

Article

# Exploring dietary supplement consumption behaviors and determinants among the urban Thai elderly

Jiranuch Ngamyinyod<sup>1</sup>, Araya Chiangkhong<sup>1,\*</sup>, Pornprom Rujipairoch<sup>1</sup>, Weerapong Ponglek<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Kuakarun Faculty of Nursing, Navaminradhiraj University, Bangkok 10300, Thailand<sup>2</sup> School of Communication Arts, Bangkok University, Pathumthani 12120, Thailand\* **Corresponding author:** Araya Chiangkhong, [araya@nmu.ac.th](mailto:araya@nmu.ac.th)

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**Abstract:** The consumption of dietary supplements among the elderly is on the rise. Despite the potential benefits, a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making processes leading to the consumption is lacking. This study explores the conditions influencing the decision-making and behavioral patterns of older adults related to dietary supplement consumption. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 elderly participants from a seniors' club in Bangkok, Thailand, who had consistently consumed dietary supplements for at least one year. The behavior was classified into five primary categories: enduring use of identical dietary supplements, insufficient regard for health compatibility, replacing medications with supplements, not verifying before consumption, and opting for supplements over medical treatments. These patterns are aligned with the core constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control). Many individuals perceive supplements as pivotal health investments, while others view them as a direct route to robust health. Trusted advice from friends and television significantly influence their choices, with a prevailing sentiment that dietary supplements are generally safe. The high price tag on supplements is often associated with superior quality. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of dietary supplement consumption decisions among the Thai elderly, suggesting the need for interventions to promote safer and more informed choices.

**Keywords:** dietary supplements; elderly; decision-making; health behavior; urban health

## 1. Introduction

Driven by aspiration for enhanced health and well-being, the consumption of dietary supplements among older adults increases significantly each year (Gahche et al., 2017). These supplements, which include vitamins, minerals, herbal extracts, and bioactive compounds, are promoted as essential for optimal nutrition and overall health, in addition to being specifically tailored for the elderly demographic. This trend has been further intensified by the unique nutritional challenges faced by older adults such as diminished appetite, restricted food choices, and decreased nutrient absorption (Kaur et al., 2019; Kassis et al., 2023; Supapon, 2020; Walrand, 2018). However, the journey toward health improvement through supplements is not without pitfalls. Misconceptions about supplements, often rooted in inaccurate or fragmented knowledge prevalent in healthcare practices, can lead to adverse health outcomes (Alhazmi et al., 2023; Kramberger and Barlic-Maganja, 2021).

Global increases in longevity have highlighted significant inequalities in access to proper nutrition, healthcare services, and reliable information necessary for informed decisions. Both developing and developed societies face the double burden of energy excess and undernutrition leading to mental and physical deterioration,