

Air Quality Laws and Psychiatry: A Case of Thai Clean Air Bills

Assoc.Prof. Chonnakarn Jatchavala M.D., MSc.¹, Asst.Prof. Krisdakorn Wongwuthikun, Ph.D²

¹Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand

² Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Law, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, Thailand

Air pollution has a profound impact on physical health, contributing to various respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and even premature death. Vulnerable groups, including children and the elderly, are particularly at risk. However, the effects of air pollution on mental health are often overlooked. Research indicates that exposure to polluted air can elevate the risk of anxiety, depression, and cognitive decline, though specific studies in Thailand are still lacking. While the link between environmental conditions and mental well-being is gaining recognition, many people remain unaware of how significantly clean air affects overall health.

Additionally, framing clean air as a human right underscores the ethical responsibility to address air pollution. Climate change intensifies these challenges, presenting a global issue that affects regions differently. Some areas face severe pollution, while others may successfully implement effective solutions.

Various air quality laws exist worldwide, such as the Clean Air Act (CAA) in the United States, which regulates air emissions from both stationary and mobile sources to safeguard public health and the environment. Similar legislation can be found in other countries, such as the European Union's Ambient Air Quality Directive, Canada's Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and India's Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act. Recognizing the dual impact of air pollution on physical and mental health is essential, highlighting the need for immediate action and collaborative efforts to address this urgent issue worldwide.

In Thailand, the Clean Air Bill has been under parliamentary consideration for several years, but it has faced obstacles due to capitalist and political interests. Currently, the draft of the Thai Clean Air Act is being discussed by the drafting committee in parliament. However, as far as is known, the draft does not include provisions addressing the mental health impacts of air pollution. This omission is significant, as a crucial aspect missing in the support for this bill is the mental health impact of air pollution. Further research in Thailand is necessary to draw attention from both the government and civil society to this issue. This webinar will feature discussions between Thai psychiatric practitioners and legal academics to emphasize the mental health consequences of poor air quality, advocating for integrated health and environmental policies, especially in relation to the Thai Clean Air Act.