

Unveiling the Invisible: Mothers Journey in Birthing Facilities of Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) of Butuan City

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Mothers residing in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) of Butuan City, Philippines, a region with persistently high maternal mortality rates (MMR) despite the availability of birthing facilities. Utilizing the qualitative Photovoice methodology, the research empowered mothers to document and articulate their perspectives on maternal healthcare challenges and strengths within their communities. The study took place in the selected (GIDA) barangays within Butuan City, namely Brgy. Bilay and Brgy. Dulag; Thirteen Mothers participated in the study. They were women of reproductive age, between 18 and 49 years old, residents of (GIDA) barangays, had given birth within 5 years, and agreed to participate regardless of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels. In-depth interviews and photo elicitation were used to explore barriers to accessing Basic Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (BEmONC) services. Findings indicated that mothers in GIDAs face substantial obstacles, particularly concerning transportation which impede timely access to healthcare facilities. Additionally, the reliance on untrained traditional birth attendants during childbirth further exacerbates risks. These factors collectively impact the well-being of mothers in GIDAs. By capturing the unique perspectives of these mothers, the study provides vital insights to inform community-driven interventions aimed at enhancing maternal healthcare access and outcomes in GIDAs. Ultimately, this research contributes to the formulation of strategies designed to ensure every mother and child receives essential support during childbirth, thereby improving maternal and neonatal health outcomes.

Keywords: Maternal Healthcare, Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs), Photovoice Methodology, Basic Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (BEmONC)

INTRODUCTION

Maternal mortality in the Philippines, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs), remains a pressing public health concern. Despite the presence of birthing facilities, access to quality maternal healthcare is limited due to factors such as inadequate infrastructure, limited healthcare personnel, and cultural practices. This study seeks to understand the experiences of Mothers in GIDAs of Butuan City to identify challenges and inform interventions aimed at improving maternal health outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative Photovoice research method to explore the birthing experiences of women in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) of Butuan City with different

socioeconomic levels and educational background. Thirteen Women of reproductive age were purposively selected from Brgy. Bilay and Brgy. Dulag, two GIDA barangays in Butuan City with birthing facilities that cater to all deliveries from different surrounding GIDA barangays. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study, ensuring participant autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, privacy, confidentiality, veracity, fidelity, anonymity, and copyright. The findings from this study aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Mothers in GIDA Barangay and inform interventions aimed at improving maternal health outcomes.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyze the data collected from focus group interviews and photovoice activities. This iterative process involved six steps: (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) generating themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing the report. By systematically applying these steps, the researchers identified and analyzed the key themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, providing valuable insights into their birthing experiences in GIDA barangays.

RESULTS

This study explored the experiences of mothers who chose to deliver at a birthing facility within GIDA barangays. Through thematic analysis of participant narratives and photographs, the research sheds light on the factors influencing their decisions and the impact of the birthing environment on their childbirth experiences.

Two key themes emerged, capturing the essence of "Embrace" and "Obstacle." Within "Embrace," the theme "Nurturing Haven" underscored the birthing facility's role in fostering a sense of security and comfort. Participants consistently reported a clean and well-equipped environment, fostering a positive birthing experience. Theme 2, "Balanced Perspective" highlighted the informed decision-making process of mothers, weighing potential risks and benefits of various birthing locations. This collaborative approach, incorporating loved ones' perspectives, aimed to optimize both maternal and neonatal well-being. Theme 3, "Stewardess of Care," emphasized the profound impact of personalized and empathetic care on birthing experiences. Participants consistently highlighted the comfort and support provided by midwives, influencing their overall satisfaction.

However, the theme cluster "Obstacle" revealed challenges faced by mothers in GIDA barangays. Theme 4, "Delay Access to Care," highlighted the significant barriers imposed by mountainous terrain and limited transportation infrastructure. The scarcity of reliable transportation options created anxieties, potentially leading to critical delays in emergency situations. Theme 5, "Unforeseen Crimson," delved into the complex experiences of women encountering Postpartum hemorrhage (PPH) during childbirth. The narratives revealed the remarkable resilience and strength demonstrated by these mothers in overcoming adversity. Theme 6, "Health Risk," focused on the anxieties surrounding newborn screening. A participant's experience highlighted the importance of clear communication in healthcare settings to avoid misunderstandings and potential anxieties.

The study found that participants had positive birthing experiences, emphasizing the nurturing environment, balanced decision-making, and compassionate care provided by healthcare staff. However, geographic isolation and limited transportation options posed significant barriers to timely medical care. Additionally, participants experienced Postpartum hemorrhage, highlighting the potential risks and emotional challenges associated with this complication. The study also underscores the importance of newborn screening for early detection of potential health issues and the need for further research on the integration of traditional practices within healthcare settings.

Overall, the study provided valuable insights into the multifaceted experiences of mothers giving birth at a birthing facility in GIDA barangays. The findings highlight the importance of not only physical resources but also a supportive environment and empathetic care in promoting positive birthing experiences. Furthermore, the research underscores the need for improved access to healthcare, particularly for geographically isolated communities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the birthing experiences of Mothers in GIDA barangays of Butuan City. The findings revealed a complex interplay of factors influencing their choices and experiences. While birthing facilities provided a nurturing haven, challenges in accessing healthcare due to geographic isolation and limited resources emerged as significant obstacles. The study underscores the importance of personalized care, emphasizing the positive impact of empathetic healthcare providers on mothers' satisfaction.

However, the study also highlights the need for improved infrastructure and healthcare access in GIDA barangays. Investing in transportation options, and increased availability of skilled healthcare workers and facilities would significantly enhance maternal health outcomes.

By addressing these challenges and investing in comprehensive maternal healthcare, GIDA barangays can create a supportive environment where every pregnancy and childbirth is safe. This will not only improve maternal health outcomes but also contribute to the overall well-being of these communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends several strategies to improve maternal health outcomes in GIDA barangays of Butuan City.

First, investing in transportation options and healthcare facilities is crucial to enhancing access to timely medical care. Seek funding from the Department of Health, City Health Office, and other government agencies to procure or upgrade patient transport vehicles and establish a robust referral system to connect high-risk patients and patients with specialized care needs to urban centers and higher-level facilities.

Second, increasing the availability of skilled healthcare providers, including midwives and nurses with BEMONC training, and investing in training community health workers to recognize medical emergencies will ensure that mothers receive appropriate care throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum.

Third, implementing community-based programs that raise awareness about maternal health issues, emphasize the importance of prenatal care, and facilitate access to essential services can empower mothers and improve health outcomes. Conduct awareness campaigns to educate the community about the availability of services offered by the Department of Health, Emergency response procedures and the crucial role of facility-based deliveries.

Highlighting the importance of newborn screening is vital, especially in GIDA barangays. Newborn screening is a simple blood test performed on infants shortly after birth to detect serious but treatable conditions. Early detection through newborn screening allows for timely interventions, preventing severe disabilities and even saving lives. By prioritizing newborn screening, GIDA barangays can ensure that every child has the best possible start in life.

Fourth, to safeguard the well-being of mothers and newborns, clinics must prioritize the employment of qualified healthcare professionals with specialized training in childbirth. While recognizing the valuable role of traditional birth attendants in communities, it's crucial to establish close collaboration between these

practitioners and healthcare providers.

Local healthcare workers should work closely with traditional birth attendants to encourage mothers to deliver at health facilities with trained healthcare providers. By building trust and understanding, healthcare workers can educate traditional birth attendants about the risks associated with home births and the benefits of seeking professional care.

Finally, advocating for policy changes that prioritize the needs of mothers in GIDA barangays, including allocating sufficient resources for healthcare infrastructure development and implementing gender-equitable policies, is essential for creating a supportive environment for maternal health.

By addressing these recommendations, GIDA barangays can create a supportive environment where every mother has access to safe and dignified pregnancy and childbirth.