

Building a Home Without a House: Understanding the Parental Efficacy and Adversity of Homeless Parents in Manila

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of homeless parents in Manila, focusing on their efforts to foster a nurturing home environment without stable housing. Guided by Resilience Theory, the research highlights the strengths and survival skills of homeless parents in the face of adversity. Specific barangays (390, 392, 404, 459, 605) are selected using purposive sampling and a semi-structured questionnaire. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, the study explores intricate aspects of parenting in homelessness and underscores the importance of addressing the significant housing instability effect on parental effectiveness and family welfare. The qualitative data undergo thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Findings highlight the unwavering commitment of homeless parents to positive relationships, showcasing resourcefulness in ensuring safety, supervision, and educational aspirations. Despite housing instability, parents exhibit effective strategies, including resourceful decision-making and adaptability. This understanding informs interventions that acknowledge and build upon the strengths and aspirations of homeless families in Manila, emphasizing emotional and relational aspects beyond basic needs. The study concludes by emphasizing its contributions to understanding homelessness dynamics and parental roles in Manila. Recommendations include recognizing and building upon the inherent resilience of homeless parents, promoting responsible parenting practices, and implementing initiatives for accessible housing aid. Future research suggestions involve exploring the experiences of children in homeless families and comparing dynamics across diverse urban settings. This study offers a concise yet comprehensive analysis, significantly advancing knowledge on homelessness and parenting in Manila, with implications for future research directions.

Keywords: Homeless, Parenting, Parental Efficacy, Parental Adversity

INTRODUCTION

In the bustling streets of Manila, a complex tapestry of lives is woven as homeless families navigate the delicate balance between struggle and resilience. This study seeks to unveil the hidden narratives of these families, casting a spotlight on the often-overlooked heroes of urban landscapes – the parents – and their enduring bonds with their children amidst the challenges of homelessness.

Homelessness, a pervasive global issue intricately linked with poverty, limited education, and unemployment, holds a significant presence in the Philippines. The City of Manila alone grapples with an approximate homelessness rate of 4.5 million individuals in a population of 117 million (Chandran, 2018). This urgent predicament demands attention, particularly in Manila's densely populated and diverse urban environment.

Parenting under such uncertain and unstable conditions poses unique challenges, potentially straining the vital parent-child bond crucial for healthy child development. The stressors of inadequate housing, financial instability, and social exclusion create an environment that can strain these relationships. Previous research underscores the substantial impacts of homelessness on parental mental health, parenting authority, material

resources, parenting environments, and social support. However, despite these insights, a critical aspect of homeless parenting remains underexplored.

The existing literature, as highlighted by Bradley et al. (2017), Andrade et al. (2020), and Bocar's study (2015), emphasizes the pressing need for more research exploring the perspectives of homeless parents and understanding the challenges faced by homeless families in urban contexts, such as Manila. This study addresses this gap by investigating parental efficacy and adversity among homeless parents in Manila, focusing on their parenting abilities and the care provided to their children.

The harsh realities faced by homeless families are vividly portrayed in a 2016 documentary featured by Al Jazeera English. It depicts distressing situations in the Philippines, where children are compelled to beg for their survival. In one heart-wrenching scenario, a mother named Judith stands by as her children plead with passersby on a bustling street, offering nothing more than love due to her inability to secure stable employment for a brighter future.

Similarly, a poignant story shared in "The Philippines' Throwaway Street Children" by UCANews in 2021 tells of Angelico, a boy abandoned by his biological parents. Neglected and cast aside, children like Angelico find alternate homes in pushcarts, enduring a life of daily survival and self-reliance. These narratives vividly illustrate the diverse experiences of homeless parents – from determination and emotional support, as seen in Judith's case, to parental absence and the struggle for self-reliance, as experienced by Angelico.

Homelessness, defined as the absence of stable, safe, and permanent housing (Homeless Hub, 2018), encompasses 'rooflessness,' where individuals lack shelter and live in public spaces (The Right to Adequate Housing, 2013). Childhoods of homeless adults are marked by persistent poverty, residential mobility, school issues, and traumatic events, especially among those with mental illness (Patterson et al., 2015).

A recent study by Garcia (2019) identifies causes of homelessness, including neighborhood abuse, lack of affordable housing, low wages, unemployment, and low social assistance levels. Child and adolescent homelessness contributes to chronic adult deprivation, crime, child welfare problems, and mental health deterioration. Childhood stressors and traumas, such as family breakdown, deprivation, violence, and abuse, lead to child and youth homelessness, forming a gateway to adult homelessness.

Homelessness poses significant challenges, with some needs being apparent, such as access to nutritious food and secure shelter. However, there are less obvious essential needs that demand attention (Brown, 2021). The outlook of the homeless often centers on long-term plans, but negative experiences gradually diminish confidence, leading to a focus on the immediate present, living day-to-day, and losing sight of future aspirations (Van Doorn, 2010).

Parental Efficacy pertains to the capability of parents to nurture and positively shape their children's behavior and growth (Crnic & Ross, 2017). Parents demonstrating various forms of support, including praise, encouragement, physical affection, advice, open discussions, and emotional support, lead to positive outcomes. Conversely, low support can result in negative emotions and substance use in children (Mills, Mann, Smith, & Kristjansson, 2021).

Homeless individuals establish routines and survival strategies to navigate their days (Lingan, J., 2020). To guide the researcher's exploration, Resilience Theory, contributed by Roberta Greene in 2008, serves as the theoretical framework. Resilience Theory asserts that outcomes are determined not solely by adversity but by how individuals and communities navigate challenges. In the context of homelessness in Manila, marked by societal stigma, physical threats, mental health stressors, and the overarching responsibility of parenthood, Resilience Theory encourages a shift in perspective, emphasizing the innate strengths, capabilities, and survival skills of homeless parents, including coping mechanisms, resourcefulness, and adaptability.

The conceptual framework visually represents the variables of the research study, focusing on Parental Efficacy and Parental Adversity, both converging toward the central theme of Experiences of Homelessness.

This structured lens facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the different aspects that play a role in the lives of homeless parents and their children in Manila.

This study, conducted during the school year 2023-2024 in selected barangays of Manila City, aims to provide valuable insights into the experiences of homeless parents. The significance of this research extends to various stakeholders, including children, communities, future researchers, government, homeless families, organizations, parents, social workers, students, and teachers. By shedding light on the challenges homeless families face, this study seeks to inspire proactive steps in offering solutions and support, contributing to improved living conditions and overall well-being.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach with a qualitative phenomenological design was chosen to deeply explore the real-life experiences of homeless parents, specifically focusing on challenges related to parental efficacy and adversity. This approach aligns with the study's aim to uncover the nuanced aspects of parenting in homelessness. Purposive sampling was deliberately employed to select participants with characteristics directly relevant to the research topic, ensuring rich and in-depth insights from those with firsthand experience. The study targeted six homeless parents residing on the streets of Manila City, ultimately interviewing seven families, exceeding the initial target. Selection criteria included a minimum of three years of street living, at least one child, and formal education and employment for at least one parent.

Ethical considerations were prioritized, incorporating measures such as obtaining written permission, informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and adhering to privacy laws, specifically Republic Act No. 10173, known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

The research setting involved direct engagement with participants on the streets of selected barangays in Manila City. This approach aimed to establish a trustworthy and open environment for participants to share their experiences. A researcher-made semi-structured interview questionnaire, validated by three experts in the field, served as the research instrument. The questionnaire comprised three parts: obtaining informed consent, gathering demographic information, and exploring the experiences of homeless parents through open-ended questions.

Data gathering procedures included obtaining permission to conduct the study outside the school premises, with recruitment visits conducted twice a week for two to three hours in the targeted barangays. The study adhered to a one-month timeline for data collection. Thematic analysis was employed as the data analysis technique, enabling the researchers to identify recurring themes based on participants' answers, contributing to a deeper understanding of their experiences.

RESULTS

Figure 2 Navigating Parental Responsibilities in Vulnerable Situations

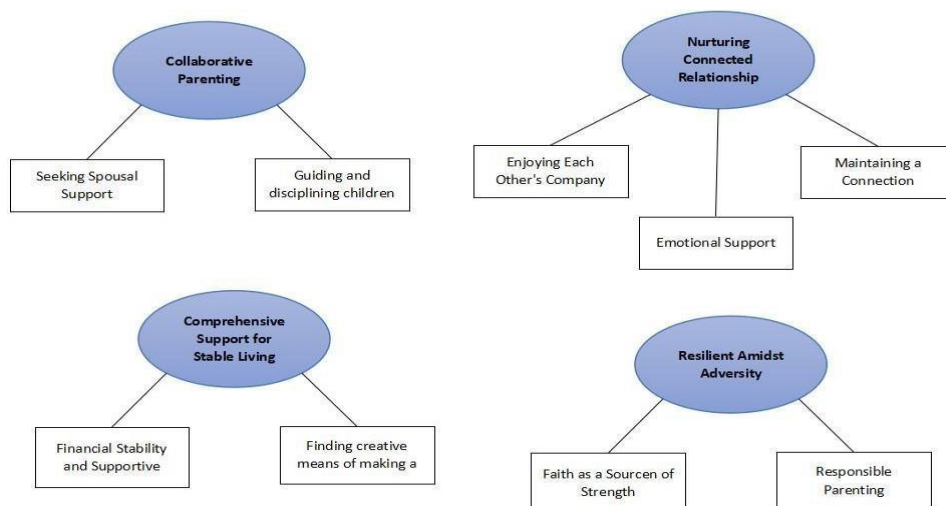


Figure 2 illustrates the navigation of parental responsibilities by parents experiencing homelessness in vulnerable situations. The figure encompasses four emergent themes, each accompanied by their respective clusters, providing insights into how homeless parents manage their roles in challenging circumstances. Homeless parents exhibit remarkable resilience amid adversity, drawing strength from various sources, as grounded in Lingan's (2020) work exploring survival strategies adopted by homeless individuals. This resilience is further elaborated through three interconnected elements: faith as a source of strength, responsible parenting practices, and collaborative parenting. Homeless parents also recognize the value of spousal support in navigating the difficulties associated with their living situation, forming a resilient foundation for effective parenting amid adversity. Working together extends to the guidance and discipline of their children as homeless parents aspire to shape their children into better individuals, ensuring a unified approach to instilling values and maintaining discipline.

Moreover, homeless parents collaborate to create a supportive environment for their children, navigating social situations and providing guidance to ensure positive choices. They prioritize building and maintaining strong connections with their children through various supportive mechanisms, including enjoying each other's company, playful interactions, video calls, celebrating special occasions, and offering emotional support. Additionally, homeless parents exhibit resilience by employing a range of strategies, including adaptive entrepreneurship, to generate income and provide for their families, showcasing resourcefulness and determination in the face of financial complexities. The theme of comprehensive support for stable living transcends short-term solutions, emphasizing long-term approaches such as Supportive Housing and accessible housing aid to assist homeless parents in establishing and maintaining stable living conditions. This comprehensive support includes housing aid initiatives and increased job opportunities, empowering parents to achieve financial stability and contribute to the overall stability of their living situations. Furthermore, immediate assistance for basic stability is highlighted as crucial to meeting the short-term needs of homeless parents in their daily lives. This includes providing financial assistance for daily expenses and education assistance, ensuring immediate stability and access to learning opportunities for their children despite challenging circumstances. This provides a detailed exploration of the emergent themes, shedding light on how homeless parents navigate their responsibilities with resilience and collaborative efforts, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support for stable living and immediate assistance for basic stability.

Figure 3 Homeless parents' ability to Nurture their Children despite their situation

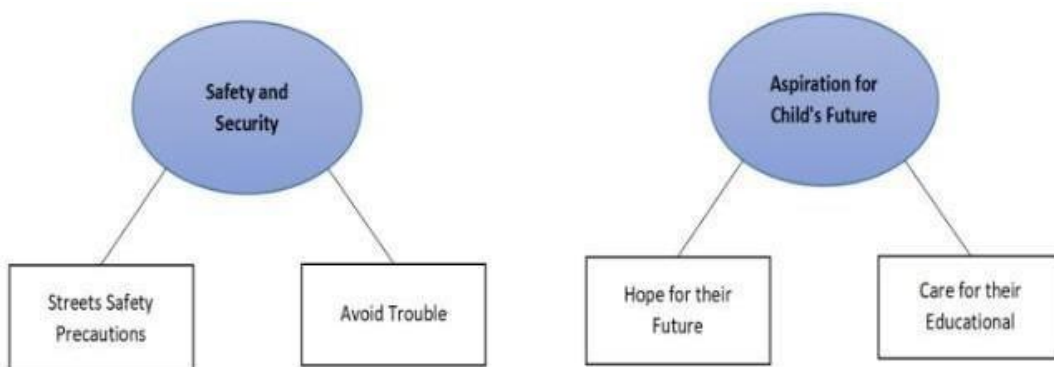


Figure 3 illustrates the homeless parents' remarkable ability to nurture their children despite challenging circumstances. This figure comprises two themes, each accompanied by their respective clusters, offering valuable insights into how homeless parents manage their parental responsibilities in the absence of stable housing. The first theme, Safety, and Security, emphasizes the proactive strategies employed by homeless parents to ensure their children's well-being. Aligned with Beasley et al.'s (2022) findings on challenges faced by impoverished families, especially in child safety, education, and exposure to prejudice, this theme delves into three interconnected elements. Despite the inherent difficulties of living on the streets, homeless parents go to great lengths to protect their children from potential harm, actively avoiding conflicts and addressing instances of bullying. Vigilant supervision becomes a priority, with parents sacrificing sleep to

maintain constant awareness of their surroundings and ensure their children's safety. Street safety precautions involve measures to prevent children from wandering alone on the streets, such as escorting them to school and actively monitoring their activities, contributing to a safer environment. The second theme, Aspirations for Child's Future, explores homeless parents' optimism regarding their children's ability to overcome the challenges of their current situation. Aligned with Garcia's (2016) perspective on homeless children's educational performance and contradicting Zahed Zahedani, Z. et al.'s (2016) findings, this theme encompasses three interconnected elements. Homeless parents express hope that their children will contribute to lifting them out of their current situation, emphasizing the desire for stability and a better life. Despite homelessness, parents share a common goal with others—to see their children complete their education. The study highlights the interconnectedness of homeless parents' hope for the future and their concern for their children's educational attainment. Education emerges as a key factor in the children's success and overcoming homelessness. Figure 3 delves into the multifaceted strategies employed by homeless parents in nurturing their children despite challenging circumstances, incorporating key perspectives from scholars such as Beasley et al., Thompson et al., Garcia, Zahed Zahedani, Z. et al., and Kong, C., & Yasmin, F. 2022. This enhances our understanding of how homeless parents actively nurture their children to achieve desired outcomes, particularly their well-being, in the absence of stable housing.

Figure 4 Effective parenting by homeless parents without stable housing



Figure 4 illustrates how homeless parents effectively fulfill their parenting role, drawing insights from Bradley et al. (2017). The figure emphasizes practical strategies for daily survival, highlighting resourceful decision-making, persistent efforts to meet basic needs, and the significance of adaptability and flexibility in overcoming life's challenges. It symbolizes the delicate balance parents maintain, strategically adjusting their approach to find stability amid life's difficulties. In terms of resourceful decision-making, homeless parents take pride in decisions that prioritize qualities such as kindness, humility, open-mindedness, and vigilance. These attributes are considered essential for navigating challenges, building positive relationships, and maintaining a futuristic vision. Despite the challenges of homelessness, parents emphasize the importance of a broad mindset and vigilance, considering these qualities crucial for overcoming adversities. Persistent efforts for basic needs are a key theme, highlighting homeless parents' strong determination to take action, be creative, and stay dedicated to fulfilling their families' basic needs. Even with limited resources, parents express the necessity of finding ways to meet personal needs without solely relying on external assistance. Their commitment to providing for their children is evident in their proactive and resourceful approaches to daily survival. Adaptability and flexibility are key aspects of homeless parents' practical approach, enabling creative solutions and cooperation with authorities when necessary. The flexibility demonstrated by homeless parents allows them to navigate the challenges of life on the streets and find opportunities for sustenance and shelter. This adaptability is crucial for their resilience in the face of uncertainty.

The persistent effort to provide needs encapsulates how homeless parents navigate daily challenges to provide stability and well-being for their children despite housing instability. This approach aligns with Andrade et al.'s (2020) findings, where some families perceive their situation as beneficial to their parental role, resulting in improved family unity, enhanced relationships, and increased well-being.

Parenting approaches involve positive thinking, and deliberate, and adaptable strategies employed by homeless parents to safeguard their children's well-being. The participants' statements reflect their commitment to overcoming challenges and providing the best possible life for their children, showcasing a strategic and forward-thinking approach to parenting. Providing support to their children, both financially and emotionally, is a critical aspect of homeless parents' efforts. Navigating the challenging environment, parents employ resourcefulness, community engagement, and a constant commitment to their children's well-being. Despite facing hardships, parents express their determination to provide financial and emotional support, emphasizing the importance of stable employment and government assistance. Amidst the lack of stable housing, homeless parents utilize effective parenting strategies endorsed by scholars like Andrade and Bradley et al., as showcased in Figure 4. The figure underscores proactive approaches and an optimistic outlook, illustrating that, despite the absence of stable housing, homeless parents can provide effective parenting for their children.

DISCUSSION

The study delves into the experiences of these parents, emphasizing the challenges they face in building a home without a stable residence, especially when caring for their children. Key findings illustrated in Figures 2, 3, and 4 reveal insights into parental responsibilities, factors contributing to a nurturing environment, and effective parenting strategies, respectively. The multifaceted landscape of parental responsibilities, resilience in parenting practices, and the emphasis on nurturing connected relationships are showcased in Figure 2. This highlights the unwavering commitment of homeless parents to positive relationships with their children amid adversity, emphasizing the importance of emotional and relational aspects beyond basic needs.

Addressing the second research question, Figure 3 brings to light factors contributing to homeless parents' ability to create a nurturing environment. Safety and security measures, vigilant supervision, and aspirations for their children's future emerge as significant themes. Despite challenging circumstances, homeless parents actively avoid trouble, ensure vigilant supervision, and express hopes for their children's educational attainment, showcasing resourcefulness and determination. These insights are crucial for designing support systems that recognize and build upon the strengths and aspirations of homeless families.

Figure 4 addresses the third research question, demonstrating parental efficacy despite the absence of stable housing. Effective parenting strategies, including resourceful decision-making, persistent efforts for basic needs, and adaptability, are central themes. Homeless parents balance ease and hardship through strategic approaches, providing both financial and emotional support to their children. This nuanced understanding of parental efficacy underscores the resourcefulness, persistence, and adaptability of homeless parents, informing the development of targeted interventions that support their unique strengths.

The study concludes with a comprehensive overview of the research, emphasizing the contributions to understanding homelessness dynamics and parental roles in Manila. Recommendations include recognizing and building upon the inherent resilience of homeless parents, supporting responsible parenting practices, and implementing initiatives such as accessible housing aid, increased job opportunities, financial support, and education assistance. Suggestions for future studies involve exploring the experiences of children raised in homeless families and comparing the dynamics across different urban settings, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding. The study urges further research on the long-term impacts of supportive interventions, strategies for breaking the cycle of homelessness, and specific criteria for parents with children with disabilities. In summary, the chapter provides a valuable analysis of the gathered data, contributing significantly to the knowledge on homelessness and parenting in Manila while proposing avenues for future exploration.

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