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Development of a community empowerment model by associate judges at Phang Nga Juvenile and family court for juvenile rehabilitation and reintegration

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Abstract

This research develops a systematic community empowerment model through examination of associate judges' practices at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court in Thailand. The study aims to understand how associate judges facilitate community engagement in juvenile rehabilitation and create a replicable framework for community-based juvenile justice reform. A mixed-methods research design was employed, analyzing data from 33 questionnaire respondents and 13 indepth interviews with diverse stakeholders. Data collection utilized structured questionnaires with validated instruments, semi-structured interview guides, and systematic document analysis of court records, project reports, and implementation materials. This research identified five core roles of associate judges in community empowerment: community-court liaison, legal education facilitation, network building, rehabilitation supervision, and restorative justice mediation. Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive correlation (r=0.572, p<.05) between community empowerment initiatives and rehabilitation effectiveness. Through systematic analysis of these practices, a four-step community empowerment model emerged: (1) facilitating community participation, (2) disseminating legal knowledge, (3) building collaborative networks, and (4) monitoring and evaluation. The significant positive relationship between community empowerment initiatives and rehabilitation effectiveness validates the model's effectiveness in improving juvenile justice outcomes compared to traditional court-centered interventions.

Keywords: Associate judges, Community empowerment model, Community participation, Juvenile rehabilitation, Restorative justice.

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Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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1. Introduction

The development of effective juvenile rehabilitation models requires innovative approaches that bridge formal justice institutions with community resources. Traditional court-centered interventions often fail to address the complex socioeconomic and psychological factors underlying youth offending, prompting a global shift toward community-based rehabilitation models [1, 2]. However, the mechanisms through which formal justice institutions can systematically engage communities in rehabilitation processes remain inadequately understood, particularly regarding model development and implementation.

Thailand's juvenile justice system presents a unique opportunity for model development through its incorporation of associate judges, non-legal professionals appointed to work alongside career judges in juvenile and family courts [3, 4]. These associate judges, drawn from diverse professional backgrounds and community contexts, serve as intermediaries between formal legal processes and community resources, as mandated by the Thailand Secretariat of the Cabinet [5].

The Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court has implemented an innovative community empowerment approach that utilizes associate judges as catalysts for community engagement in juvenile rehabilitation. This approach represents a significant departure from traditional court-centered models, establishing formal networks that facilitate systematic collaboration between judicial institutions and community stakeholders. Despite its potential significance for juvenile justice reform, this model has not been systematically examined or documented.

This study addresses this research gap by developing a comprehensive community empowerment model based on the practices implemented by associate judges at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court. The research examines the structure, processes, and effectiveness of this approach to create a replicable framework for community-based juvenile rehabilitation. Three specific research questions guide this model development investigation: (1) What roles do associate judges play in empowering communities for juvenile rehabilitation? (2) What is the relationship between community empowerment initiatives and rehabilitation effectiveness? (3) How can these practices be systematized into a comprehensive community empowerment model for sustainable juvenile rehabilitation?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This investigation employed a mixed-methods research design specifically aimed at model development, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to understand and systematize community empowerment practices. The quantitative component assessed relationships between community empowerment initiatives and rehabilitation effectiveness to validate model components, while the qualitative component explored underlying processes, mechanisms, and stakeholder perspectives to inform model structure. This methodological approach enabled triangulation of findings and systematic development of the community empowerment model [6].

2.2. Study Setting

The research was conducted at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court, located in Phang Nga Province, Thailand. This court serves a predominantly rural population and has implemented community empowerment initiatives since 2021, providing a rich context for model development. The court's jurisdiction covers eight districts with diverse socioeconomic characteristics, offering comprehensive data for developing a broadly applicable community empowerment model.

2.3. Participants and Sampling

The study population comprised stakeholders directly involved in community empowerment processes in Phang Nga province. For the quantitative phase, census sampling was employed, inviting all available personnel at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court to participate (N=33):

- Career judges (n=1)
- Court officials (n=14)
- Associate judges (n=18)

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling identified interview participants (n=13) representing diverse perspectives on community empowerment model development:

- Career judge (n=1)
- Court officials (n=2)
- Associate judges (n=5)
- Community network members (n=5)

Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least six months of experience in their respective roles and direct involvement in community empowerment processes. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

I. Model Development Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed specifically for model development purposes, based on a literature review and pilot testing with five court personnel [7]. The instrument comprised three sections measuring: (1) associate judges' roles in community empowerment (8 items), (2) community empowerment processes (6 items), and (3) rehabilitation effectiveness (5 items). All items utilized 5-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Content validity was established through expert review by three academics specializing in juvenile justice and community development [8]. Internal consistency was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.84 across subscales [9].

- II. Model Development Interview Guide: Semi-structured interview guides were developed specifically for model development purposes, focusing on community empowerment practices, implementation processes, and systematic approaches. Questions explored participants' roles in model implementation, community engagement mechanisms, collaboration strategies, and recommendations for model refinement.
- III. Document Analysis for Model Development: Court records, project reports, network membership lists, training materials, and implementation guidelines were systematically reviewed to understand the historical development, formal structure, and operational mechanisms of community empowerment initiatives for model documentation.

2.5. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred between March and June 2023, with a specific focus on understanding model components and implementation processes. Questionnaires were distributed during court meetings and collected within one week. Interviews were conducted individually in private settings, lasting 45-90 minutes each, with a specific emphasis on understanding systematic approaches and model development insights. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits related to model development research. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonymization of data and secure storage of materials. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki [10].

2.7. Data Analysis

- I. Quantitative Analysis for Model Validation: Descriptive statistics characterized participant demographics and variable distributions. Pearson's correlation coefficients examined relationships between study variables to validate model components. Multiple regression analysis assessed the predictive power of associate judges' roles and community empowerment on rehabilitation effectiveness to support model effectiveness. Statistical significance was set at p<0.05. Analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28.0.
- II. Qualitative Analysis for Model Development: Interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach [11], specifically focusing on identifying systematic practices and model components. Initial coding identified meaningful data segments related to model development, which were subsequently organized into categories and themes representing model elements. Two researchers independently coded transcripts, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. NVivo 12 software facilitated data management and analysis.
- III. Model Development Integration: Quantitative and qualitative findings were systematically integrated during model development to create a comprehensive community empowerment framework. Convergent findings informed core model components, while diverse perspectives highlighted implementation considerations and model refinement needs.

3. Results

3.1. Associate Judges' Roles in Community Empowerment Model Development

Quantitative analysis revealed high levels of agreement regarding associate judges' various roles in community empowerment (Table 1), providing foundational elements for model development. Participants particularly emphasized associate judges' contributions to juvenile justice administration (M=4.55, SD=0.62), provision of case adjudication advice (M=4.39, SD=0.86), and participation in case deliberation (M=4.33, SD=0.96). Community representation (M=4.15, SD=0.83) and external agencies coordination (M=4.06, SD=0.97) were also recognized as important functions for model effectiveness.

Table 1.Perceptions of Associate Judges' Roles in Community Empowerment.

Role	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Supporting juvenile justice administration	4.55	0.62	Very high
Providing case adjudication advice	4.39	0.86	Very high
Participating in case deliberation	4.33	0.96	Very high
Representing community perspectives	4.15	0.83	High
Coordinating with external agencies	4.06	0.97	High
Overall	4.30	0.67	Very high

Qualitative analysis identified five primary roles that associate judges perform in the community empowerment model:

Community-Court Liaison: Associate judges serve as systematic intermediaries between formal judicial processes and community networks [12]. As one associate judge explained: "We translate legal language into community understanding and bring community wisdom into court deliberations. This two-way communication creates mutual understanding and trust, which is essential for the model to work."

Legal Education Facilitator: Associate judges conduct structured workshops and training sessions to enhance community members' understanding of juvenile justice processes and legal rights [13]. A community network member

noted: "Associate judges explain complex legal matters in ways we can understand, using examples from our daily lives. This knowledge empowerment is a cornerstone of the model."

Network Builder: Associate judges actively establish and maintain collaborative relationships with community organizations, local government agencies, and civil society groups [14]. Court officials observed: "Associate judges leverage their community connections to create comprehensive support systems, which form the backbone of our empowerment model."

Rehabilitation Supervisor: Associate judges monitor juvenile offenders' progress during community-based rehabilitation programs, providing systematic guidance and support to both juveniles and their families [15].

Restorative Justice Mediator: Associate judges facilitate restorative justice processes that bring together offenders, victims, and community members to repair harm and strengthen social bonds, creating a holistic model approach [16].

3.2. Community Empowerment Model Components

Document analysis revealed systematic community empowerment initiatives that form the model's operational framework:

Child, Youth and Family Protection Network: This comprehensive network comprises 672 members across Phang Nga province, representing local government (23%), educational institutions (28%), health services (15%), social welfare organizations (19%), religious institutions (8%), and community leaders (7%). The network operates through district-level coordinating committees and village-level implementation teams, providing the structural foundation for the model.

Legal Education Programs: Regular workshops provide community members with systematic knowledge about juvenile justice processes, children's rights, family law, and rehabilitation principles. Between 2021 and 2023, 45 workshops reached 1,247 community members across eight districts, demonstrating the model's reach and impact.

Community Mentorship System: Trained community leaders provide ongoing support and monitoring for juvenile offenders during rehabilitation. Currently, 89 certified mentors work with 156 juveniles in community-based programs, creating sustainable support mechanisms within the model.

Inter-agency Coordination Platform: Monthly meetings bring together court personnel, local government representatives, and community organizations to develop collaborative rehabilitation strategies and address systemic challenges, ensuring model sustainability and effectiveness.

3.3. Four-Step Community Empowerment Model

Based on a systematic analysis of research findings, a comprehensive four-step community empowerment model emerged as the central framework implemented by associate judges at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court (Figure 1).

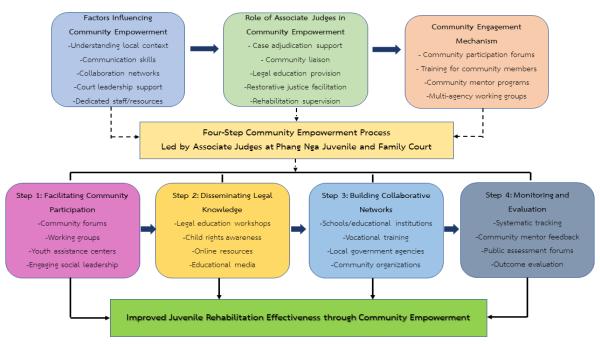


Figure 1.
Four-Step Community Empowerment Model implemented by associate judges at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court.

Step 1: Facilitating Community Participation

- Organizing community forums and public dialogue sessions
- Establishing working groups with diverse community representation
- Creating youth assistance centers within communities
- Engaging traditional leaders and influential community figures

- Developing volunteer recruitment and orientation programs
- Step 2: Disseminating Legal Knowledge
 - Conducting legal literacy workshops for community members
 - Organizing children's rights awareness campaigns
 - Developing multilingual educational materials and online resources
 - Training community members in juvenile justice procedures and rehabilitation principles
 - Establishing peer education networks

Step 3: Building Collaborative Networks

- Forming partnerships with educational institutions for prevention programs
- Coordinating with vocational training providers for youth employment opportunities
- Collaborating with local government agencies to integrate services
- Establishing cooperative relationships with civil society organizations
- Creating formal memoranda of understanding between stakeholders

Step 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

- Implementing systematic tracking of rehabilitated juveniles' progress
- Collecting regular feedback from community mentors and network members
- Organizing public assessment forums for program evaluation
- Developing outcome indicators and performance metrics
- Conducting annual network effectiveness reviews

Participants emphasized this model's systematic nature: "The four steps ensure community empowerment follows a structured process with clear actions, responsibilities, and accountability measures. Each step builds on previous achievements, creating a sustainable and replicable model."

3.4. Model Effectiveness Validation

Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between community empowerment and juvenile rehabilitation effectiveness (r=0.572, p<0.05), providing empirical validation for the model's effectiveness. Multiple regression analysis examined the predictive power of associate judges' roles and community empowerment on rehabilitation effectiveness. The model explained 37.9% of variance in rehabilitation effectiveness (R²=0.379, adjusted R²=0.337, F(2,30)=9.18, p<0.001). Community empowerment emerged as a significant predictor (β =0.799, p<0.001), while associate judges' roles showed indirect effects through community empowerment activities.

These findings validate that the community empowerment model significantly influences rehabilitation effectiveness, primarily through systematic community engagement activities rather than traditional court-related functions. As one community network member observed: "When communities actively participate through this structured model, juveniles feel supported by people they know and respect, leading to better outcomes than traditional approaches."

4. Discussion

This research successfully develops a comprehensive community empowerment model implemented by associate judges at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court, characterized by systematic engagement of community stakeholders in juvenile rehabilitation processes. The model development contributes significantly to understanding how judicial institutions can effectively mobilize community resources for juvenile justice through structured, replicable approaches.

4.1. Theoretical Contributions to Model Development

The four-step model extends existing theories of community capacity and collective efficacy in several important ways.

First, the model demonstrates how formal institutions can systematically build community capacity for juvenile rehabilitation through structured knowledge dissemination, skills development, and network building. This extends Chaskin's community capacity framework by illustrating the catalytic role that judicial institutions can play in developing community resources for social problem-solving through systematic model implementation [17].

Second, the significant relationship between community empowerment and rehabilitation effectiveness supports Sampson and colleagues' collective efficacy theory. The model provides a structured approach for communities to develop greater knowledge, skills, and networks related to juvenile rehabilitation, thereby strengthening their collective belief in their ability to support juvenile offenders effectively [18]. This approach is further supported by social capital theory, which emphasizes how community networks and trust facilitate collective action for social benefits [19] and collective efficacy theory suggests that communities can develop shared beliefs and coordinated actions to achieve common goals, as demonstrated by research on neighborhood effects [20]. These theoretical foundations are further strengthened by work on trust and social capital, which shows how community networks facilitate cooperation for social benefits [21].

Third, the model suggests an integrative approach to juvenile justice that transcends traditional boundaries between formal judicial processes and informal community interventions. Associate judges function as "boundary spanners" who facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration between these domains through systematic model implementation [22, 23].

4.2. Model Implementation Framework

The developed community empowerment model offers several key implementation components:

Systematic Structure: The four-step model provides a clear, sequential framework that courts can adapt to their specific contexts while maintaining core empowerment principles. Each step builds systematically on previous achievements, ensuring sustainable implementation.

Role Clarification: The model clearly defines five core roles for associate judges, providing specific guidance for implementation while allowing flexibility for local adaptation.

Network Architecture: The model demonstrates how to establish and maintain comprehensive community networks, with specific organizational structures and coordination mechanisms.

Evaluation Mechanisms: The model incorporates systematic monitoring and evaluation components, ensuring continuous improvement and evidence-based refinement.

4.3. International Comparative Perspectives

The Phang Nga community empowerment model aligns with international juvenile justice reforms emphasizing systematic community integration. Similar to "Communities That Care" programs in the United States, the Thai model demonstrates how structured community coalitions can coordinate resources and interventions for delinquency prevention and rehabilitation [24]. The model also resonates with restorative justice practices in Canada and New Zealand, where community voices are formally incorporated into adjudication and rehabilitation planning [25, 26]. Research evidence supports the effectiveness of such restorative diversion programs, with meta-analyses demonstrating positive outcomes for at-risk youth when diverted from traditional justice processes to community-based interventions [27]. The theoretical foundation of this approach aligns with Braithwaite's concept of building legitimacy through restorative justice, which emphasizes the importance of community engagement in creating more effective and accepted justice outcomes [28]. This integrative approach also reflects broader movements toward child-friendly juvenile justice systems that prioritize rehabilitation and community integration [2].

These international comparisons suggest that, while specific implementation details vary across legal and cultural contexts, the core model principles of systematic community engagement, legal literacy development, collaborative networking, and structured evaluation represent shared foundations for effective juvenile justice reform worldwide. The four-step model provides a framework that can be adapted across different contexts while maintaining its essential empowerment components.

4.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This model development study's limitations must be acknowledged [29]. First, the single-site focus limits generalizability across different judicial contexts [30]. Future research should examine model implementation across multiple jurisdictions to identify contextual factors influencing adaptation and effectiveness.

Second, the study relied primarily on stakeholder perceptions rather than longitudinal outcome measures such as recidivism data [31]. Future investigations should incorporate extended tracking of rehabilitation outcomes and comparative analyses with traditional court-centered approaches to validate model effectiveness over time.

Third, the perspectives of juvenile offenders and their families were not directly captured in model development [32]. These voices are crucial for understanding how the community empowerment model affects rehabilitation experiences from the beneficiaries' perspectives and should inform future model refinements.

Fourth, the cross-sectional design limits conclusions about causal relationships in model implementation [33]. Longitudinal research designs would strengthen the understanding of model effectiveness and implementation processes over time.

5. Conclusion

This research successfully develops a systematic community empowerment model for juvenile rehabilitation through a comprehensive examination of associate judges' practices at Phang Nga Juvenile and Family Court. The four-step model, facilitating community participation, disseminating legal knowledge, building collaborative networks, and monitoring and evaluation offers a replicable framework for engaging communities in juvenile justice processes worldwide.

The significant positive relationship between community empowerment and rehabilitation effectiveness (r=0.572, p<0.05) validates that this systematic model approach holds considerable promise for improving juvenile justice outcomes. By serving as structured intermediaries between courts and communities, associate judges can leverage local resources and knowledge to develop more contextually appropriate and sustainable rehabilitation strategies through systematic model implementation.

The establishment of the "Child, Youth and Family Protection Network" with 672 members demonstrates the practical feasibility of large-scale community mobilization through systematic model application. This network's structured organization and comprehensive coverage provide concrete evidence of the model's implementability and effectiveness.

For policymakers and practitioners seeking to implement community-based juvenile rehabilitation, this model offers four key implementation strategies:

- I. Establish systematic policy frameworks: Develop clear institutional policies that legitimize and guide community empowerment activities within juvenile justice systems according to model specifications.
- II. Implement Structured Resource Allocation: Assign specialized personnel and adequate budgets to coordinate community networks and maintain ongoing engagement activities as specified in the model framework.

- III. Execute systematic capacity building: organize continuous training and education programs following model guidelines to ensure community members possess the necessary knowledge and skills for effective rehabilitation support.
- IV. Deploy comprehensive monitoring systems: Create structured evaluation mechanisms that track both quantitative outcomes and qualitative stakeholder feedback according to model specifications to guide program improvements.

The community empowerment model developed through this research provides a valuable foundation for systematic community-based juvenile rehabilitation implementation globally. While contextual adaptations will be necessary across different legal and cultural settings, the core model principles of systematic engagement, knowledge sharing, collaborative networking, and outcome monitoring offer a proven framework for developing effective community-based juvenile rehabilitation systems [34, 35].

6. Featured Application

This research provides a practical, systematic framework for juvenile courts worldwide seeking to implement community-based rehabilitation programs. The four-step community empowerment model offers actionable strategies for engaging communities in juvenile justice processes, with demonstrated effectiveness and clear implementation guidelines that can be adapted across different legal and cultural contexts.

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