

# Understanding Poverty in Samar, Philippines: A Sociological Perspective

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**Abstract:** Poverty in the Philippines remains a challenge. In a recent nationwide self-rated survey of the Social Weather Station, more Filipino households consider themselves poor despite the positive feedback on one of the government's poverty alleviation programs, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore the reasons behind this claim. It explored the experiences of poverty from the lower class status, particularly the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries. The study revealed that norms and practices in the family might contribute to their claim of poverty, such as poor lifestyle choices, difficulty prioritizing needs, lack of parenting style, and extended family. Parents' low education and lack of financial literacy are seen as another factor of poverty. Likewise, religion plays a part in responding to poverty. Participants assert that there is psychological comfort in experiencing poverty because of their religious convictions. Thus, it can be reasoned that sociological factors can affect poverty.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Social Institutions, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), Norms, Practices

## I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty in the Philippines remains a challenge. More Filipino households consider themselves poor. A recent nationwide survey by the Social Weather Station showed that self-rated poverty among Filipinos rose to 46 percent in 2017 from 44 percent in 2016. In a study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (2009), the leading causes of poverty in the country include the following: low to moderate economic growth for the past 40 years; low growth elasticity of poverty reduction; weakness in employment generation, and the quality of jobs generated; failure to fully develop the agriculture sector; high inflation during crisis periods; high levels of population growth; high and persistent levels of inequality (incomes and assets), which dampen the positive impacts of economic expansion; and recurrent shocks and exposure to risks such as economic crisis, conflicts, natural disasters, and "environmental poverty."

The main goal of the government is poverty reduction. Several poverty monitoring is being conducted to provide measures of poverty which have become the basis for poverty reduction plans and programs for national and local governments.

One of the government programs to alleviate poverty is the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program, locally known as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, 4Ps that provides conditional cash grants to the poorest of the poor in the

Philippines. The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program is a national initiative that serves as the Philippine government's flagship program in its campaign against poverty and hunger in the country. The program is implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, with the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and the National Economic and Development Authority as partners.

According to the Worldbank (2017), "In the Philippines, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino conditional cash transfer program has helped alleviate poverty for millions of households, with targeted interventions for many urban residents. They receive support in health care, education, case management, housing, employment (cash for work), skills training, psychological counseling, livelihoods assistance, and referral services."

Moreover, a study conducted by Dr. Anticeto Orbeta and Dr. Vicente Paqueo of the Philippine Institute for Development Studies entitled "Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program: Boon or Bane?" suggests that besides the benefits of additional household income, the Pantawid has increased the desire for work in household heads and has increased school participation and performance in children aged 5-14.

However, despite the positive feedback on the evaluation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, the self-rated poverty survey of the Social Weather Station showed a negative result. Instead of alleviating poverty, more Filipinos consider themselves poor. Hence, the researchers would like to study the reasons behind this claim and explore the experiences of poverty from the lower class status, particularly the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries who were identified and economically assessed as poor by the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Specifically, the parameter of this study was focused on understanding the sociological factors that might affect the participants' experience of poverty.

### *Objectives*

To understand poverty from the lower-class status, particularly the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries, and explore their lived experiences.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach. It aimed to explore the lived experiences of

Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries. The participants came from different places in Samar, specifically Villareal, Zumaraga, Daram, Jiabong, San Jose de Buan, and Catbalogan City.

According to Mills and Birks (2014), A qualitative research study aims to examine phenomena that impact the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context. Phenomenology seeks to accurately describe the phenomenon without pre-existing knowledge of a framework, but remaining truth to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). Using qualitative research, the researcher would be able to connect with their participants and see the world from their viewpoints (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The researcher found this method most applicable to the inquiry to provide a comprehensive sociological analysis of the lived experiences of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries on poverty in the context of their norms and practices being part of different social institutions.

Participants of the study were identified using purposive sampling. The researchers chose the participants that fit the study. Participants were the head of the family of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries from Villareal, Zumaraga, Daram, Jiabong, San Jose de Buan and Catbalogan City and were part of the program for more than three (3) years. Data was saturated with 25 participants composed of 18 females and seven (7) males.

An in-depth interview was conducted among the participants. The interviews were conducted at a convenient place and in the local language. Social Science teachers had proficiency in this language and the capability to conduct the interview.

Participants were asked if they were willing to participate in the conduct of the study. The researchers read and translated the consent form into the 'waray' dialect. Permission to audio-tape the interview was asked and granted. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the names and locations were not reported as this could lead to identification.

In the analysis of the data, all audio-taped were transcribed verbatim to English. Analyses were done using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This process of analysis involves sorting or coding the data into themes and categories by identifying and analyzing repeating patterns that exist in the data. The analysis followed the six steps involved in the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The first stage, translate and transcribe the data verbatim because most of the interviews were conducted in 'waray' dialect, the researchers first translated the audio-taped interview into English. In the second stage, the iterative process, the researchers read and reread the data and got deep into the data. Third and fourth stages, the researchers identified themes and codes relevant to the current research aims and objectives. In the fifth stage, identified themes were restructured and revisited to ensure that the analyzed data

were focused and detailed enough. The coded statements were then grouped under different broad themes in the final step.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Results*

From the data analyses, poor lifestyle choices, difficulty prioritizing needs, lack of parenting style, and extended family are the themes that emerged as the norms and practices in the family. Moreover, Parents' Low Education is the theme that emerged in education. Also, lack of financial literacy emerged as the theme in the economic aspect of the participants. The participants also claimed that the government should provide additional poverty programs, but they appreciate Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Lastly, the religious aspect of the participants serves as the psychological comfort of the participants.

Family plays an important role and is considered the backbone of society. Family as a social institution performs important functions. Norms and practices that emerged in the family that may contribute to their claim of poverty are poor lifestyle choices, difficulty prioritizing needs, lack of parenting style, and extended family.

#### *Poor Lifestyle Choice*

The majority of the participants revealed that they spend their money on unnecessary activities and engage in gambling, drinking liquor, smoking, etc. These poor lifestyle choices of the participants affected their financial status. They made them feel that they don't have enough to provide for their basic needs because they had unnecessary expenses. This is evident in the following statements:

*"Ha usa ka adlaw nakakagasto ako mga segkwenta (P50) para ipalit sigarilyo..."* [I spent 50 pesos a day to buy cigarettes]

*"Oo, nagiinom kami hit akon mga kasangkayan, danay aragmot danay ako nala napalit kun mayda kwarta"* [Yes, I drink liquor with my friends, sometimes we share for the expenses, sometimes if I have money I just pay.]

*"Nataya ako ha bulang bangin manla ako magdaog..."* [I spend money on cockfight, I might just win...]

#### *Difficulty prioritizing needs*

Some of the participants claim that there are cases when they have to make some financial sacrifices because of an event or other unexpected happenings that can affect their finances. As stated below:

*"Kun may birthday naghahanda gad gihapon kami, danay nagshoshort kwarta pero okay la basta makaselebrar la"* [We celebrate birthdays, sometimes I run out of money but its ok we as long as we are able to celebrate]

*"Naging tradition na man gud na kun mayda patron naghahanda gud bisan talaguti, nahuram la anay para la makatuman han patron"* [It has been part of our tradition to

prepare foods during fiestas, I even borrow money for us to celebrate]

#### *Lack of Parenting Style*

Some of the parents assert that they also want to give everything to their children as parents. Even if sometimes it will cost them to spend on unnecessary things their children wish to, they still choose to give. It is illustrated in the following statements:

*“Kun mayda karuyag paliton hit akon anak, danay kinukurian ako pag diri...nananalingkamot ako na maihatag ha iya...”* [if he wants to buy something, I find it hard to say no...I see to it that I will be able to give it to him...]

*“Bata pa man iton hiya, d pa ito makakaintindi hit kakurian sanglit kun naaro gintatagan nala”* [she is still a child, she can't understand our situation that's why if she ask something I just gave it to her”

#### *Extended family*

Most of the participants belong to an extended family. Living under one roof with children, parents and siblings means additional expenses. Filipinos are known to be generous, especially to family members. They see to it that they share whatever they have. As stated by some participants:

*“Damo kami ha balay, aadto akon kaganak apti kabugtuhan, ansya kulang amon panigastos”* [There are many of us in the house, my parents, siblings are there, that is why we lack on financial resources]

*“kay damo man kami ha amon balay, makuri man kun diri magshare...”* [There are many of us in the house, it is so hard not to share...”

Education as a social institution plays a vital role in our society. It functions to socialize the individual for various social roles, which is beneficial in developing society. Unfortunately, some were not given a chance to finish school, and worse, some didn't even experience going to school. Parents' low education is the theme that emerged that can be seen as a factor of poverty.

#### *Parents' Low Education*

Most of the participants were elementary and high school graduates only. The mentioned that it is hard for them to provide the needs of their family since they don't have a stable and high paying job because of their educational background. As stated:

*“Elementary manla akon natapos, naagaantos nala ako pagpabinata pero kulang la gihapon para amon kinahanglanon”* [I finished elementary, I just work as a housemaid but still it is not sufficient for our needs]

*“Waray man ako makatapos pag skwela sanglit yana kikiran ako makabiling maupay na trabaho na hataas it sweldo”*[I

didn't finish school that is why I cannot look for a high paying job.]

The economy is the social institution that deals with the consumption of goods and services. Participants have their means of living to provide and sustain their needs and are even part of the government poverty alleviation program. However, despite the availability of financial support and their capability to sustain their needs, they still have a hard time meeting their daily needs and claim to be lacking financial resources. The responses found that lack of financial literacy is one of the primary reasons they tend to run out of financial resources.

#### *Lack of Financial Literacy*

Financial literacy is the ability to manage one's financial resources. Participants assert that because of too many needs and the limited financial resources they have, they are having a hard time budgeting their finances. As illustrated in the following statements:

*“Oo, may trabaho kami pero kinukurian la gihap kami pagbudget tungod han kadamo na kinahanglanon namon na gutiay la it amon kita.”* [Yes, we are working but it seems that we are really having a hard time budgeting because of so many things needs that we needed with our small income.]

*“Diri ako maaram kun paano ko iisaktuhon an akon kita”* [I don't know how to budget the limited income I have.]

Government is another social institution that administers law and order and maintains security in society. It aims for the betterment of society and the equality of its people. It acknowledges those belonging to the lower class status of the society by creating programs to alleviate poverty, such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). The participants want to have more programs on poverty alleviation, but they are appreciative of the present Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

#### *Additional Poverty Alleviation Programs*

Participants want that the government should come up with more programs on poverty reduction. Programs that they want to avail are livelihood programs that are sustainable. As mentioned:

*“Maupay unta kun magka may-ada pa iba na programa na amon matatagamtaman, labi na an livelihood para kami pirmi may kita”* [It is better if we can avail of livelihood programs for us to have a sustainable income.”

*“Mayda gad nabubulig an gobyerno pero mas maupay unta kun tagan kami hin pakabuhi sugad ha amon na waray aram...”* [The government is extending help but it is better if a livelihood program will be provided to us considering that we are uneducated.]

*Appreciative of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)*

Participants are very grateful and appreciative being part of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4PS). It help them send their children to school and provide their needs. It is evident in the following favorable statements:

*“Dako an bulig han 4PS ha amon, imposible namon mapag-aram an amon mga anak kun waray 4PS”*[4PS is a big help for us, it is impossible for me to send all my children to school and provide their school needs without 4PS]

*“Nagpapasalamat kami na usa kami han mga beneficiaries han 4PS, dako it amon pagtapod na magkakamay-ada maupay na kabuwason an amon mga anak”* [Thankful that we are one of the beneficiaries of 4PS, it gives us an assurance that our children will have a better future]

Religion is a social institution that involves patterns of beliefs and behaviors that answers questions and explains the seemingly inexplicable that project outward into social control and integration. Religion serves as a psychological comfort for the participants.

#### *Psychological Comfort*

Life for those belonging to the lower status is not that easy. There are times that they experience they have nothing and start losing hope. But because of their faith, they are comforted with the hope that God will help them overcome poverty. As shown in the following statements:

*“Makuri it amon kabutang pero natoud ako na bubuligan ako han Makagarahum na matalwas hini na kapobrehan”* [We are having difficulty in our situation but I believe that God will help me overcome this poverty]

*“Guin iinampo ko nala it amon kamutangan, maaram ako diri kami papabay-an han Diyos”* [I am praying for our situation, I know God will not forsake us.]

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Results of the present study showed the emergence of themes on why the participants experience poverty through a sociological lens. The norms and practices in the family might contribute to their claim of poverty, such as poor lifestyle choices, difficulty prioritizing needs, lack of parenting style, and extended family. Parents' low education and lack of financial literacy are also seen as another factor of poverty. Likewise, religion plays a part in responding to poverty.

Poor lifestyle choices, difficulty prioritizing needs, lack of parenting style, and extended family are some of the reasons that might contribute to their experience of poverty. This claim is supported by a study conducted by the University at Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions (RIA) in Buffalo, New York, U.S.A found out that those unable to find employment and on social assistance and living in poverty seemed to not only be at higher risk of becoming gamblers but have more severe gambling problems, including addiction. Being financially disadvantaged appears to cause

people to risk what little money they have available to them in hopes of turning it into an enormous amount of money, thinking that that, in turn, would improve their financial situation.

Moreover, parents with low education have been losing economic ground. This assertion was supported by the study of Hall and Chau (2007) on Parents' Low Education Leads to Low Income, Despite Full-time Employment. It was found that higher education is one of the most effective ways that parents can raise their families' incomes. There is clear evidence that higher educational attainment is associated with higher earnings.

On the other hand, the lack of financial literacy of the poor was seen as one of the reasons for poverty. This result was supported by the study of Long (2011) on Financial Education as a Means of Reducing poverty. He found out that poor financial decision-making and lack of financial knowledge are attributed as contributing causes of poverty. When taught effectively, financial education can increase financial literacy and improve economic well-being among the poor.

In addition, government poverty alleviation programs positively impact the poor, particularly the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). This claim was supported by the study by Frufonga (2015) entitled “The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in Iloilo, Philippines: An Evaluation,” results revealed that there was ample evidence of the improvement in the preventive healthcare among pregnant women and younger children. Improvement was observed in the reduction of malnourished children. Results also showed an increase in the enrollment of children in public schools. Likewise, the attendance rate of children also increased. Accordingly, the decrease was observable in the incidence of child labor among children. The decrease to nearly 0% in the drop-out rate of school children was an indication of improvement.

Lastly, religion plays a part in responding to poverty. Participants assert that there is psychological comfort despite experiencing poverty because of their religious convictions. This claim was supported by the study of Beyers (2014) on “The effect of religion on poverty,” it was found that religion can create a new matrix of thought, influencing society's values. A society with high regard for materialism and consumption needs to take note of an existence stretching further than earthly life that includes a connection to a spiritual realm. Religion can contribute to experiencing the fullness of life in all its forms.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study describes why the participants experience poverty through a sociological lens. Norms and practices that emerged in the family that may contribute to their claim of poverty are poor lifestyle choices, difficulty prioritizing needs, lack of parenting style, and extended family.

Moreover, education as a social institution plays a vital role in our society. It functions to socialize the individual for various social roles, which is beneficial in developing society. Unfortunately, some were not given a chance to finish school, and worse, some didn't even experience going to school. Parents' low education is seen as a factor of poverty.

On the other hand, the participants' economic activity was also a factor in why they were experiencing poverty. Participants have their means of living to provide and sustain their needs and are even part of the government poverty alleviation program. However, despite the availability of financial support and their capability to sustain their needs, they still have difficulty meeting their daily needs. They claim to be lacking financial resources. The responses found that lack of financial literacy is one of the primary reasons they tend to run out of financial resources.

More so, the government has its role also to play. It aims for the betterment of society and the equality of its people. It acknowledges those belonging to the lower class status of the society by creating programs to alleviate poverty, such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). The participants want to have more programs on poverty alleviation, but they are appreciative and have favorable responses to the present Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

Then, religion plays a part in responding to poverty. Participants assert that there is psychological comfort in experiencing poverty because of their religious convictions. Hence, it can be said that norms and practices in different social institutions can affect poverty.

#### *Recommendations*

1. Strengthen values formation in the basic unit of the society, the family.
2. Financial literacy programs for the poor.
3. More poverty alleviation programs of the government.
4. Continuous improvement and strengthening of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), a broader scope will be more beneficial to the poor.

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