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**“Weak ties” a Key Ingredient for Social Integration:  
Women’s Organizations and Thai Women in Sweden**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The aim of this study is to 1) describe the structure and types of associational and organizational networks within immigrant women’s community in southern Sweden Malmö, Lund and Eslöv, 2) examine how such networks facilitate Thai women’s well-being and integration by providing social supports and services, and 3) present how Thai women perceive the role of social and organizational networks in relation to the process of social integration. In-depth interviews with 9 representatives from organizations and individual semi-structured interviews with 8 Thai women are the primary source of the data collection. The concept of social capital is used to understand the structural features of the networks. The result showed that community and women’s organizations are important sources of support to Thai women. Associational networks may not be useful to improve women’s economic status, such as recruiting job, however they help the women to feel secured and connected to their host society. The findings from the in-depth interview indicated that one of the most confronting issues for Thai women is the desire of obtaining jobs. In this regard of the process gaining employment, further researches on the use of associational and organizational networks on Thai women’s employment are suggested.

**Key words:** *Thai women, associational and organizational networks, social capital, well-being, social integration*

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## **“Weak ties” a Key Ingredient for Social Integration: Women’s Organizations and Thai Women in Sweden**

### **1. Introduction**

Over the past four decades, the most significant change in global migration patterns seems to be the remarkable increase of female migrants. Statistically speaking, about half of the world’s migrant population is female, and the share of women in the migrant stock has increased almost 3 times from 35 million in 1960 to 94 million in 2005 (UN, 2005; World Bank, 2006). Focus on the migrant population within Europe, of the 14.8 million non-EU immigrant population in the EU population as a whole in 1992, 45.4 % were women (Eurostat, 1996).

Despite the increasing notion of *the feminization of migration*, prior to the mid-1970s, women had been largely invisible in studies of international migration (Kofman, 1999). Although, according to Morokvasic (1984), more attention has been paid towards immigrant women as a result of the general growing interest in women’s position in society and the increasingly visible economic presence of immigrant women, female migration research is still understudied and should be “rediscovered” (Morokvasic, 1984, p.890). Kofman (1999) points out that there is the absence of discussion of women’s participations in diverse form of migration in European reviews of migration. Family reunification<sup>1</sup> emerged at the political debate in 1990s, as many European states sought to reduce this form of migration by restricting the condition of entry (Eurostat, 1995 cited in Kofman, 1999). Combined with the debate about incapacity of immigrants to integrate, the renewed migration policy led to calls for further limiting migration in order to control the expansion of immigrant community. However, still there has been little general analysis of the gendered composition of family migration. And the dominant, meaning through which families are mainly constituted, that of marriage, has

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<sup>1</sup> This term is commonly used for immediate members (mostly spouse and children) brought in by primary migrants, but in more recent years, it also includes both settled migrants bringing in a marriage partner, usually from their country of origin, and international marriage of citizens with noncitizens (Kofman, 1999).

received even less attention (Kofman, 1999).

In Sweden, as in many other EU member states today, reunification and other family ties account for a large share of the total migration. Generally, the most common nationalities among the applicants for family unification were Iraqi and Thai, followed by Somali, Serb, Montenegro and Turkish origin (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2007). Regarding dependents from Thailand, more than 80 percent were women and the number of Thai female dependents doubled between 2002 and 2006 (see Figure 1. in APPENDIX B, Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2007).

In the last two decades a relatively large number of marriages have taken place between women from Thailand and Swedish men in the last two decades (Hedman, Nygren, & Fahlgren, 2009). In Swedish media, Thai women are sometimes reported as or connected with social problems such as “import wives”<sup>2</sup>, victims of “two years role”<sup>3</sup>, prostitution and domestic violence (SvD, 11 February, 2010, see APPENDIX A). Yet almost no scientific research in relation to these issues have been conducted in Sweden, there are few ways to know the real situation. Other countries, for example Germany reported that, of an estimated 2,000 Thai women in Berlin, 20-30% is involved in prostitution (Morokvasic, 1993). Indeed, Thai women as the pattern of female flows in the global political economy and subject as mail-order brides and sex tourism have begun to receive academic attention (Pettman, 1996 cited in Kofman, 1999). It is, however, problematic that social problems are frequently described as individual rather than structural problem (Hedman et al, 2009).

It is controversial that such an approach often tends to ignore the possibility of these women to make decisions and act in their own interests. Additionally, this approach also tends to ignore that there is a growth of community level organizations with an aim to empower vulnerable groups and promote social development as a whole. In other words,

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<sup>2</sup> This word is usually used on Swedish media that implies such situation that Swedish men go to Thailand and choose one and bring her back with him.

<sup>3</sup> In order to get permanent visa, foreigners need to stay in Sweden at least for 2 years but the problem is reported that some are abandoned by Swedish men before 2 year come.

the society might have a capacity to provide social support systems that enable women to get access to social networks<sup>4</sup>, resources and to organize themselves. But little is known about the relative roles of formal support services compared to kin and friendship networks and acquaintances in immigrant women's resources. Yet, various generalizations and stereotypes exists about immigrants e.g. that they prefer to resolve all their problems within the family rather than use the social service systems (Rose, D., Carrasco, P., & Charbonneau, J., 1998).

By the late 1980s, there exists many scientific researches of conceptualizing and studying family, friendship and community ties-'strong ties'- as key elements in international migration (Boyd, 1989). Compared to strong ties based network studies, in contrast, the potential of weak ties with acquaintances and institutions has received only minimal attention in the literature. However it is coming to be recognized as crucial to the transition from settlement to integration, in that weak ties described by Rose et al (1998, p. 3 ) "allow people to diversify their social network and serve as a gateway to an array of socio-economic and cultural resources beyond those generally available in the person's ethnic or immigrant community". For this reason, I am interested in the functions of associational and organizational networks as weak ties for Thai women and contribution to their sense of well-being and social integration.

This study analyzes the role of organizational networks as 'weak ties' in order to facilitate Thai women's integration as well as their well-being, while focusing on Thai women's participations in these networks. In an attempt to accomplish the research objects, the concept of social capital is laid out to bring relevant understandings. Social capital is increasingly recognized as one of the most salient concepts in social sciences (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2006). Although there is no common definition of social capital, several core ideas are shared by scholars. For the study, according to Lin et al (2006), two notions are particularly important: first social networks are the foundations of social capital and second, access to and use of social resources embedded in social networks

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<sup>4</sup> Generally sociologists and anthropologists use the term "social networks" to refer to networks of personal relations based on family, friendships and community ties (Boyd, 1989)

(i.e. social capital) can lead to better socioeconomic status e.g. finding better job. Thus the thesis study intends to serve as a case study demonstrating how associational and organizational networks are important source of social capital that is accessible to Thai women and can be used to enhance their wealth and status.

Lastly, my study tends to reveal new insights of their lived experiences of Thai women who not only seek to achieve a successful life for themselves, but also need to feel settled and better well-being, if their new life to be sustained in the long run.

## **1.1 Background: Thai women in Sweden**

Over the last 30 years, there has been a steady increase in the number of Thai women immigrating to Europe (IOM, 2005). In Germany, the country in Europe with most Thai immigrants, the number has risen from 998 in 1975 to 25529 in 1997, whereof 84 percent are women (Vilas, 2009). In Sweden, the number of Thai women similarly increased from 672 in 2000 to 2489 in 2009 (Statistics Centralbyrån, 2009) whereof 75 percent are women (Figure 1). In addition, among other immigrant women, Thai female population is the third largest group (Figure 2)<sup>5</sup>.

Given this statistical background, Thai women are the third largest immigrant female group (2516 in 2009) following 3521 of Iraqi women and 2595 of Somali women. However the reason why they come to Sweden is different. In Sweden, among the 2486 Thai women immigrants, most were granted residence permits based on family reasons (Statistics Centralbyrån, 2009), and mainly through marriage with Swedish men so that a much smaller portion immigrated for work, studies or for humanitarian reasons. In short, this is not the common case of Iraqi or Somali women<sup>6</sup>.

It was important for the study to focus on Thai women and separate from other majority group of immigrant women in Sweden because what women could gain from the

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<sup>5</sup> See APPENDIX B

<sup>6</sup> Both immigrant groups do not have as many as people who came to Sweden with family ties as Thai women. The humanitarian reason and the need of protection is more common reasons in their grounds for settlement(Migrationsverket, 2005)

networks may depend on the reason behind of women's immigration. This aspect will be discussed in the related literature reviews.

### *Push and Pull factors*

Extensive Thai migration to Sweden has been taking place for a decade, yet only little research has been done in this topic. However one project organized by the Thai embassy in Sweden conducted to explore the reasons of migration, the so called "push and pull factors"<sup>7</sup> of Thai immigrants at Eskilstuna Kommun in Stockholm. Through interviews with 36 of Thai people (34 female, 2 male), the study found that one of the most attractive factors was the availability of employment and the higher wages offered to workers (Thanawat, 2005). Another factor which brought Thai migrants to Sweden was the family reasons. Accordingly, Thailand became the most popular destination for Swedish tourists so that the tourist industry was increasing as well as job opportunities in this field (*ibid*). As a result, many Thais decided to move and work in the tourist areas and get the opportunity to meet tourists coming from Sweden. Thus if the couple decided to continue the relationship, the easiest way to build up the family is that moving with their spouse (Thanawat, 2005).

## **1.2 Objects of the study**

The study intends to describe, explore and analyze organizational networks to support immigrant women, in particular Thai women. Not all organizational networks or support system will be studied; rather it is a case study in the Skåne region (southern part of Sweden) with special attention put on those related to enhancing Thai women's well being and social integration.

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<sup>7</sup> The definition of the term here is "[f]actors that tend to repel people from an area, such as high employment and poor housing, are called push factors. Factors tend to attract people to an area, such as a wide range of facilities or well-paid jobs, are called pull factors" (Thanawat, 2005)

## **1.3 Research questions**

- What is the structure and types of organizational networks and social supports available for Thai women in Sweden?
- How does the organizational network facilitate and enhance Thai women's well-being and integration?
- How do Thai women perceive the role of social networks in the relation with the process of social integration?

## **2. Literature Review**

In order to understand the broader picture of the relationship between immigrant women and social networks, earlier studies conducted in Canada and the United States provide better perspective for the study. Evidently, they have a longer history of female migration and more studies of their long-standing system of family reunification<sup>8</sup> preferences (Kofman, 1999).

I went through the brief literature review using these keywords such as social networks, social support, social capital, immigrant women, well-being, integration etc. Mainly Lund University electronic library resources were used to collect the previous research papers. After that, these literatures were categorized into five groups which social networks or social support refer to settlement, employment, health, gender and social capital.

### **2.1 Social networks and settlement**

Researchers argue that immigrants' pool resources which help their kinfolk and contact with kin provide information and reduce their risks of migration (Choldin, 1973; Taylor,

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<sup>8</sup>

1986; Massey et al, 1987, cited in Menjver, 1995) However Mejver (1995) also argue that complex networks illustrate cases where these networks fail to provide the expected assistance to the newcomers. Using the comparative analysis of a Salvadorean group with Vietnamese and Mexican group in the U.S., it is demonstrated that immigrant networks are affected by forces in the context of reception (Mejver, 1995). For example, Vietnam people have access to state assistance upon arrival which helps them adjust into Swedish society since they came here with refugee status, and Mexican people do not have such formal assistance, but they have longer migration history to Sweden has created informal ties through which migrants have access to resources such as market opportunities (Mejver, 1995). For the Salvadoreans, compared to Vietnamese and Mexicans, those factors such as the absence of state support, a short history of large scale of migration and a community that in general poor etc have created a weak condition for solid kin-based networks to prosper (Mejver, 1995).

This case is similar to the case of Thai group in Sweden and seems very meaningful to my present study. As I described before in background of Thai women, since most Thai women came to Sweden through marriage which implies her Swedish husband may be the most and only important source of help when they arrived in Sweden. In other word, their social networks frequently weaken upon arrival and during settlement. This background even more inspires me to focus on one ethnic group-Thai women because the way in which you come to new country might have significant impact on how you access to social networks and information.

## **2.2 Social networks and employment**

Employment is one of the most important settlement needs and one of the most crucial indicators of settlement and integration for immigrants (George & Chaze, 2009) On the other hand, social networks play an important role in order to match and sort jobs for immigrants in the host society (Baily & Waldinger, 1991; Sanders, J., Vistor, N. & Scott, S. 2002) and also establish the basis for the mutual trust and corporation (Portes & Sensenbrener, 1993, cited in Sanders et al, 2002).

For these reasons, researchers are contributing to my understanding of how their reliance on such ties effects immigrant's employment. Sanders et al (2002) examined how employment is affected by reliance on interpersonal ties in the job search by in-depth interviews with Asian immigrants in greater Los Angeles. And they found that reliance on interpersonal ties in finding work increase the rate of transitions of low prestige (Sanders et al, 2002). However that relationship applies only when the new employer and the job seeker are of a different ethnicity. By advantage of their knowledge of the home society's language and customs, immigrants often find jobs quickly through impersonal resources such as ethnic newspapers and co-ethnic employment agencies and those processes show the importance of ethno-linguistic social closure (Sanders et al, 2002). Important to this study, their findings also suggest that women rely more on interpersonal ties than men in the process of getting low-end jobs beyond the co-ethnic domain of the economy. This evidence of Asian women's relative lack of self-reliance in labor markets in the U.S. may be attributed to be able to compare with Thai women's situation in Sweden and see whether less pre-immigration employment and job-search experience influence their labor participation as Asian women in Los Angeles typically does.

In regard to employment, literature has highlighted the role and importance of social capital in meeting the needs of new immigrants (Massey, 1987; Menjvar, 1995). The study from Canada, Toronto, with in-depth interviews with South Asian newcomer women regarding to the role of social capital in obtaining employment, George & Chaze (2009) found two kinds of social capital emerged from the data: preexisting social capital and self-created social capital. Suggested by their result, the first one was networks of people or organizations that preexisted as a resource for South Asian newcomer women that they could access for help (George & Chaze, 2009). They also found that this kind of help derived from preexisting social capital, which could be either informal (friends, relatives acquaintances and their networks) or formal (agencies and organizations), did not depend on the closeness of the relationship with the members of the networks, and the most concrete help sometimes came from acquaintances rather than relatives (George & Chaze, 2009). Since I aim to explore the potential of "weak ties" in the relation of Thai women's networks, these findings may

encourage the process of my research.

## **2.3 Social networks, health and well-being**

Social capital has long been connected in the literature, especially both in Public Health and Social Work, with health outcomes (World Development Report, 2003) and mental health outcomes (Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, & Slaten, 1996). For instance, the absence of supportive relationships in informal (family, friend, and neighbors) and formal (school, social service agencies, community organizations and health care system) social networks has been found to be related to increase clinical depression among immigrants (Umberson, et al, 1996, cited in Shobe, Coffman & Dmochowski, 2009). Using the cross-sectional study with 99 Latinos in th U.S., Shobe et al (2009) examined the effects of different aspects of capital on health outcomes such as depression. As a result, they discussed that their findings might indicate that Latino immigrants with limited social supports and unemployment seem to be more depressed than employed immigrants with increased supports. Especially, as their findings support that “it is often *who* you know, not *what* you know, in terms of job acquisition” (Sobe et al, 2009: 105). This notion might also be important to note for my study since none of Thai women participant in the study is employed at the moment.

Gellis (2003) examined the role of social support networks on depressive symptoms among 79 Vietnamese immigrants in multicultural community in the U.S. The result showed that non-kin social support networks from broader community had a positive effect in reducing depressive symptoms, while kin social support networks were associated with negative effects such as family conflicts triggered by the stressors of caring for the depressed person (Gellis, 2003) Therefore the study findings suggested that broader community support such as formal health and mental health services may have important role to play in the psychological well-being of Vietnamese immigrants (Gellis, 2003). These suggestions inspired me to assess the possibility of organizational support networks in relation to Thai women in Sweden as well.

## **2.4 Social networks and Gender**

Recent debates about gender differences of the return of social networks (Lin& Dumin, 1986; Duck, 1990; Sassen, 1995; Hagan, 1998, cited in Crowell, 2004) provide the critical perspectives for the research. It is not only the challenges for assumptions that social networks have positive long-term benefits but also the suggestions that networks operate in gendered ways and produce systematic differences in various stages of immigrant women's settlement process. In the ethnography study on Maya community in Houston, the U.S., Hagan (1998) found that social relations of work, neighbors, and voluntary associations create different network structures for men and women and examined how gendered networks can differently affect on Maya women's attainment of legal immigrant status. Findings showed that live-in domestic works, which Maya newcomer women normally engaged, can only provide less mature and less resourceful job networks than men can find. Thus Maya woman's constrained networks operated so as to limit the women's ability to settle legally in the U.S., while they enhanced Maya men's ability to do so (Hagan, 1998). However, it is important to note that this result does not mean that other gendered networks might follow the same form and directions as Maya community does. Nor does it mean that migrant-based gendered social networks always benefit men's status attainment.

Based on the ethnography study of newly arrival of Vietnamese women's social groups and networks in the U.S., for example, Kibria (1990) showed that women's neighbor groups were an important source of informal power so that women were able to cope with male authority in the family and community. But they did not use their newly acquired resources in order to survive in a radical reconstructing old patriarchal system (Kibria, 1990). Rather, in many ways, the women remained attached to old male-dominant family system because it offered them economic protection and allowed them to continue exercise their power sanctioned by male over the younger generation (Kibria, 1990). On the other hand, she emphasized that while the Vietnamese men loses their social status with the settlement in the U.S., the Vietnamese women enhanced their collective power (Kibria, 1990). Not only the women's network became an important

source of economic security and family survival, but also the women's group became essential agent of negotiation between the Vietnamese community and the outside of ethnic community such as hospitals and welfare agencies. As a result, the men changed their opinion of women's community because many realized that without these resources the family cannot afford to settle down in the U.S. (Kibria, 1990).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

In order to explore how social support system and networks play a role between Thai women and Swedish organizations and institutions, special attention is spent on the concept of social capital. Uphoff (1999) states that the structural conception of social capital leads researchers to focus on social relations, networks, loose associations and formal association, in addition social capital refers to resources, such as information, reputations, credit, that flow through a social network. Thus social capital is a resource which can be used to enhance one's wealth and status, to marginalize others, or both (Uphoff, 1999, cited in Bebbington, 2008, Ed. in Desei & Potter, 2008, p.133).

Because a person's social networks might influence their access to schools, health care or institutions providing financial services, this social capital might also facilitate access by guaranteeing the person's reliability and accountability (Desei & Potter, 2008). This might be crucial consequences for Thai immigrant women how to generate social capital as well, for example, access to information about education, health services and jobs etc.

#### **3.1 What is Social Capital?**

Social capital is increasingly introduced worldwide as a solution for both local and national issues (Anucha, Dlamini, Yan & Smylie, 2006). Despite its popularity, there is no agreed definition of social capital; therefore it is necessary to start from a definition which is developed through the last decades. First, I will refer to the three major works

of social scientists, Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam in order to trace back the popularity of the concept of social capital. Second, Swedish political scientist, Rothstein's notion of social trust is briefly introduce along with social capital theory as a critical point towards previous three scholars. Third, I will refer to Lin's definition and interpretation of social capital because he summarized other point of view on social capital which is considerably related to my research questions.

Although the concept of social capital has been associated with a positive outcome (Coleman, 1988), Bourdieu (1972/1974, 1983/1986, cited in Lin, 2001) extensively focuses on the roots of social inequalities in a way which social capital is distributed unevenly among people who posses different economic status and dominant culture. In fact, he identifies a wide range of social capital such as economic capital, social capital (relationship with significant others), cultural capital, and symbolic capital (prestige and honor), it is clear that Bourdieu considers these forms of capital as largely in the hands of the dominant class, since it occupies the top positions in the society. In addition to social capital, in his form, depends on the size of one's connections and on the volume or amount of capital that these connections possess.

For Bourdieu (1983/1986, cited in Lin, 2001), therefore social capital is "made up of social obligations or connections" and it is the aggregation of "actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or in other words, to membership in a group" (p.248 cited in Lin, 2001). In summary, Bourdieu sees social capital as a form of capital possessed by members of a social network or group. Among the members, the capital can be used as credits in which social capital contributes to members and it is maintained and reinforced for its utility when members continue to invest in the relationship (Lin, 2001). The caution of social inequality and exclusion by the unequal distribution of social capital is important findings to my study. For example, when Thai women intend to look for support from networks within their own community, they might be suffering from unequal institutional connections.

For Coleman (1988), the concept of social capital identifies certain aspect of social

structure by their functions despite differences in form, appearance, and construction. And the function identified by the conception of “social capital” is the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve their interests (Coleman, 1988). For this reason, social capital is not fungible across individuals or activities. In his paradigm of social action, Coleman (1988) depicts how actors exercise control over resources in which they have an interest, and how they are interested in events that are at least partially controlled by other actors. Thus, in order for their interests to gain from the outcomes of an event, actors engage in exchanges and transfers of resources (Coleman, 1988). These social relationships serve important functions in facilitating the actions of individual actors per se they form the basis of social capital (Lin, 2001). Coleman (1988) illustrates this point by using the example of critical aspects for young people’s success in education. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is concerned with how the social relationships of authority, trust and norms embedded in young person’s family or community organization affects her/his development of human capital. Coleman argued that functional relationships, especially embedded in the family, which is primarily the social-organizational domain of everyday life of young people, are useful in helping children develop their cognitive and social capability (Coleman, 1988).

Putnam (1993) applied Coleman’s conceptualization of social capital into his main work, *Making Democracy Work*, aiming to understand the relationship between political attitude and social value in Italy. He noted importance of trustworthiness and civil engagement, and came up with new understanding that allowed him to identify “social capital” as “features of social organizations such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (p.167). He emphasized that “networks of civic engagement” (p.173) which represent intense horizontal interaction are an essential form of social capital because “the denser such networks in a community, the more likely that its citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefits” (Putman, 1992, p. 173).

In addition, he noticed that trust is an essential component of social capital as well. Derived from his work in Italy, he clarifies “social trust in complex modern settings can

arise from two related sources- norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement” (Putman, 1992, p. 171).

In the relation to the notion of social trust, a recent study by Rothstein (2009) confirms that in economic relations, for example, lack of social trust will limit transactions between agents, tribe and unknown groups, thus in this way, social capital can be seen as an asset. However he argued that “While networks are often also seen as a part of social capital, we want to underline that networks as such cannot be a social capital because it cannot be an asset to be known by many people as an untrustworthy person” (Rothstein et al, 2009, p. 84). To be clear, what he emphasized here “likewise, to have contacts with many people whom you cannot trust cannot be an asset. What transforms networks and social contacts into assets (i.e. social capital) thus depends on the quality of the trust in them” (Rothstein et al, 2005, 2009: 84).

Combining the causal relation between trustworthy public institutions and social trust with Swedish and Romanian students in Rothstein’s quantitative study, Rothstein et al. (2005) showed that first of all, corrupt behavior by public authority clearly influences people’s trust in them in both cases. Therefore it seems to confirm that it is not the case that people who live in highly corrupt society morally accept corrupt behavior by public officials; rather ordinary citizens who participate in corruption are not to blame because it is the system that forces them to participate in corrupt dealings (Rothstein et al, 2009). Second, he also found that when people experience deceitful behavior by public authorities, they do not only lose trust in authority in question, but also they come to believe that people in general in such a society are less trustworthy (Rothstein et al, 2009).

In relation to his study, social trust among Thai women and organizations might be the possible measure that has affect on creating their social capital. This is not the main subject of my study but I will shortly come back to the discussion of social trust later on.

### **3.2 The role of “Weak ties”**

In their attempts to understand contemporary migration to industrialized countries, researchers focus increasingly on the concept of social networks. Primarily the networks in the migration literature refer to personal relationship based on “strong ties” with family and close friends. Current migration research in regard with networks has become aware of the possibilities of “weak ties” with acquaintances and institutions (Rose, et al, 1998; Hagan, 1998) The notion of “weak tie” has been introduced by Granovetter (1973, 1974) who was among the first to theoretically examine issues involving the strength of weaker ties (Lin, 2001). Researchers found that the use of more “weak ties” rather than “strong ties” might be important to achieve an individual’s desired goal (Granovetter, 1974; Boissevain, 1974; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981, Putman, 1992). Weak ties tend to have special functions which less frequent contacts might be able to go beyond the immediate socially homogeneous neighborhood where one live (Rose et al, 1998). Accordingly, one’s networks with “strong ties” are likely to know one another which there might be less diverse sources of information available to networks member.

However Lin (2001) argues that the weak tie discussion itself does not suggest that weaker ties will always link individual to better resources. Empirical observations, according to Laumann (1966, cited in Lin, 2001), suggest that individuals prefer to interact with others of similar or slightly higher, rather than lower socioeconomic status. In short, the remaining issue of ‘the strength of weak ties’ argument is, for Lin (2001), whether it is necessary to have such weak ties hypothesis in order to understand the advantage of networks locations in accessing to social capital (Lin, 2001). This might be critical point of my study as well, however I will employ this concept that weaker ties might allow immigrant women access to wider resources heterogeneity and also the benefit from such ties can be extended to their social capital, as in what Rose et al (1998) describe explicitly the potential of this relatively new concept:

“those with whom one establishes weak ties are more likely to act ‘gateways’ facilitating the flow of information or as bridges to other spheres of society or other

resource systems removed from the individuals network of strong, dense ties; they may also lead to new networks of strong ties, in this sense, access to weak ties may become a key element in social integration processes because of their potential to open up to wider range of resources.” (p.4)

### *Immigrant women and weak ties*

How a Thai woman builds her social networks, especially when she is limited to her husband and her own ethno cultural community, which is based on strong ties, or in the case of without paid employment outside of the house? In general, researches on men’s and women’s networks studies have pointed out that women’s networks are more related to a larger proportion of kin but fewer different types of non-kin, while men’s networks, in contrast, consisted of fewer kin and more non-kin (Moor, 1990; Rose et al, 1998 ). In addition, there is another gender differentiation in network diversity and size between men and women, which is the participations in organizations. Lovin (1982, cited in Lin, 2000) showed that men belonged to larger organizations when compared with women in similar categories such as work status, age and education. The study also indicated that men were located in core organizations which were relatively large and related to economic situation; on the other hand, women were located in peripheral organizations which were smaller and more related to domestic and community affairs (ibid). This may explain why so little study has been done on weak ties among immigrant women. On the contrary, the circumstance indicates that the improvement of women’s social network and further, the strength of women’s weak ties will be a key resource for social integration as well as empowerment of immigrant women in many ways.

The discussion here is that, according to Aroian’s (1992) study of Polish immigrants in the U.S., the need of social support is changed over the settlement period. The result indicated that they no longer needed fundamental information or support rather they shift to expand their source of social relations in order to gain more various and different types of resources (Aroian, 1992). Therefore, in what Aroian (1992) refers to

as the “middle settlement”<sup>9</sup> phase, there was a reason to believe that these women might in fact have various kinds of weak ties in their social networks, perhaps including some extending beyond the ethnic community of origin. And this might be also a key element for Thai women participants in my study as well because most of Thai women who I interviewed with have been in Sweden as almost same period as Polish participants in Aroian’s (1992) study. This led me want to explore the formation, the nature, and significant of weak ties by means of intensive interview.

To be able to apply the concept of social capital to the experience of immigrant women, Lin (2001) provides the theoretical grounding on social capital that the research needs to focus on. Lin (2001) defines social capital as “the resources embedded in one’s social network and how to access to and use of such resources benefits the individual’s actions” (p.55). However he also paid considerable attention to inequality of social capital. Women and minorities have, for example, different access to social capital due to their advantaged or disadvantaged structural positions and social networks. Therefore Lin (2000) summarized such unanswered question on social capital that “we must examine, first whether different social groups possess different amounts of quality of social capital; second, whether they gain different return from what social capital they have; and third, whether it is possible for members of disadvantaged groups to act to overcome such deficiencies” (p.790). Although the second one is important question that is needed to study, since few studies related to Thai women in Sweden have been conducted yet, my study will focus on mainly the first one and later on I will briefly try to address the third one for the discussion part of the study.

In conclusion, the research is motivated by the conceptual framework provided by Lin (2001) that views social capital as having three components: structure (embeddedness), opportunity (accessibility through social networks), and action (use). As Lin (2001) emphasized that the theory of social capital is:

“...first, it should explain how resources take on values and how the valued resources are distributed in society - the structural embeddedness of resources. Second, it should

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<sup>9</sup> 4-5 years since immigrated (Aroian, 1992)

show how individual actors, through interactions and social networks, become differently accessible to such structurally embedded resources – the opportunity structure. Third, it should explain how access to such social resources can be mobilized for gains – the process of activation” (Lin, 2001, p. 29).

The research results tend to articulate how directly or indirectly social capital contributes immigrant women’s social well-being. In this study, social capital was defined as a structural variable that describes organizations and their networks and linkages between Thai immigrant women and organizations (Lin, 2001).

### **3.3 Empowerment**

Apart from the concept of social capital and weak ties, I intend to use the concept of empowerment and to employ it as a research tool in the study. This concept can be discussed in broader level as Cox and Pawer (2008) described that “the use of the term *empowerment* can mean assisting individuals to exercise greater control over their own lives, and to exercise a stronger influence over the decision-making and structural developments in society that impact directly or indirectly on their lives and well-being” (p. 81). Given their concept, it is important that at the core concept of empowerment is the understanding of power. According to Page & Czuba (1999), empowerment requires that power can change, if power cannot change, or if it is inherent in positions or people, then empowerment is not possible, nor is empowerment conceivable in any meaningful way and vice versa. Power is often related to our ability to make others do what we want, regardless of their own wishes or interests (Weber, 1946, cited in Page & Czuba, 1999). In addition, Weber (1946) gives us further recognition that power exist within the context of a relation between people and neither power exist in isolation nor inherent in individuals (*ibid*). Thus empowerment is “a process that fosters power (the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own life, their community, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important” (Page & Czuba, 1999). For this reason, empowerment is a key concept for immigrant women as well, that the process gives such an opportunity that immigrant woman themselves might open the recognition of their own value and believes, encourages expression of their own issues. Moreover

throughout the process of empowerment might also give skills and knowledge that will motivate them to take steps to improve their own lives.

While empowerment is a common and important concept in social work which is my discipline, it is also very widely used in the social development literature in a similar but somewhat broader sense (Cox & Pawar, 2008). World Bank in their report, stated that “empowerment has been argued to be important for development because it determines the extent to which women gain access to education, are able to seek employment or health care outside of the family, can acquire contraceptive information, and the freedom to act on their fertility preferences or on the illness of their children, among other dimensions.” (World Bank, 2001) This is a very similar idea to what the outcome of the use of social capital might be, especially for immigrant women in many ways.

Lastly, empowering people is not only the purpose of development or simply mechanical process of sharing, distribution of power at individual level. Given in an understanding that power will be seen and understood differently by people who inhabit various positions in power structures (Lukes, 1994 cited in Page et al, 1999), contemporary research has opened new perspectives. For example, SinghaRoy (2001) argued that, historically speaking, empowerment related changes are only possible through sustained grassroots mobilizations, social movement, and selfless interventions of civil society. Thus the empowerment approach will be also important in order to discuss the significance of grassroots women’s organization and members as a power or tool for the empowerment of marginalized groups, particularly Thai women for my study, in the society.

## **4. Data and Methodology**

In this section, the study’s methodological approach is presented. The methods used to collect the data are mainly interviews and observations including informal and

unstructured interviews.

All of data was collected in Malmö, Lund and Eslöv, the region of southern part of Sweden. Malmö is the third largest city in Sweden and because of the connection to other country e.g. Denmark; the number of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants are increasing in this region (Statistiska centralbyrån, 2009)<sup>10</sup>. As a consequence, Malmö city has developed grassroots' level women's organizations to support (immigrant) women during the past few decades<sup>11</sup>. Eslöv was chosen because the city has a Thai temple which provides many activities for Thai people. Also, since most Thai women live in the countryside, it was necessary to gain the additional data not only from major cities but also from the outside of city.

## 4.1 Research Design

Most of the primary data for the thesis was collected during the field work that carried out from March to May 2010. In my study, the grounded theory procedure will be used as an overall approach. Especially I am inspired by Charmaz's constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006).

According to Charmaz (2006), "a constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data"(p. 130). This approach is different from Strauss and Glaser's (1967) classic grounded theory in regarding how we discover the theory. In Strauss and Glaser's (1967) view, theory is emerged from data but separately from the scientific observer (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike their position, Charmaz (2006) assumes that "neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect" (p, 10) therefore the approach emphasize that "grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a methods for developing theories to understand them" (Charmaz, 2006, p.10). Thus, her constructivist approach to grounded theory takes a reflexive stance towards the

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<sup>10</sup> See figure 3. In APPENDIX B

<sup>11</sup> The evidence refer to the interviews with representatives of Malmö Kivinnojouren

research process and products.

Consequently, her constructivist approach is that we, the authors of the study, *construct* our grounded theory through our continuous involvement and interactions with participants as she stated that “*the theory depends on the researcher’s view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it*” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Furthermore, Charmaz (2006) emphasizes that “the logical extension of the constructivist approach means learning how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in large and often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships”( p, 130).

My main study goal is not to develop an in-depth description of a number of individuals, but rather to investigate the social networks between Swedish community-based organizations for immigrant women and Thai women. In the grounded theory procedure, both quantitative and qualitative research can be used as methods; however it is mostly adopted in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2006). For my study, qualitative analysis method is suitable since I am interested in how and what kind of social networks are created and given meaning to Thai women. By using a qualitative approach, I investigate how women’s and community-based organizations relate to and collaborate with other organizations and also with immigrant women. In addition, I also hope to deeper understand the exchange of contacts and information between women’s organizations and Thai women in southern Sweden.

I entered the study field through “zigzag” (Casewell, 2006) process, I went to the field and collected data, came back to the office for analysis and back to the field again as Charmaz also suggests that “*grounded theories stop and write whenever ideas occur to them*” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10)

## **4.2 Entering and gaining access to the field**

Through a snowball technique, I expanded the field. The first step to the study field was

to collect information related the issues of Thai women from Swedish newspapers<sup>12</sup>. From articles I gathered some key words such as women's organizations name, Thai embassy in Stockholm and the critical situation of Thai women. I first contacted Malmö Kvinnojouren (Women's emergency center in Malmö)<sup>13</sup> by email and confirmed an interview appointment by telephone. Because Malmö Kvinnojouren is part of Sveriges Kvinno- och Tjejerors Riksförbund<sup>14</sup>, I was able to search other women's organization in Sweden and after I also gained more information about Roks (Riksorganisationen för kvinnojouren och tjejer i Sverige<sup>15</sup>). With the help of the list of member organizations, I made successful contacts with 2 more organizations: ATIM and Kriscentrum. My hypothesis was that empowerment guided organizations might be one of the places where Thai women come and participate. Therefore I also contacted 2 organizations in Lund and Malmö to conduct interviews with staff from Lunds KvinnoForum and IKF (Internationella Kvinnoföreningen i Malmö). Simultaneously I contacted the Thai ambassador in Stockholm by email in order to gain related information for my research.

In Eslöv, first of all I contacted a Japanese woman who lives in the city and she helped me to gain access to an immigrant women's support group (Kvinno möt kvinno) in Eslöv. In addition to this activity, I also had an opportunity to conduct interview with staff from Studie främjandet Mittskåne who was a leader of this women's support group. Lastly, since the Swedish government gives opportunity for all foreigners to get free Swedish lessons, SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) at KOMVUX in Lund was a suitable place for recruiting Thai women participants for my individual interviews. After I conducted three interviews with Thai women, I expanded the study fields in regarding to employment and health because all previous participants mentioned about the importance of network when they try to get a job or their child was ill and so on. Later I added such questions as: how Thai women perceive their social networks in relation to try to enter the labor market or gain access to health care.

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<sup>12</sup> The list of newspaper is in APPENDIX A.

<sup>13</sup> See APPENDIX C for more details of all organizations that I contacted for interviews.

<sup>14</sup> The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young women's Empowerment Centers (SKR)

<sup>15</sup> The national organization for women's shelter and young women's shelter in Sweden

## **4.3 The sample**

The study was conducted in three cities, in Skåne in the southern part of Sweden: Malmö, Lund and Eslöv. 9 of the interviews took place with a member of staff from 6 nongovernmental organizations, 2 governmental institutions and 1 ethnic association.

### *In Malmö*

- Kvinnojouren (Women's emergency center)
- ATIM (Ansvar, Tillit, Integritet och Mod: Responsibility, Trust, Integrity and Trust)
- Kriscentrum (Crisis center for Women)
- IKF (Internationella Kvinnoföreningen: International Women's Association)

### *In Lund*

- KOMVUX (School for adult education)
- Lunds Kvinnoforum (Women's forum)
- IVIK (Introduction program for immigrant youth)

### *In Eslöv*

- Thai Temple (Wat Sanghabaramee Temple)
- Kvinnو möt Kvinnо by Studie främjandet Mittskåne (The study promotion association)

Apart from those organizations, 8 Thai women (3 for intensive interviews, 5 from focus group interview) were interviewed and the population was collected with broader ranges of criteria to find my respondents. Most of the participants were contacted at language school (Komvuv), but in order to avoid as much selectivity bias as possible, participants were also contacted through women's organization and Thai temple's community. None of them are employed in labor market at the moment of research, however one participants recruited from Thai temple were about to start working as a nurse. The collection process to include the women is using snowballing technique. Certain restrictions are placed on who might qualify as respondents. The participants are:

- Thai women
- Age 30-40 years old
- Women who have different education background, social status and the number of children.
- Less than 5 years stays in Sweden<sup>16</sup>
- Residing in the study area

#### **4.4 Data collection methods**

In the study, a multi-method design is used to answer my research questions. According to Flick (2006), linking different qualitative or quantitative methods is essential because this combined design goes beyond the limitations of a single method by combining several methods and giving them equal relevance. In this study, I have conducted:

- Organizational interviews
- Semi-structured individual interviews
- Focus group interview
- Observations

The major source for collection of data in my study was in-depth interviews with staffs and organizational leaders from women's organizations, NPOs and language school. In addition, interviews with Thai women complemented with participatory observations and informal conversations. According to Charmaz (2006), interviewing is a useful data-gathering method in various types of qualitative research. She assumes that it is a useful method for interpretive inquiry so that intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of particular topic or experience (Charmaz, 2006).

During the field work, almost all interviews were tape-recorded. Sometime a

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<sup>16</sup> Most of Thai women participant have stayed in Sweden less than 5 years but I also interviewed with one who has stayed in Sweden more than 5 years.

tape-recorder could not be used because of the situation such as noisy environment or the interview situations happened without any appointment. Each interview took 30-60 minutes, entirely dependent on the participant's wishes. The transcriptions of the audio taped interviews were carried out by the researcher. All the participants from the organizations were comfortable speaking English so translators were not required. Some Thai women seem not willing to speak neither English nor Swedish but it was possible to communicate with all Thai women in English so gave their interviews in English as well. Simultaneously I sometimes wrote field notes during the interviews and observations, and after each session I also wrote down the main aspects of the entire interview, such as observations and participant's behavior etc.

### **Semi-structured interviews/Key informant interviews**

For my organizational analysis, I conducted key informant interviews with persons who work in different welfare/human service organizations related to my study and knowledgeable about their organizations. I asked few fundamental open questions which refer to their origin, their service users (clients), and their capacity and linkage with another organizations and government<sup>17</sup>. Key informant interviews aim to obtain social knowledge and key informants have special knowledge on a given topic (Mikkelsen, 2005). They are not necessarily the leaders. A staff who has experienced of women's organization is as much a key informant as a social service officer in my study. During the field work, a member of the staff was willing to support served as gatekeeper and helped me to collect the data regarding Thai women. For example, a teacher from KOMVUX, he provided me the information about the religious festival at Thai temple thus I was able to participate the event and obtained valuable observation at Thai ethnic community.

### **Focus group interview**

The turndown rate was a serious problem for the researcher in studying Thai women. Part of the problem might be the busy work schedule that they have to maintain study as well as domestic jobs such as taking care of children. While trying to collect the Thai

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<sup>17</sup> See interview guide in Appendix D for more details.

women participants in Komvux, I felt that some Thai women might dislike to be asked by one on one interview in English. For this reason, the researcher decided to conduct focus group discussion with 5 Thai women at lunch time in the language school. During lunch time, Thai women are often sitting and eating together with other Thai women. Given that observation, I predicted that they might prefer to talk as a group member, not alone. According to Creswell (1998), “focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individual interviews one on one may be hesitant to provide information” (p.124). Thus the focus group interview was suitable for conducting interview with Thai women participants in my study.

## **Observations**

From the beginning of the research, in KvinnoForum (one of the local women's organizations in Lund), I had the opportunity to participate in most of the support programs and events for immigrant women and talked with them and staffs during the field study. Although the grounded theory procedure fits particularly well with intensive qualitative interview, it complements other methods such as observations, surveys and research participants' written accounts (Creswell, 2007). It was knowledgeable for my study in a way which I could gain a glance of how community organization carries out the activities.

In addition to the observations at one women's organization, I have also taken part in the Thai traditional festival at Thai temple. In that situation, I was able to observe how Thai people communicate and intervene with each other and also had chance to talk to some their Swedish husband. And I discussed with some Thai women during the event and I used informal and unstructured interview methods in order to gain a relevant data such as how this Thai temple is important place for them and how they found this place since they came to Sweden.

Moreover I felt in a way that the participatory methods have contributed to adjust the interview to make it more conversational, while still controlled and structured

(Mikkelsen, 2005). Indeed, to do interview with Thai women in Komvux was conducted very conversational, since the researcher was also studying there as a same student so Thai women saw me more as a friend than the researcher.

## 4.5 Data analysis

In grounded theory, data analysis has a well-defined process that begins with gathering data, coding, constant comparisons, categorization, theoretical sampling, and memos in generating a theory (Walker and Myrick, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the process of defining what the data are about; a grounded theorist creates qualitative codes by defining what s/he sees in the data (p.187). Therefore the codes are emergent and developed as the researcher studies on their data. Although I adapted Charmaz's constructivist approach for the research, I have been inspired by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) because they provide clear procedures for the analyzing processes. Their guidelines offer a set of general principles where open, axial, and selective coding into core category are the main steps. However my analyzing process is slightly different as I am willing to describe below.

## 4.6 Coding Processes

*Open coding* consists of two tasks; naming of the data and categorizing of phenomena. Strauss and Corbin (1990) call this procedure "conceptualizing" (p.62). During the open coding, the data will be broken down and closely examined as well as compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data.

In this study, I started with the data which I collected from the organizations. Through a line-by-line analysis<sup>18</sup>, I examined the collected data at the end of each interview day and also compared my data with earlier interviews. This type of coding can help the

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<sup>18</sup> Line-by-line coding means naming each line of your written data (Glaser, 1978 cited in Charmaz, 2006)

researcher to separate data into categories and to see processes. According to Charmaz (2006), “being critical about your data does not necessarily mean being critical of your research participants. Instead, being critical forces asking *yourself* questions about your data.”(p.51) therefore through coding each line of data, I ask: ‘What does the data suggest?”, “What processes are going on in this issue here?”, “When, why, and how does the process change?” etc in order to see actions and identify significant processes (Charmaz, 2006).

In the beginning the codes were very short and simple such as; practical functions, mental things, feeling, violence, organized and arranged, police, legal counselor, movement, symbol etc. For instance, when I asked the staff from Malmö Kvinnojouren how they provide the health care service if women are mentally abused by violence and she answered; “*we try to call the health care, where they can find a doctor and nurse, try to find the best way, and also we can go together with them if they need.*” From this answer my original codes were organizing, arranging, accompanying.

Following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) way, once the particular phenomena in data is identified then the researcher begin to group ones concept around them in order to get an abstract conceptual name. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest “*the important thing is to name a category*” (p.65). This is done to reduce the number of units with which the researcher has to work (ibid).

In addition to open coding, I also paid attention to “*in vivo*” codes According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), this is “the words and phrases used by informants themselves, catchy ones that immediately drew attention to them” (p. 69). For example, once the staff from Kvinnojouren mentioned that “*we try to help them in the “the jungle”, we guide them in that, and literally we hold them in hand, help them to find a way*”. In the sentence, through the word “the jungle”, I somehow grasped the importance in the data because it’s catchy, suggesting and summarizing all the networks and information that immigrant women face at the moment.

Then I moved on and kept coding in order to find as many codes as possible and

compared the codes with new ones. At the same time, I kept asking myself questions about my data continuously. For example; *Who* provide social support to Thai women with needs of help? *When* do they need the services? *How* does their help affect immigrant women? *Why* are social support networks important? During the entire process of coding data, *memos* were also taken. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), memos help the researcher to gain analytical distance from materials and assist your movement away from the data to abstract thinking, then also in returning to the data to ground these abstractions in reality (p. 199).

*Axial coding* is the second of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three-stage method. Open coding fractures the data and allows me to identify some categories, their properties, and dimensional locations. The main purpose of axial coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) is to put the fractured data back together in new ways "by making connections between a category and its sub category" (p.97). The most significant or frequent codes were put into broader categories, for example, emotional support, counseling, navigating, providing security, the flow of information, guide etc. Those categories were compared to find patterns and relations among them. During axial coding, the researcher works to understand categories in relationship to other categories and their subcategories. Axial coding "...the purpose is to delineate and extricate relationships on which the axis of the category is being focused." (Strauss, 1987, cited in Walker & Myrick, 2006). *Selective Coding*, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), is the "process of integrating and refining the theory." (p. 143, cited in Walker & Myrick, 2006). Since the author is seeking the structure of networks, both organizational and among Thai women, the role of their networks, and the outcome of access and use of such networks, during developing the categories, I started to organize and select the core categories around my main study concept.

Afterwards, I repeated the same procedure all over again throughout all the material until all categories are saturated and new themes stopped emerging. Following the next section, the result from coding will be demonstrated.

## **4.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical questions should be carefully paid attention to in a study of a culture in which the researcher is an outsider. When getting into the field and finding the participants for my research, I was always telling them information about the study aims as well as they had a right to decide whether they wanted to participate and share their personal experience with me. I did not use a written agreement but a verbal approval of all the respondents in the study was used, and all research participants were taken part in it on a voluntary basis. Every time before I started the individual interview, I briefly explained about my purposes and aims of my research to respondents. The respondents were also informed that they have right to skip or not answer at any time of the interview without any consequences. I paid considerable attention not only to make them comfortable but also allow the women to extend in the situations where they might reveal some sensitive information when such topics emerged. I was very careful with not producing any prior expectations during the interview, however perhaps I did not enough offer some of them the returns of attending the research once it was concluded. All Thai women participants will remain anonymous but most of staff from organizations gave me a permission to use their real names in the thesis.

## **4.8 Limitations**

The research conducted in the three cities located in the south part of Sweden. For example, north part such as Stockholm of course has different systems and the welfare organizations. This study is not a representation of whole Thai women and their support organizations in Sweden.

Time limitation also restricts me to explore through the rest of existing women's organization in the Skåne region. Snowball technique was used during the field study, but after I collected 9 samples, I stop collecting the data and more concentrated on the data analysis due to the time limitations.

Language barrier was also a huge object for the researcher. Mostly I used English for all interviews except for the ice breaking conversations. I used some Swedish because I noticed that sometimes speaking Swedish in the beginning makes my relationships with participants works better.

Because it was a student research and sometimes the research topic touched upon very sensitive topic of women (e.g. domestic violence and trafficking), I wasn't allowed or introduced to see women at the shelter and one organization. Therefore my research participants of Thai women were mostly collected in Komvux and Thai temple. My research topic did not narrow down only the social networks in the emergency situations, rather any type of "life event" such as, getting employment, education, health care, child bearing etc that Thai women face in the daily life.

## **5. Findings/Analysis**

In this chapter, I will first demonstrate the finding from the in-depth interviews with 8 organizational representatives and analyze the role of different types of community organizations, both public and third sectors, in building social capital for Thai women. Second I will also present the findings from the in-depth interviews with Thai women and compare them with what I found it in the organizational analysis. How do the social networks enhance Thai women's well-being and further social integration?

### **5.1 Results: Organizational networks**

#### **Language school as a main provider of networks and knowledge**

KOMVUX (Adult education in Sweden) and SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) is the major networks that foster and build social capital for Thai women.

According to a teacher from Komvux, the school provides Swedish class as well as many kind of knowledge about Swedish society as he said:

*“Swedish society how it works is more or less integrated in life and study. So at the same time they learn the language, they should also learn about Swedish society, different traditions, health care, and social welfare and so on. So it should be integrated, in the language class, teachers also tell a lot about how it works in Sweden...so it is an idea that they should get an introduction which means they learn about Swedish society as well.”*

These programs allow women to meet other women and share experiences. The advantage is that Thai women also have an opportunity to meet different ethnical groups which probably give Thai women the wider “weak ties” by taking language and other courses. The KOMVUX teacher mentioned that:

*“You can get a network here that is a very important aspect that you can meet new friends. And that is very good and important that kind of integration taken place here between students practically from all over the world.”*

One of the study participants, a representative from Studie främjandet, uses this advantage in order to provide women’s discussion groups at KOMVUX. In fact, most of other organizations recognized those language schools as important resources, not only for learning Swedish language but also tasks such as finding a job, integrating into Swedish society. So what the first thing they do is to refer these women to KOMVUX or SFI.

*“Actually one of the first thing we do is we contact school like Komvux. And if your Swedish is not enough, you know if they need to learn more Swedish because in a country like Sweden unfortunately you cannot grow... It's not because you are not able to grow, it's because people around you won't let you grow, and won't let you achieve the job you want to get...” (Staff from ATIM)*

As once teacher from KOMVUX in Malmö said “*they (immigrant students) see us (Komvux teachers) as a gateway to Swedish society*” (field note), the social relations among language schools seem to be essential for building of Thai women’s social

network. However, in-depth interviews with Thai participants revealed several challenges of women's involvement with such schools. For example the schools do not ensure that they will secure employment.

### **Connections with the authority**

The organizational networks have connections with authorities such as police, lawyers and doctors etc. Through these types of networks, Thai women might be able to gain 'power' as well as security in order to protect themselves, for example, in the case of husband's violence. As social capital reflects the extent of social connections (Lin, 2001), such networks contain embedded resources that Thai women can gain. The strong connections with authorities can provide more power compared with non-governmental organizations. A staff from a governmental organization (Kriscentrum) emphasized the point:

*"We have always somebody working here. Women can find us and come and talk here all through the night. We work here for 24 hours, this is the most different thing compared to Kvinnojouren and ATIM...I think we have more professional things. Here it's different, they can see it safe and secure...We have more connection with police after "Project Karin"<sup>19</sup>; we have better contact with police... I feel they have more understanding for the problem"*

Apart from assistance from the police, those organizational networks provide the legal support for immigrant women if such emergency situation occurs. This shows that "weak ties" sometimes can be more efficient than "strong ties", in a way they can reach to legal supports which perhaps strong ties cannot provide.

*"We help women who don't know any lawyer or don't have any recommendation for a lawyer. We help them to get a good lawyer who is...we know who is interested in the program and made good work before. And if the women want... which is most of the time...We follow them to the trial because they feel very alone, I mean they have to sit*

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<sup>19</sup> New project has been set up at Kriscentrum which more enhanced the strong relationship with police.

*directly opposite side of a husband who treated them very badly, it's not very nice and easy to keep calm".* (A staff at Kriscentrum)

Given this authority background, on the other hand, organizational networks have the potential of acting as a “advocate” between Thai women and Swedish husband. To connect with a women’s organization means to connect with authority, usually police. A staff from Kvinnoforum describes such existence of authority behind the women as “invisible security” and that works in such way:

*“We could help the women even if they are not here because we are in their life. I mean the man knows that she knows us and she can talk to the man like “if you hit me, I am going to call them and they are going to call to police” ...And the man, he understands that women is not alone and if he does something to her, we are going to call to police and he stops hitting her.”*

This is one of the ways that women gain power when they get access to a women’s organization. At the same time, the organizations themselves perceive the connecting with authorities an important because such networks enable them gain more responsibility as well as enough funding.

### **Organizations as extended local neighborhoods**

When working with women who need some supports, women’s organizations also work with emotional situations and mental support. Moreover, those women’s organizations try to organize and arrange for their better situation through meaning as a social worker.

As a result, according to the interviewee from Kvinnojouren, through the whole process of long intervention and building up of trust, the relationship between Thai women and the organizations usually is changing over the time. An interviewee from Kvinnojouren said that *“...when you are following them through all of the steps, of course you get become important for them. So you sometimes continue to have a contact with them even after that just because you have known them so long. You try to follow up and see how they are doing and yeah it is like this.”*

Similarly, the teacher from KOMVUX told about when he had a Thai women student

who had a problem with her Swedish husband and she was depressed and it was rather serious situation, he “*tried to talk to her and I said I can be kind of an extra father for you and I could be an extra grandfather for your children*” Those situations express some people even form closed relationships or become kind of siblings beyond the role of formal representative of organizations. But the most important advantage with these relationships is that they have broader resources embedded in their networks than usual networks- strong ties.

### **Advisor for reproductive health and right**

Getting pregnant and having children are not only the important phases in women’s lives but also to prevent unexpected pregnancies is important for many women. Yet not all organizations that I studied provided services with health issues. However two of them are concerned about women’s reproductive health and try to give them information through their programs.

“*...sometimes even Swedish people don’t know about information. That is the main focus, ah...main goal for us, you know the project that some important information how to prevent unexpected pregnancy, how you take care of yourself, that is our job to make sure the right information, you have the right person to help you and your problem.*”

(Staff from Studie främjandet)

An interviewee from KvinnoForum was rather concerned about women might pay less attention to themselves when they get children. This could be a significant issue for Thai women, according since they are considered to be willing to take care of the family than themselves<sup>20</sup> (Mills, 2003).

“*...I think women should know that don’t make any babies before you have a job or you have ah...because when you make a baby, you know, you must do a lot of things, you need a lot of energy...you must feed a baby I think. I think it’s important to speak out and tell them that baby is good, it’s nice to have a baby, but not when you don’t have anything because a baby is a responsibility, you must and you do everything for your*

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<sup>20</sup> More details about Thai gendered culture see Mills (2003) “*Thai women in the global force*” p.76-91.

*baby...I think first you have to use all your energy for your own life.”* (Staff from Kvinnoforum)

Having children might also prevent from creating social networks. In fact, the representative from Studie främjandet mentioned that particularly Thai women cannot take part in their women's group activity because they have small child to take care of. This is interesting to discuss because the findings from Thai women themselves seem to have more positive opinions about having children. It is noteworthy that these opinions emerged from 2 representatives from women's organizations who are themselves also immigrant women. This might imply that they are neither trying to impose Swedish norms on other women nor bring them up according to Swedish cultural norms. Rather I assumed it was came up with their own experiences as same immigrant women living in Sweden, and it was their wish that young women shall consider more carefully the impact of having children in their lives.

I will now demonstrate the findings from in-depth interview with Thai women, and compared them with those previously depicted from organizational representatives.

## **5.2 Results: Thai women's perception of social networks**

### **Social networks of Thai women in the first settlement period**

Most Thai women told me that they were quite lonely when they had just moved to Sweden. In the beginning, they usually got all the information or supports from their Swedish husband or sometimes his family, which seems to be a quite narrow and small network. However after they start going to KOMVUX, their social relationships became wider and more helpful. One of Thai women mentioned:

*“Actually I got into school immediately after I came here, like one week after, I learnt Swedish immediately and they also have a contact person to immigration office. They helped me also with translation. They asked me what I want, what I think etc everything. They are really helping.”* (Thai woman at Thai temple)

Although they explained to me that it was a very tough period for them in the beginning because they did not have anyone to talk to and ask for the help, many women also showed strength in themselves during the first settlement period. For example, when one Thai woman was asked “Who were the important people in helping you settle in Sweden?” (Appendix D), she immediately answered “*me myself is the most important person to settle down!*” (Thai woman from group discussion interview). Thai women repeatedly told me about the importance of being strong and tough in order to live and manage things in Sweden. Their answers present quite different images from what Swedish newspapers usually reported about Thai women. It seems to me that in-depth interviews with Thai women present reveal that they are neither passive nor some kind of victim, rather women who have the strength and motivation inside of them to adapt to a new country.

One woman differed widely with the others on her experiences from the first settlement period. She had the luck of knowing ethnic neighbors from her home country from the beginning.

*“...I was so lucky, when I first came with tourist visa to come to visit my boy friend, in my boy friend’s apartment, next door, she was a Thai girl. Already! She’s been living here for 6 years already. That Thai neighbor starts talking with my boy friend and he said “oh I’m going to meet Thai girl in Thailand.” And they start to be friend, to be neighbors, very closed, when I came here first day, she already gave me many stuffs (cloth, caps etc) because she realized that it was cold for her. She was so nice...She starts introducing Thai friends, I never feel lonely after one year.”* (Thai woman at KOMVUX)

This indicates that having strong ties in the very beginning might be crucial for newcomers. And the positive effect may last longer if you have such networks. Having neighbors and co-ethnic networks, in particular strong ties might facilitate well for the newcomer to settle down in the new society.

## **Employment and desire for job**

None of the Thai women participants in my study were employed at the moment. However, many other Thai women usually work in non-skilled job places such as cleaning at office or hotel<sup>21</sup>. Of my study participants, the only exception is that one Thai woman who stayed here over 5 years got a job offer in nursing and she will start working soon at the hospital. All Thai women mentioned language difficulties when they try to find a job.

*“Y: How do you find the information about jobs?*

*T: From my friends, they just help me but mostly the job they got, it's like cleaning job.*

*Y: Komvux is proving some information about job?*

*T: Yeah they have Arbetsförmedlingen<sup>22</sup>, but you know, I go to the Arbetsförmedlingen in the city and sometimes they help. But we have to speak Swedish first otherwise you can't get a job.”*

Thai women seemed to realize that in terms finding a job, it's not just “what you know” but as important is “who you know”. One woman said “*how to find the job... it depends on what kind of job you want to work. For example cleaning job is very easy to find but like teacher; no it's very difficult. And also if you don't know anybody, it's very difficult.*”

In-depth interviews with women showed that the women know that employment is an opportunity for them to build social networks with people who normally wouldn't interact with them. Many of them had a working experience from Thailand thus they already knew the positive effect of a working place. Indeed, a study from Canada found that different forms of social capital open up employment opportunities for immigrant women (Rose et al, 1998). The problem is how to access such social capital and get a job. Overall, employment revealed itself to be a central issue that touched on all aspects of women's lives.

## **“Right way” and “Brain Waste”**

Several Thai interviewees had high education up to university level or skilled training

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<sup>21</sup> The evidence refers to an interview with the teacher at Komvux.

<sup>22</sup> Swedish Employment Agency (governmental job recruiting center)

from Thailand. However they still faced difficulties to find a job because a Thai degree or diploma did not qualify in Sweden. But this is not always the case, as a Thai woman who recently got a job in nursing care told me:

*“...if you go to the **right way**, you also can get a job. Getting to know some contact is very important. Contact with someone in the job, for example, doctor or nurse, if you are interested in studying nursing and then you will work in the same area, team as a trainee and here they can recognize you to somebody. And when you study, you have to find the **right way**...because I want money and study, no good! You have to think about future.”* (Thai woman at Thai temple)

This woman's life experience suggests that “right way” implies that women need to find a way that ensures less competition with local people. For example, she studied journalism and secretary before in school but she found that it is difficult to get such kind of job with heavily competition with Swedish candidates thus she changed her career to nursing care. The problem might be time consuming. It takes a long time to change a career from one to the other one and for immigrant women; it may be a difficult decision to make sure whether this is a “right way” or not.

### **Pregnancy, child care and motivation for study**

In-depth interviews with organization staff indicated that having children might have a negative impact on Thai women in terms of establishing their social networks and sometimes place them in tough positions. A Thai woman told about certain difficulties:

*“...my daughter make my life...what can I say...lovely. Sometimes it's very difficult because we have no one to help. I have to take care of her by myself... If in Thailand, we have grandma, grandpa ...But if you live here, everything you have to do it by yourself.”* (Thai woman at KOMVUX).

Most migrant women lose the traditional network of social support that they had in their home country (Aliefendioglu, 2004, ed. in Faist, & Özveren, 2004). The answer from the interviewee indicates in Sweden Thai women may lose the status associated with

being a member of an extended family as well as childcare support within this family.

But, according to in-depth interviews with Thai women, children have a quite positive impact on their lives. Their importance for the motivation for language study and integration into society is significant. A Thai woman at KOMVUX said "*I was quite lazy at that time but I changed my mind after I got pregnant. "What I'm doing now?"*" "*"Oh my child is going to come, so it's for my child's future..."*" if *I don't rush myself to learn Swedish here I can't get the job and work for my son...*" For example, when the child start going to a daycare center, they somehow need to speak Swedish and communicate with other mothers. This is also a way to gain the strength of weak ties because, according to Lin (2001), such parental networks provide opportunities to contact actors with valued resources and acquire additional resources, for example, through children's schools. In turn, what expected here is that Thai women will feel more settled if their children are together with them than if they are not.

### **Thai temple and the role of religious networks**

Settlement and integration processes are influenced by kin and friendship ties; village based networks and customs such as festivals, membership in ethnic association and shared cultural and ethnic origins (Boyd, 1989). These personal networks provide not only fundamental livelihood such as food and shelter, but also job information and contacts, information on health care and social services, recreation and emotional support.

According to Cooper & Cooper (1990), the great majority of Thai people, around 94%, are devout Buddhist. As a philosophy, Buddhist has played a profound role in shaping the character of Thais and particularly their reactions to events (Cooper& Cooper, 1990, cited in Thanawat, 2005). My findings from in-depth interviews as well as observations in a Thai Temple indicate that religion is a major factor in the formation of social networks for Thai women. Most of them know about the Thai temple in Eslöv and a few times every year when the Thai temple has traditional events, they visit there for religious gathering. Thus I find "religious capital" meaning religious networks might be associated with positive outcomes particularly around enhancing Thai women's

well-being. When I asked the question “How does the Thai temple help you?” one Thai woman answered:

*“For example if you have some kind of trouble in your life or anything, like you are thinking too much and then the temple will make you calm down. It’s like, you believe something that you are your own good comer (Thai Buddhist word). You think like “Oh I did something wrong, I did something bad” but if you pray Buddha and asking him, like, by asking him makes you like strong, self-confident, “I can make it” like this and put it inside of you.”* (Thai woman at Thai temple)

However because of the fact that the religious organization was not linked to other community organizations<sup>23</sup>, it could not provide “bridging social capital” that could connect women to resources that improve access to, for example, employment.

### **Trust, trustworthiness, and the impact of gossip**

Without a high degree of trustworthiness among the member of the group, the institution could not exist (Coleman, 1988 cited in Burt, 2006, ed. in Lin et al, 2006). Three Thai women participants mentioned about the impact of gossip. One told that because of the heavy gossip among Thai women in language school, she is not willingly to take part in Thai ethnic groups.

*“...sometimes they gossip a lot. So it’s better not to be a friend, with everyone. Sometimes it’s too much, they gossip a lot. I don’t like it. I have girl friends. I have a friend from Taiwan, China, Japan...but Thai friends, I have Thai friends but not from here.”* (Thai woman at KOMVUX)

On the other hand, two of them informed me that there used to be Thai community group in the Skåne region (the southern part of Sweden) but that it no longer exists because of the heavily gossiping among them. It implies that gossip created a high degree of “not-trust” which harmed to their networks. This example suggests that

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<sup>23</sup> The information refers to my field visit at Thai temple in Eslöv.

trustworthiness among Thai women is also important elements to build their social networks as well as social capital.

## 6. Discussion

In order to discuss the results which were presented in the previous section, three of my research questions will be examined again. It is not the purpose to make statistical generalization from the findings provided within the study. The research was conducted based on the qualitative study which had a small number of interviews and participants, thus there was no concerns towards generalization. Nevertheless, I intend to compare the results from my interviews with the results from other previous research in order to expand the validity of the findings provided by the respondents.

- What is the structure and types of organizational networks and social supports available for Thai women in Sweden?

The result showed that community and women's organizations in southern Sweden build a diverse range of networks and also provide supports and services for immigrant women. My analysis of the qualitative data led me to sort out two main categories in the relation to the notion of weak ties: "macro-level" social and institutional networks (language and training course, governmental and municipality (Kommun) services, i.e., job search and health care), and "micro-level" social networks (community and women's organizations, member of Thai temple, acquaintances). I will start discussing macro-level networks, and the discussion for micro-level networks will be discussed along with the third research question.

Language and other courses taken by immigrant women seem to be most effective networks for Thai women and illustrate the concept of weak ties well. All Thai women who I interviewed are taking language or training courses and this enable them to enter into contact with outside of family networks. Moreover those networks enable Thai

women to establish closed friendships with other Thai women as well and even, in the frequent case they made friends who are beyond co-ethnic groups.

Most of Thai women saw learning and mastering language is a key tool in the process of integration into Swedish society. Language teachers at KOMVUX and SFI are sometimes key navigators for immigrant women who provide comprehensive information and resources such as health care and employment etc that are useful for them in various situations. For example, I came across a case where a KOMVUX teacher helped to give alternative advice for Thai woman who wanted to open new Thai food restaurant in Eslöv.

Among Thai women participants, contact with governmental or municipality (Kommun) services sometimes do not really depends on women's own networks. Rather Kommun itself send information (i.e., the list of day care center for their child) direct to Thai women or woman's husband immediately registers her into language school right after she arrived in Sweden. Although this aspect perhaps touch upon Lin's (2001) argument on 'the strength of weak ties' in preceding chapter, in any case, usually these enable them to gain basic language and integration classes (KOMVUX and SFI), then the language school teachers refer women to, for example, the governmental job agency (Arbetsförleningen) if they need to find a job, or if they need some health care information, the teachers also introduce women to the municipality health care center (Vårdcentralen) in class, while non-profit organization, such as Studie främjandet Mittskåne, involving with women's group discussion within language school and give them information about reproductive health as well. Here the picture of their networks is quite complicated. In such structure, the greater social capital is available and importantly it may be crucial for immigrant's integration, as Giusta et al (2006) stated that "a successful process of integration will coincide with increased social networks which overlap with resource providers' networks, and an increased number of links with government institutions." (p. 823)

Similarly, community and women's organization (NGOs and NPOs) are complex cases in the relation to the notion of weak ties. Immigrant women are usually introduced to

those organizations through strong ties; some interviewees call it “mouth to mouth” (field notes) strategy, then these organizations might in turn serve as “gateway” (Rose et al, 2005) towards Swedish society because they have connection with government institutions, namely Kommun (municipality). As Massey (1998) first identified migrant networks as a source of social capital, such connections is conceptualized social or institutional capital that help immigrant women in the process of integration as well as help them less isolated and more self-confident.

However, findings from the organizational interviews revealed the extreme difficulty organizations face operating without core funding and program instability. Even they have certain program that provide women with places and networks, but without funding in some cases just closed down at some point. Therefore organizations also have to work on a lot of paper work in order to receive enough funding from the government for next year. And they mentioned that those paper works take certain amount of time with few staffs. As a result, they do not really expand their support networks efficiency because of time consuming dilemma.

- How do the organizational networks facilitate and enhance Thai women's well-being and social integration?

Despite sharing the same goals (i.e. prevent women from domestic violence or encourage them into Swedish labor market), basically each of women's organizations are at different network locations that I already discussed before, macro-level (governmental, i.e. Kriscentrum) and micro-level (non-profit organizations i.e. Kvinnoujouren and ATIM). However, I was able to glance over some efforts of women's organizations through these interviews with representatives during my field studies. The inter-connected organization's networks work very well in terms of the flow of new ideas and information. For example, women's emergency organizations such as Kivinnojouren, ATIM and Kriscentrum share their information through annual meetings, seminars and publications etc and they also refer their clients, mostly immigrant women, to more specialized services depends on the women's needs.

According to Lin (2001), why embedded resources in social networks i.e. social capital enhance the outcome of actions because the flow of information is facilitated. Thus their attempt of sharing information and networking provide social capital that Thai women can gain access to and use for their security and well-being.

Workers such as family counselors and social workers from women's community organizations turned out to be very important 'advocate' for women at a complex and difficult moment in their life. Two of organizational representatives expressed the current organization support systems including legislations and formal governmental supports are a "jungle" where all information and resources are interwoven. Thus the immigrant women sometimes need a "guide" in order to find the right way to go. Furthermore, the findings showed that these resource people are often appreciated not only for their administrative support (i.e. filling a form, contact with police) but also for their emotional support and companionships.

In short, within women's organizations networks, there is a growing linkage among them and some Thai women take advantages from their weak ties. Granovetter (1973, cited in Lin, 2001) argued that if individuals need different information, then they may be more likely to find it in the different social circles than their own. To reach another social circle, according to Granovetter (1973), individual would need to find ties-*bridges*- that link the different two circles. Therefore, usually weak ties serve as bridges between networks because strong ties such as family members are thought to be connected to the same networks. On the other hand, Burt (1992) contends that focusing on the strength of a bridge misses the point which is the *hole* between networks. Burt (1992) in his theory of the 'structure hole', defined "the hole is a buffer...[a]s a result of the hole between them, the two contacts provide network benefits that are in some degree additive rather than overlapping" (p. 18).

Surprisingly, none of my Thai respondents knows about 2 of organizations in Lund and Malmö where they are especially active on enhancing women's participation in the Swedish labour market, although most of them are willing to gain certain skilled job. Among Thai women, as the previous interview analysis suggested, it seems only

unskilled information circulated; this in turn they need expanded networks in order to gain the job information which exists the outside of their networks. Because once a hole is bridged, information flows and opportunities increase (Sanders et al, 2002), what Thai women's network need might be *the bridge* between individuals and organizations. Yet it seems not so many potential factors works as a bridge for them.

- How do Thai women perceive the role of social networks in the relation with their process of settlement and integration?

Having Swedish husband is the great advantages for most Thai women in the first settlement period, because her husband provides fundamental information and knowledge, such as how to apply for language school or where is the hospital to go etc. They often described their husband as the primary source of getting into the Swedish society. As it was identified in the previous section about social capital, Lin (2001) suggests that women have different access to social capital due to their advantaged or disadvantaged structural positions. These notions in turn give attention to inequality of social capital among women. In the case of Thai women, extent to which Thai women's networks can be extended is also depends on husband. For example, being together with Swedish-born men means eventually their husband's friends become their common friends, and perhaps those friends are related to professional fields as well.

In my sample Thai women have contacts with neighbors<sup>24</sup>, friends, and husband/boyfriend of friends or members of Thai temple, all of which constitute their micro-level social capital. Especially Thai temple plays important role for Thai women not only to meet new friends and share information, but also assure their self-esteem and confident. However Giusta et al. (2006) argue that these networks can be small or large, or at sometimes privileged group may shut other groups out from accessing their intermediaries, therefore, horizontal and vertical links are also important to micro-level social capital.

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<sup>24</sup> However some Thai women have no contact with neighborhoods (field notes).

Yet the findings showed that husband locate Thai women at advantaged network positions, especially in terms of getting a job, strong ties with husband and same ethnic friends might limit the opportunity. The findings show that none of Thai women participants were involved in labor market or even any volunteer work as a practicum at the moment of interview. But all of them mentioned about the desire for future job and some of them actually mentioned the importance of networks in order to find a job. Apart from my Thai interviewees, however, many Thai women work outside of the home, usually very early in the morning before they go to school (interview from KOMVUX teacher). They have to do it sometimes because they are not refugee and came to Sweden for the reason of marriage, meaning that they cannot get the subsidies from the government. Mostly they found those jobs through friends and mostly these jobs are low-skilled jobs (i.e., cleaning and dishwashers), which often did not correspond to the Thai women's qualification or work experience in Thailand.

Not surprisingly those who closed someone who has same ethnicity, social and educational background tend to circulate similar information about job. In the case of Thai women the flow of unqualified job information is spreading among them. On the other hand, those who are looking for opportunities regarding to their professional or skilled field is limited.

Friese's (1995, cited in Kofman, 1999) rare case studies of the deskilled of European women, in the case of Polish women in Germany, reveal the several difficulties they face in retraining and regaining a professional occupation. It may suggest that the same "brain waste" perhaps happened to Thai women as well. Nonetheless, since most of Thai women had working experiences before in their home country, they saw employment as a key element that develops their relationships with host society as well as their self-esteem.

In Lunds Kvinnoforum, there are several Iraqi women working as a practicum and they know that it would be useful for their future career (field notes). For example, in Canada, according to George & Chaze (2009), volunteering and joining co-op programs benefited the newcomers because the activities provided work experience and an

understanding of the Canadian workplace environment. In addition, volunteer work provided opportunities to develop and improve skills for future work, to gain access to persons who could then act as referrals for future jobs, and sometimes to obtain employment within the organization where the participant was volunteering (Giusta & Kambhampati, 2006). Such micro-level networks are also other social capital that Thai women shall access because they provide women's ability to secure benefits as a result of membership in social networks or other social structures.

Other aspects that were mentioned by Thai women participants in the relation with involving in the Swedish labor market may contribute to the development of a sense of belonging and to overcoming the fear of differences. For one of Thai interviewees, it is important to possess her own job because she will not feel 'integrated' into Swedish society until she will be employed, in turn she also mentioned that working in the Swedish labor market give her such feeling that she will be more integrated so that confident to get more Swedish friends through her future occupational place. As Coleman (1998) conceptualized social capital is understood as the benefit emerged from relationship among persons, such networks related to employment as a source of social capital may help women to feel connected to their host society and therefore to feel more integrated.

The issues of pregnancy and reproductive health are interesting contradictions to discuss more details: while two of organizations seemingly concern about Thai women's having children, the interviewed women themselves appear to see this as enriching and helping to build up networks. Munch at el. (1997, cited in Lin, 2000) found that child rearing as a family activity placed men and women in different structural positions with respect to flow of information and other resources in social networks. The result showed that having a child had no statistically significant effect on men's network size, but had a significantly negative effect on women (*ibid*). In particular, women whose youngest children were aged 3-4 had significantly smaller networks than their counterparts with adult children. Thus, the effect of child rearing on network is significant and gendered. In this sense, having children might affect on creating Thai women's social networks negatively as some organizations mentioned about. However in terms of empowerment perspective, I argue that this is rather women's right of choice in many ways because it

might be Thai women's important process of empowerment that it determines the freedom to act on their fertility preferences. It seems Thai women gained their own power and motivations through having children and children related networks implying their alternative "gateway" towards Swedish society.

The result also showed that social trust has significant impact on the operation of Thai women's network. To better understand the dynamics of migration networks, as Boyd (1989) emphasized two questions require to answer, first why and when do personal networks fail to emerge and, second, under what conditions do networks weaken and/or disappear. In the Thai women case, an earful of gossip among them discouraged individual to make friends, even more the Thai community group actually disappeared. As a consequence, the evidence indicated that the lost of trust have negative effects on the sustainable social networks. However it should be more discussed that the cases of the role of "religious networks" might strengthen Thai women's strong ties and further over come such negative impacts. Because of their strong faith of Buddhism, they feel more united with other Thai people and they also enrich their empowerment though connecting with each other by means of believing in common religious. As preceding empirical result showed that Thai community group without religious purpose has become extinct. On the other hand, the religious based community group continues to exist although the type of gathering is similar and its same members. Therefore the religious networks might be an alternative solution for the issues of impact of gossip and building social trust among Thai women. Followed by Rothstein's suggestion, identified in the preceding sections of research context, the notion of social trust is important characteristic of Thai women's networking and it is a vital asset for social capital. This aspect also pays considerable attention in a way which people relate to each other and how people construct networks.

## **7. Summary**

The role of “weak ties” increasingly recognized as a source for settlement and integration in international migration. Compared to social networks consisting of “strong ties” with family and close friends, weak ties with acquaintances and organizations are more likely to facilitate the flow of information or as bridges to other social circle or resource which is taken away from the individual network of strong ties. In this regard, access to weak ties may become a key element in social integration process of immigrant.

Despite the remarkable increasing of female migration, the migration studies focused on immigrant women are still understudied. Thai women in Sweden are frequently described as “victim” of social problems such as domestic violence and trafficking rather than women who seek to achieve better economic status and well-being. Therefore, such social networks and weak ties approaches tend to reveal the potential of those women to make them settled and feel confident living in the new country.

The study examined the associational and organization networks within immigrant women community in southern Sweden, Malmö, Lund and Eslöv by focusing on how such networks facilitate Thai women’s integration as well as their well-being.

The study has set out to accomplish the following three research questions:

- Examine the structure and types of organizational networks within immigrant women’s community in southern Sweden
- Examine how do organizational networks facilitate Thai women’s well-being and integration
- Examine Thai women’s perception of the role of social and organizational networks in relation to their process of settlement and integration

Using a constructivist approach, the following methods were used to explore the research objectives: key informant interviews with representatives from 9

community-level and women's organizations in the Skåne region, a semi-structured interviews with 8 Thai women who live in the same study field including one focus group discussion, and 2 observations at one women's organizations and one Thai temple. The concept of social capital is the main theoretical framework which enables the researcher to explore the two significance of the 'structural' features of the social networks and the 'resources' embedded in the networks (Lin et al, 2006).

The findings from the interviews with representatives of each organization indicated that there are two levels of networks: macro and micro level. And these possess different social capital respectively depends on their networks locations. Institutional and governmental networks (macro level) connect with authority and in their networks, they can provide security and advocate to immigrant women. On the other hand, although language schools, community and women's organizational networks have limitations to enhance women's economic situations in line with e.g. gaining skilled jobs, they considerably help them to provide knowledge and information about Swedish society, emotional supports and companionships.

For Thai women, social networks with strong ties (husband and same ethnic friends) are fundamental resources in the first period of settlement. However in terms of gaining employment, the strong ties based networks provide job opportunities but often restricted to low-skilled jobs.

Thai women in the study turn to be different from what have been written in the Swedish newspapers. Most Thai women are highly motivated to study language and seek better jobs. But the findings also showed that some Thai women have been struggled with multiple tasks such as managing study, housework, and mostly working in the non-skilled job place. These associational and organizational networks seem not to connect efficient with Thai women especially when they try to move from low-skilled jobs to the jobs related to their educational background and skills. Further researches on the importance of employment, both as the outcome of access to and use of the associational and organizational networks for Thai women are suggested.

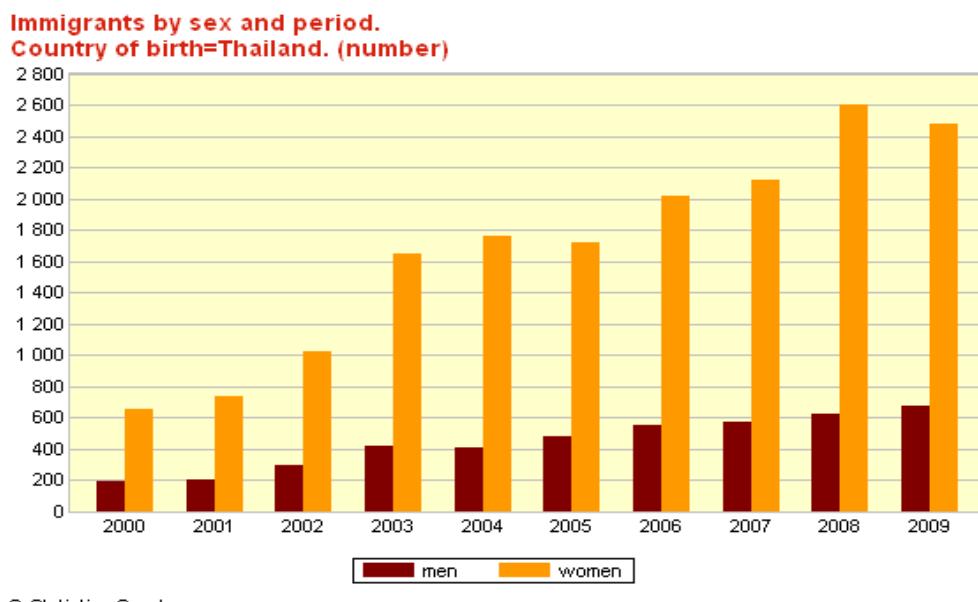
## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Appendix A: The articles about Thai women in Swedish newspaper

Newspaper	Dates	Titles
Aftonbladet	14 August, 1996	Hon har Sveriges tuffaste chefsjobb
Dagens Nyheter	28 April, 1998	Med charterflyg till sexhandeln
Dagens Nyheter	13 May, 1998	Fördomarna drabbar alla Thailändskor
Dagens Nyheter	7 June, 1998	Nu börjar hennes nys Svenska liv
Goteborgs-Posten	24 May, 2002	Bril Svensk för att få bå i Danmark
Ostersunds-Posten	19 June, 2004	Många fördomar om män med Thailändska kvinnor
SvD	14 Februari, 2010	Kärlek och fördomarna förenar
SvD	11 Februari, 2010	Allt fler thaikändskor söker nytt liv i Sverige

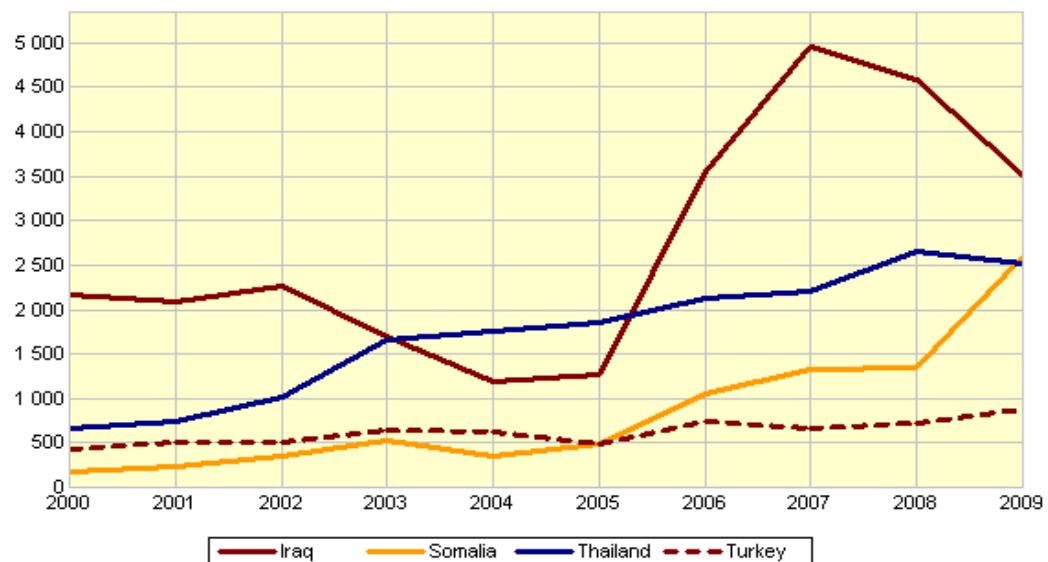
### 8.2 Appendix B: Immigrant population graphs

(Figure, 1)



(Figure, 2)

**Immigrants by country of emi-/immigration, period.  
Sex=women. (number)**



© Statistics Sweden

(Figure, 3)

**Immigrants by sex and period.  
Region=1280 Malmö, Age=total. (number)**



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### 8.3 Appendix C: A list of organizations (Malmö, Lund and Eslöv)

Organizations	Location	Participant's name	Classification
Lunds Kvinnoforum**	Lund	AKRAM	Non-profit organization (NPO)
Malmö Kvinnojouren**	Malmö	Christin	NPOs (members of SKR, see below)
Lund Kvinnojouren*	Lund		
ATIM Women'sOrganization**	Malmö	Nikan	NPO providing shelter for women
Studie främjandet Mittskåne**	Lund	Thigneh	The study association for adult education
Tänk om! *	Malmö		Member of SKR
FemCenter *	Malmö		Member of SKR
Internationella Kvinnoföringenen *	Malmö	anonymous	Non-profit organization for women's job support
Terrafem*	Malmö		Member of SKR
Kriscentrum för väldtsutsatta kvinnor**	Malmö	Maj-Britt	Crises center for battered women and their children run by the City of Malmö
Red Cross Malmö*	Malmö		International organization
Lunds KOMVUX**	Lund	Tommy	Municipality school for Adult education
IVIK**	Lund	Karin	School program for young student
Arbetsförmedlingen*	Lund		Employment agency
Vårdcentralen	Lund		Health care center
Wat Sanghabaramee Temple**	Eslöv	Anna	Thai temple, ethnical association
Thai embassy in Stockholm*	Stockholm	Thanawat	The embassy
Sveriges Kvinnor och Tjejerors Riksförbund	Sweden		The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young women's Empowerment Centers (SKR)

ROKS: Riksorganisationen för kvinnojouren och tjejjourer i Sverige:	Sweden		The national organization for women's shelter and young women's shelter in Sweden
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\*The request for interview was sent

\*\* The interview was conducted

## 8.4 Appendix D: Interview guide (Organizations)

### 1. Organizational Characteristics

What is the name of organization?

What type of organization?

Who is the membership of organization? ( i.e., ethnic groups, women, seniors, youth)

How many of staff?

### 2. Origins of the Organizations

How was your organization created?

What kind of activities has it been involved?

What is the main purpose of your organization today?

### 3. Membership of Service Users (Clients)

Can you tell me about the people involved in your organization?

How do they become involved?

Are Thai women in the community involved?

If not, why are Thai women in the community not involved?

Could you explain how this organization is important for Thai women (or immigrant women) ?

### 4. Organizational Capacity

Apart from your main services, how would you also provide information and supports of employment and health care for Thai women (immigrant women)?

Could you tell me how do you perceive their very diverse cultural and religious differences when you meet your service user/clients?

### 5. Inter-Organizational Linkages

How would you characterize your organization's relationship with other community

organizations?

When do you feel the need to establish collaborations/links with them?

Do you have links with organizations outside the community? With which ones?

#### 6. Linkages with Government

Could you describe your relationship with the government?

Have you has experience in trying to get government assistant?

Is your organization linked to any government program?

Which government program(s) is your organization involved with?

Do you feel sufficiently informed about government programs and activities?

### **8.5 Appendix E: Interview guide (In-depth interviews with Thai women)**

#### 1. Ice Breaking Questions

How long have you stayed in Sweden?

How old are you?

How many years of education do you have?

What made you decide to come to Sweden?

In general, how has living in Sweden been for you?

#### 2. Initial Contacts in the Community and Creating Friendships

When you first arrived in Sweden, did you have someone who supported you?

Do you have any children? How did you find school for your children?

How did you learn to do things in the community such as shopping, taking the bus, etc?

Who were the important people in helping you settle in Sweden?

What kinds of relationships did you have with them?

#### 3. Post settlement and Community Social Capital

Can you tell me about the friendships (relationships, ties) you have developed with your neighbors and other members of the community?

Do you know what kind of services, voluntary organization and facilitates you have in your community?

What kind of information/informal organizations do you rely on to work for the betterment of yourself and your family? Tell me in details what these things are.

#### **4. Economy and Status**

If you are working now, could you please briefly describe about your working place? (Will say if they don't have one.)

What kind of job did you perform in your home country?

What do you think about women working outside the home?\*

Are there certain kinds of work that you consider better for women?\*

How do you balance working outside the home and taking care of your family?\*

\*If the interviewee does not have a job, focus on the different questions marked with an asterisk (\*).

#### **5. Cultural capital**

What are some things from your cultural background that helped you adjust to life in Sweden?

In your daily life, how do you feel about communication with Swedish?

(If you have difficulties to use Swedish, how you could change the situation?

-How is KOMVUX?)

Can you describe to me your thoughts and feeling about moving to Sweden and trying to become part of this country? (Why do you feel this way?)

#### **6. Social Capital, Health and Well-Being**

How is your health?

What would make you feel harder/easier to stay well?

What would make you feel more settled?

What are your experiences with stress, have you ever experienced stress? (When?)

Do you have someone who listens about your anxiety and stress?

If yes, who? In which aspect, does the person support you?

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