



ADVERSITIES AND VICTIMIZATION AMONG GROWN-UP STREET CHILDREN IN QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the adversities faced by adult street dwellers who grew up on the streets in Quezon City, Philippines. Employing a narrative research design, the life stories of two participants, who were both victims and offenders, were collected. The Socio-Ecological Model of Resilience was used to understand how street children navigate adversities and victimization throughout their lives. The findings reveal the vulnerability and fragility of the lives of street-dwelling children and their families, trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for escape. The narratives shed light on the structural injustice and government neglect experienced by the poorest of the poor in the Philippines. Despite these challenges, the participants show resilience through the support of significant adults, early involvement in child work to survive, and realizing the consequences of their delinquent actions. Through this research process, the participants found a voice, enabling them to move from a position of vulnerability to agency and empowerment. The study highlights the importance of giving marginalized populations a platform to express their experiences and concerns. By understanding the pathways leading to adaptive outcomes in the context of street adversities, society can shift towards a more agentic view of street-dwelling children. Future studies are recommended to include a more representative sample of street-dwelling adults in Quezon City and explore adversities processes among different socio-economic groups in the Philippines. A mixed-method approach could provide a comprehensive understanding of resilience among marginalized populations. These findings can inform interventions to address the unique needs and challenges faced by street-dwelling children, helping to create a more supportive and inclusive society.



KEYWORDS: *adversities, adult street dwellers, victims and offenders, vulnerability*

INTRODUCTION

Victims of crime were considered to be forgotten in the criminal justice system. Living in the streets, children are exposed to high risks and they are often abused, exploited, and at the same time an offender (Liborio and Ungar 2010).

Little is known about the developmental processes involved in the lives of children who grew up in the streets and have remained street dwellers in adulthood. Four years ago an estimated 1,090,000 children lived on the street throughout the Philippines (De Guzman, 2015), while about 768,000 of them are considered highly visible street children, spending at least 8 hours a day on the street engaging in activities such as begging, peddling, sleeping, petty crimes and committing the status offense (De Guzman, 2015).

Quezon City had the highest number of highly visible street children among all cities in the Philippines with an estimate of 290,000 (DSWD 2017). These numbers of street children come into conflict with the laws in many ways. Some are trafficked into involvement in illegal activities, from bag snatching and petty theft to drug or weapons smuggling in exchange for their life (Bret & De los Santos 2012).

Children suffer the most when society fails to fulfill its social contract towards the poor (Morrison, Nikolajski, Borrero, & Zickmund, 2014). Lack of economic opportunities may pressure children of poor families in the urban centers to work and live on the streets to supplement family income (Sta Maria, 2010). Furthermore, economic hardship may lead to increased family violence, and physical and emotional abuse at home may in turn push children to migrate to the streets (Hule & Conticni, 2007; Mello et al 2014).

Yet, street children are frequently seen with hostility by society and are either perceived as defiant, deceitful, delinquent, and anti-social or as helpless victims (Roux and Smith 2012). Street children steal food, or clothes for themselves and are beaten by shopkeepers or adults, reinforcing the label of street children as criminals (Tangcangco, 2017).



However, understanding the pathways that lead to adaptive outcomes in the context of adversities of the streets may usher in a paradigm shift towards a more agentic view of street-dwelling children.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Socio Ecological Model of resilience is used in the study to explain resilience among street children, until they're grown-up and become adults (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013;). Accordingly, resilience during adversities is understood as a process that is negotiated discursively between the individual child and his or her ecological environment. Both internal and external resources that are available to the child contribute to the development of resilience, whereas the availability of resources in the child's context is more crucial than the individual characteristics of the child (Ungar, 2013).

Previous research in this context predominantly focused on the cultural aspect and on individuals who have not experienced the adversities of extreme poverty and living in the streets(Kolar, 2011). A current fourth wave of resilience research is taking cultural differences and similarities into account, while different resources and pathways in accessing these resources may have differential impacts across different cultures(Banaag, 2016; Ungar, 2016).

Even though there are previous studies that marginalized populations employ atypical strategies during adversities (Martinez & Doestro, 2014), the perception of children or youth on their own resilience, as well as their views and experiences of the processes that lead to bouncing back across different cultures, has yet been given attention. This becomes particularly true in the Philippine context, and among more vulnerable populations that are not generally perceived as resilient (Ungar, 2016).

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to explore adversities processes among adult street dwellers who grew up on the streets. Understanding such processes of victimization among growing-up street children across their life trajectories may inform and guide further intervention. In that way, the study aimed to contribute to a shift in the societal views of street-dwelling children by making their voices heard and by exposing the injustice they experience. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following research questions: How do the grown-up street dwellers describe their adversity and victimization experiences in the streets? What are the themes and sub themes that emerged from the adversity processes, and victimization experiences of the adult street dweller that grew up on the streets?

LIMITATIONS

A very limited number of participants provided an in-depth understanding of the individual* experience and idiosyncratic explanations of the processes involved (Theron, 2015). The data collected in this study relies on retrospective narratives of the participants and may therefore be distorted by their memory, selection, and interpretation. The facts presented here are constructed in the process of conducting the narrative interviews. Due to the limited number of participants, conclusions from this study cannot be generalized beyond the research participants situated in their specific socio-cultural context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a case study narrative research design in order to collect two life stories of adult street dwellers who grew up on the streets, focusing their knowledge on their being both a victim and an offender. Narrative research is based on the assumption



that knowledge has to be obtained and thus, follows a certain structure (Czarniawska, 2004). Narratives are especially useful to shed light on the meaning-making process of individuals throughout their life course because people organize their interpretations of reality in the form of narratives (Murray & Sergeant, 2012). A new direction in resilience over victimization and adversities among indigenous and marginalized groups has been employing life narratives in the exploration of life course pathways (Allen et al, 2014). Likewise, a narrative approach was meaningful for the predominantly oral, collectivistic, and relational culture of the urban poor in the Philippines, Taking into account that most street dwellers have not enjoyed formal education.

The informants

The cases studied included two adult street dwellers, aged 34 and 35 years, one male and one female, who grew up in the streets as children of street families in Quezon City, Philippines. They were purposively sampled according to the criterion being considered. The criterion was: (1) behavior domain: not involved in illegal activities (drugs, prostitution, alcohol, gambling, crimes); (2) victimization domain: not a victim of any crime, petty crime, light, less serious, and serious offense); (3) employability domain: regular and honest source of income (regularly pursues legal livelihood, does not involve own children); (4) social domain: healthy family functioning and relationship (no violence or abuse in the family, children attends school); (5) personal characteristics domain: no symptoms of insanity.

Data gathering and treatment

The purpose and nature of the study were explained to the informants and participants, and written informed consent was obtained from them. Prior to the interviews, the researcher spent 2 hours with the family of each participant at their location on Sundays for two months, asking informal questions and taking field notes, observing their lives and interactions. Subsequently, initial and follow-up narrative interviews were conducted with both participants at their dwelling places on the street. The initial interviews lasted between 50-60 minutes, the follow-up interviews were between 30-40



minutes. The initial interview primarily focused on the life narratives of the participants by asking open non-leading questions. During the elicitation of the narratives, the researcher took the role of an active listener, not interrupting the narratives. During subsequent interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the initial data analysis, in order to explore the themes emerging in more depth. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were later used in the public text and quotations were translated from Tagalog.

The data analysis was based on a naturalistic approach to narrative research employing the thematic model, thus focusing on what the participants experienced; how they coped; and what their life experiences mean to them (Riessman, 2008). After the initial interviews, the narratives of the participants were re-storied by the researcher into a chronological sequence using the original words of the participants (Allen et al, 2014). The emerging themes and sub-themes were then identified. The initial themes were then verified with the participants before the follow-up interview and overwhelming agreement was found. From the initial themes, follow-up questions were formulated.

The data from the follow-up interviews were included in the chronological stories. A second round of thematic analysis yielded themes, paying attention to differences and similarities of the experiences of victimization and resilience over adversities of the two participants. The output of the second phase of analysis was again verified with the participants in order to establish the trustworthiness of the results.

Ethical And Legal Considerations

Adherence to ethics gives proper direction and fundamental ways to live an upright life in the criminology profession and all the services it covers. Hence, it is imperative for this research to pass ethical and legal considerations for the protection of both the informants-participants and the researcher.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Cubao, in Quezon City, Philippines where the study was conducted, is a melting pot of different religions and cultures. A catholic church represents the Roman Catholic population, to which the two participants belong. The city is a commercial district, heavily congested. The poorest families occupy the waterways (esteros), slum areas, and vacant spaces under the bridges, beside buildings, and along sidewalks. Due to severe poverty, drug abuse, petty crimes, and other crimes are rampant in the areas.

Kurdapya, the first participant, lives with her family in an estuary(ester), together with seven other families. She is 35 years old, widowed, and with only two children aged 11 and 12 years. Kurdapya works as a dishwasher in a small canteen and also sells tobacco to passing jeepneys, earning 110 -130 pesos a day. Kurdapya's parents, originally from the Visayas region came to Cubao, Quezon City in their adolescent age to look for work but ended up living in the estuaries. Kurdapya is the eldest of eight siblings.

Amboy, 34 years old and married, is the second participant. He lives with his family in a makeshift tent under a bridge. Since it is a makeshift tent, they only stay there during night time to sleep. The family spends its days on the streets. Amboy has three children ages 9-13 years. He is working as a barker of passengers in a jeep/bus loading and unloading area. He earns 100-110 pesos a day with that, then from 5:00 pm onwards every day he drives his "kuliglig," a bicycle with a sidecar. He earns 210-250 pesos a day. Her wife sells tobacco and candies on the sidewalk and earns 50-55 pesos a day.

Non-Normative Adversity

Children in poverty cannot, per se, be considered a high-risk population even though they are potentially exposed to higher risks than the other populations (Brick, 2015). The narratives of the participants provide evidence for the accumulation of adversity beyond poverty, which can be considered non-normative. (Wartenweiler, 2017



Both participants started their narratives on a positive note: there was a time when life was okay. “I also experienced a good life with my parents” (Kurdapya, Interviewed October 10, 2022). “When we were young, though life was hard, we were brought up well by our mother” (Amboy, Interviewed October 26, 2022). But circumstances changed and through the sudden death of a parent, they ended up in severe poverty: “Our mother left us, so I became a mother of seven siblings, that's why life became so very difficult” (Kurdapya). “Life then was very difficult...we experienced eating only once a day with only rice and salt, and sometimes, we only ate every other day” (Amboy).

Kurdapya's father was shot to death when she was only eleven years old because of drug dealings. Then her mother left them and ended up in jail for drug dealings. “Being the eldest of eight siblings, I experienced becoming a paid prostitute at a young age to feed my sisters and brothers.” (Kurdapya)

Amboy's mother died of tuberculosis when he was ten years old. That was then the greatest challenge he had experienced: “It was so difficult to accept that she was gone, I wondered how we could survive” (Amboy). His father has been taking drugs ever since he could remember. He did not take responsibility for his family since her mother's death. Due to the early loss of their parents, both participants were left on the street to fend for themselves and their siblings. “We didn't have a place to stay..My siblings slept wherever we were, on the street, under bridges, anywhere” (Kurdapya).

Both participants started working at a young age. Kurdapya began to work immediately after her father died. She sold plastic bags at the market, cleaned windshields of cars, dishwashed, and became an errand girl for everyone. She did everything she could but the earnings were not enough to feed eight mouths. So she began running drugs, bag snatching, theft, prostitution, and other illegal activities that, in her mind, were the easy ways to earn an income. She was jailed because of illegal activities but was released after a month because she was still 14 years old at that time, a minor. Amboy began to work after he dropped out of school, helping out in canteens, slaughtering chickens, collecting garbage, helping in a construction site, cleaning canals, and others. Both participants



dropped out of school early. Amboy did not finish Grade 2. Kurdapya didn't finish Grade 4. Due to living on the streets, both participants were exposed to illegal activities at a young age.

In addition to losing their parents early, both participants lost other young siblings. Kurdapya experienced the death of her three young siblings due to sickness and two brothers were jailed Amboy lost two young siblings; he didn't know where they were up to now.

Adversities Themes

The thematic analysis of the narratives yielded six processes of the participant (Table 1). The pathways are presented as separate processes but interact with each other.

"She opened my eyes.. how to survive" (Amboy). Both participants recalled significant adults in their lives who were a source of inspiration for them. For Amboy, it was his mother. He remembers her as hard working and sacrificed much to provide for her family. He gained his survival skills from the example of her mother. "She persevered for us to live...she made all the sacrifices. That's where I focused myself." After his mother died, he began to emulate her: "We strove to live an honest life. Because of our mother, even though we were poor, she brought us up not taking advantage of other people" (Amboy).

By observing other people, Amboy was able to verify the lessons that he had learned. "My mother told me, but sometimes I learned from other people around me that if it's illegal, I should never indulge myself as it would harm me and my children will be left if I am jailed, I don't want them to experience extreme difficulty like what I had experienced. They need a father" (Amboy).

Kurdapya recalled adults and police officers when she was detained. They advised her to stay away from vice and illegal activities and not to emulate other street dwellers. What they said was carved into my mind. That was the biggest help that I ever received, the advice of the police..." Finally, she imparted her learning to her own children. "That's



why I am so happy with the 4Ps of the government, my two children are studying now in school.... It should not have been, because I was still young” (Kurdapya).

Getting involved early in work was not only an adverse experience. It served as a pathway toward adaptation. Both participants got involved in work as children. When they were left in the streets, they were able to utilize their learned work skills to provide for their own needs and their siblings but they also recognized the detrimental effect of child labor and victimization. “Pressed hard in my work... I did my best, agreed to everything, until I learned things, illegal activities that were not appropriate for my age. It should not have been because I am still young” (Kurdapya).

Both participants did not only provide for their own needs but also took on responsibility for their siblings. Kurdapya recalls how her younger siblings gave her the strength to cope with their situation, “They were my inspiration, and because of them, I felt stronger. I had to be courageous for them.” Amboy recalls the same too, he needs to work hard for his siblings. “They are my strength.” (Amboy)

Similarly, now that they have children, they work so hard to get away from illegal activities. Amboy reflected, I poured myself into the needs of my children. We are still in extreme difficulty in life but I am trying my best to send my children to school. Now that we have benefits as 4Ps, I am more determined to let my children finish elementary and high school.

Work provided him with a way of coping, gave him consolation, and helped him to emotionally distance himself from the struggle of poverty. “It was helpful, an important factor... had something to do, of course, I thought of my lost siblings” (Amboy). “This is the biggest lesson I learned,” Kurdapya agreed.

Both participants got involved in illegal activities to survive on the streets. Amboy joined his peers in theft, bag snatching, and others. Unlike Kurdapya, he was not caught, but he realized the consequences that such behavior might have through his personal reflection. “Doing these things, I may be put in jail.” Kurdapya was detained for running drugs



among others at the age of 14, but since she was a minor, she was released after a month. "In jail, I learned to pray hard. I learned to pray the holy rosary. I promised to God that if I am released I will not do it anymore. God answered my prayer" (Kurdapya).

Both participants got married and had a family. However, Kurdapya's husband died early, leaving her two children to support solely.. For Kurdapya, her early partnership was a negative experience from which she derived her learning, while for Amboy, it was a source of strength. Amboy narrated how finding a partner led to a sense of solidarity and mutual support and helped him cope with the challenges of life. In the same way, for Kurdapya, her children were her inspiration to work hard daily and shun illegal activities. "I prayed and prayed" (Kurdapya). Belief in God served as a resource to both participants. Amboy expressed his spirituality, that every day and that during nighttime in their makeshift tent, God will protect them from danger.

The adversities the participants have experienced illustrates the vulnerability and fragility of their lives in particular and the lives of children of street children. Their narratives exemplify how they lack opportunities and basic rights, such as shelter, education, care, and protection of their parents.

Their families seem to be caught in a cycle of poverty with no real chance of escape, as seen in their intergenerational cycle of poverty and street-dwelling reaching from their parents to their children. Even though their participation attributes their poverty to individual and family causes (Tuason, 2015), their narratives exposed the structural injustice and government neglect of the poorest of the poor in the Philippines. For example, parents are put in jail without consideration of the plight of their children. That even when their parents die, no social services are available to them. When they would like to study, which is a basic human right, they are left to fend for themselves. Instead of being upset by the lack of opportunities and victimization as well as neglect by the wider society, the participants are left with a sense of shame about their adversities. It is difficult for them to see beyond their own experience and understand the societal causes of their fate.



Furthermore, their voices remain unheard by the wider public' and then they remain powerless to bring about socio-structural change. (Wartenweiler, 2017) Nevertheless, this study showed how narrative research can give them a voice (Lienbeberg and Theron, 2015), enabling them to move from a position of vulnerability and powerlessness to agency and empowerment. As expressed by one participant, after the interviews, the research process led to personal change by verbalizing their experiences. They felt listened to, were able to process some emotional pain involved, overcome the fear of rejection, and move on from their past. In that sense, the naturalistic approach to narrative research had progressed further into an interactional co-construction of a life story between participants and the researcher (Esin, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

It has been shown how marginalized and educationally deprived, depressed, and underserved people are able to make meaning of their experiences through narratives. The resulting adversity processes are culturally embedded with both similarities and differences in sociocultural contexts. Victimization comes in when a society fails to fulfill its social contract with the poor. A better understanding of these processes furthers a positive view of street-dwelling children with strengths and agency, actively navigating towards resilience.

Recommendations

Further studies can build on these findings, employing a more representative sample for the population of street children who are now adults but still street dwellers in Quezon City. A mixed method approach could help to generalize findings beyond single participants. Future studies may also explore other adversities processes among other socio-economic groups in the Philippines in order to exemplify similarities and differences.



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