

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research study was to explore the participation of Thai women in domestic health tours, more specifically the 'preventative' type of health tour. The aim of this kind of tour is to encourage the participants to change their lifestyle to healthier ones, in part so that they can prevent illness or, in some cases, lessen the effects of an existing illness. The research investigated the respondents' participation in these tours both in relation to their leisure patterns and lifestyles and to their adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

In order to achieve the overall aim and objectives of this research, an extensive review of the literature supported the primary research study which involved a participant observation study of a commercially-organised preventative health tour. Subsequently, two sets of interviews were undertaken with Thai female health tour participants with the second set being undertaken three years after the first series. The primary data obtained were rigorously analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively to determine the range of socio-demographic and other factors which determine the leisure patterns and practices of Thai women, their participation in health tours, and their adoption of healthy lifestyles.

The results clearly demonstrated that age was the most important determinant of leisure choices, practices and patterns of the respondents the majority of whom were drawn from the upper middle and upper classes of Thai society. In terms of their adoption of a healthy lifestyle experience, age was also the key determinant.

In addition, the data obtained from the first series of interviews were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively to investigate the existence of demonstrable groupings of health tour participants. According to the qualitative data analysis, it suggested the existence of five such groups while the quantitatively-based cluster analysis indicated the existence of three groupings. The comparability and credibility of these groups are discussed and a random sample of the five qualitatively-determined groups were interviewed a second time, primarily to investigate their adherence to, adoption or rejection of a healthy lifestyle. The results of the first and second series of the interviews demonstrated that health tour participation led to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle for slightly less than half of the respondents.

The results of this study indicate that, contrary to what may have been anticipated, the factors that influence and determine the leisure and lifestyle practices and choices of Thai women living in major urban environments show many similarities with those in Western society although the underlying cultural milieu is founded on different cultural foundations.