's right to participate in the protests?
 - 3.3 Have you heard any story that, in your opinion, children's rights were violated due to their participation in the protests?
 - 3.4 Can you describe any events or stories in which you heard, witnessed or were told about how children's rights were violated due to their participation in the protests?
 - 3.5 What do you think about these situations below that children have experienced due to their participation in the protests?
 - 3.5.1 Children were banned from protesting and expressing any forms of political views in schools by teachers, school administrators and police.
 - 3.5.2 Children were physically abused by their family members, expelled from homes, and got their monthly allowances cut by the parents due to their participation in the protests.
 - 3.5.3 Children were charged under several allegations, including, e.g. sedition, lese majeste and violation of the emergency decree?

4. The understanding of competent officials' roles and responsibilities
 - 4.1 In your opinion, what are the general roles and responsibilities of a competent official?
 - 4.2 How can one best execute the tasks connected to these roles to help children who were exposed to various forms of violence and restrictions due to their participation in the protests? (I will ask them based on the situation mentioned in 1.5.1, 1.5.2 and 1.5.3)
 - 4.3 Do you think you can provide me with the cases or examples from your practice to describe how you protect children who participated in the protest or who were exposed to various forms of violence and restriction due to their participation in the protest?

5. The understanding of the shanges that should be made in working with such children
 - 5.1 In your opinion, what are the challenges in executing your competent official roles to protect children when it comes to the matter that children have a political conflict with the government?
 - 5.2 Do you think there are any barriers to limiting you to ensure children's right to participate in a protest or protect them from any harm that might occur when they go to protest?
 - 5.3 In the case that children distrust the government representative, in your opinion, what kind of alternative work or measure should be in place to ensure children's well-being and safety?

5.4 Do you have any suggestions to improve the child protection system in Thailand to recognize the children's right to participate in a protest and develop adequate measurements to protect children's safety and well-being when they participate in a protest?

6. Do you have any questions or comments before we are going to finish the interview?

Closing

Thank you so much for your time and information today. Next, I will type the interview note into a Microsoft word file and put only the month and the year of the interview. Your name or any personal information that can refer to you will not be on it. After I transcribe the interview into the Microsoft word file, I would appreciate it if you could have a look at the interview transcription. If you would like to do it, we can have another Zoom meeting or face-to-face meeting. By these means, we will read through the texts together, and you can provide me with any comments that you see fit. For your information, the interview transcription file will be kept in Onedrive in which the email to access to this online storage space provided by the University of Stavanger. There is just only me who can access the files via the University of Stavanger's email. I will delete the interview transcription as soon as I get the final grade from the University of Stavanger. The grade will be issued on the last of 30th September 2021.