

LIFE CHANGES AMONG THE PANTAWID PAMILYANG PILIPINO PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

Bonna Mae S. Gorospe¹, Marlou R. Savella²; Dea Meir L. Tacbas³

^{1,2,3} University of Northern Philippines, Vigan City, Philippines

*For Correspondence; Tel. +639171553016, Email: bonnamae.gorospe@unp.edu.ph

ABSTRACT: *The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is a government flagship program that aims to alleviate poverty in the Philippines. Despite the impressive reports about the program, a dearth of recent evidence on the beneficiaries' life changes was noted. This study explored the experiences of eight beneficiaries residing in Ilocos Sur on how the program transformed their lives. As a qualitative research, Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) gave the researchers the best opportunity to understand the innermost deliberation of the beneficiaries' lived experiences. Data was gathered through one-on-one in-depth interviews. A researcher-made interview guide was used by the researchers in obtaining qualitative data from the informants. Data were transcribed, coded, and categorized to obtain the results of the study. Analysis of all collected data revealed that the 4Ps contributed to the lives of the beneficiaries. The themes identified based on the distinct experiences of the life changes as beneficiaries were (a) financial/economic capability, which includes finance daily expenses, source of livelihood, availability of daily needs, and decrease in family debts, (b) educational support, (c) improved lifestyle and (d) empowering beneficiaries. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) may continue the program provided that the expenditures of the beneficiaries are strictly monitored. Livelihood programs are intensified to provide family beneficiaries with additional income.*

Keywords: conditional cash transfer, interpretative phenomenological analysis, poverty alleviation, social science

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty seems to be a constant, never-ending concern on the global agenda. It is considered to limit the potential as well as the opportunities of young and well-motivated people. The SDGs aim to reduce extreme poverty by 2030. The main reason for this is that it limits the potential opportunities of people particularly the young and well-motivated ones to participate in many economic, social, cultural, and political activities of the society. To address this, many governments, including the Philippines, aims to reduce extreme poverty through the provision of subsidies, social pensions, and other support services to the most indigent members of the population.

The conditional cash transfer program has been implemented in Brazil, Mexico, Cambodia, and Bangladesh. In Brazil, it is called Bolsa Familia, in Mexico, it is Oportunidades, in Cambodia, it is called Cambodia, as Education Sector Support Project. Whereas in Bangladesh, it is called Female Secondary School Assistance Project Education. Though the program in different countries has variations, its common features are the provision of monthly cash payments for its beneficiaries to be in school [2].

The 4Ps is also a way for the Philippine government to achieve its vision: "sustained economic development, improved lives of Filipinos, and empowered poor and marginalized sectors." This commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) serves to formulate policies and implement development programs. The Philippines, which has an estimated population of 104.9 million as of 2017, has catered to 20% 4Ps beneficiaries of the total population through the years. This program identifies who and where the poor are in the country. As of December 2016, the 4Ps is operating in 80 provinces, with 144 cities and 1,483 municipalities. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported a total of 4,387,689 active households. However, out of the total active households, there were only 4,377,762 recipient households in 2015 in the same areas covered (Official Gazette, 2016).

Fernandez and Olfindo [4] described the 4Ps as a conditional

cash transfer (CCT) program that transfers cash to household beneficiaries as long as they follow its conditionalities. Like other CCT programs, the 4Ps aim to alleviate prevailing poverty. This is through supplementing the beneficiaries' income to address their existing consumption poverty, particularly in the education and health of their family members [22]. Governments worldwide often faced great difficulty in reaching their nation's most impoverished and additionally often failed to lift benefited individuals out of long-term poverty through education [14]. The government is spending millions of pesos to support the poorest of the poor. An ample amount of money has been given to the beneficiaries. However, the extent of the program's effectiveness in alleviating poverty and exploring many aspects of the beneficiaries' lives is a dire consideration that needs to be answered. Further, the dearth of studies regarding the beneficiaries of the 4Ps in the context of their life changes motivated the researchers. The conduct of this study is important since the findings will be a tool for understanding the reality of being a government subsidy beneficiary and how its objectives are reflected based on their lived experiences. Moreover, it will serve as a basis for maintaining or changing the program.

This study aimed to identify the unique experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries. The focus of this study was the beneficiaries who overcame life conditions and were able to improve their lives.

METHODS

This study used the phenomenological research method. Qualitative research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials [21]. This is also an approach for exploring [10] and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The study was conducted to 8 4Ps beneficiaries from the province of Ilocos Sur. These were active household beneficiaries of the 4Ps who met the criteria based on the 2003 Small Area Estimates (SAE) of the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). A researcher-made interview guide was used by the researchers in obtaining qualitative

data from the informants. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The researchers recorded the interview with the informants' consent. After this, the recordings were transcribed considering the principles of in-depth interviewing with a phenomenological orientation. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of Smith & Osborn [20] was used to analyze the life changes and experiences of the 4Ps. The researchers strictly adhered to the confidentiality of data. The researchers personally secured informed consent from each informant. All information to be gathered from the informants was treated with the utmost confidentiality.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed the manifestations of the life changes of the informants. Four themes emerged as to how the 4Ps contributed to the lives of the informants.

Financial/Economic Capability. Providing for their children's day-to-day needs like vitamins, milk, and food was a manifestation that the program has changed their lives. In health concerns, unfortunate children can take vitamins and other food supplements because of the 4Ps program's cash grants. The informants shared that the money they get from the program helps them buy things they need like grocery items and frozen foods as validated by the following statements "*We can buy vitamins and milk for them.*"; "*Our children have daily school allowance.*". Other research in CCTP has revealed that low-income families have increased their food expenditures, and food security in their households has improved. Household beneficiaries from these programs reported increased consumption of cereals, meat, and dairy in studies from Kenya and Brazil [9]. Similarly, the "Mamata Scheme" of India had positive and significant effects on food security. Informants also claimed improvement in their families' physical well-being, as evidenced by their higher health services consumption.

This is consistent with other CCT programs like the *Bono de Desarrollo Humano* of Ecuador. Segura-Perez Grajeda and Perez-Escamilla [18] found that the BDH program had improved the health and nutrition outcomes among the most vulnerable children in the country. Also, they noted that the program was effective in growing the practice of preventive services, consumption of healthy foods, immunization rates, and encouraging healthy behaviors from the beneficiaries.

In the current study, some informants mentioned the support for livelihood establishment. They use the money they get from the program to sustain their livelihood. Some were also provided with livelihood skills training like backyard gardening. This has increased the family income of some beneficiaries as validated by the statement "*They provided us our fish cage livelihood.*". These activities to economic empowerment through livelihood training were much valued by them. This result is consistent with that of Molyneux [8], who pointed the need to include livelihood activities in designing CCTs to improve the program's sustainability and guarantee long-term benefits for beneficiaries. In Mexico, most evaluation studies demonstrated positive impacts on education, health, and nutrition indicators. Some longer-term studies have shown significant, although small, increases in

other indicators, such as consumption, income, and agricultural investment [11].

The money informants get from the program go for school expenses and is also used as additional capital for livelihood. The informants stated that they use the money to buy ingredients for the delicacies they sell to people. The need for sustainable livelihood is revealed from the narratives of the informants ("*The money we get helps us in our food business.*"; "*We have a livelihood that we are sustaining from the program.*"). The availability of daily needs includes the informants' experiences where food and other grocery items are stored in the house for future consumption as seen in these statements ("*We have rice already.*"; "*We have grocery items and frozen foods.*"; "*We have something to use now.*"). The program was found very useful to alleviate the poverty of vulnerable people in need of government financial assistance. This support covers a person's basic needs for survival, provided that eligible beneficiaries who will receive cash grants should secure food. This finding is parallel to the Theory of Maslow's hierarchy [7] of needs for motivation to arise in a higher stage; each stage must be satisfied by the individuals themselves. This means that the informants could store food and grocery items for survival through this flagship program. The results of the study reveal that although people rated their financial situation as the most significant difficulty in their lives, the informants reported that they had reduced their debts. They also learned how to budget their money better. They are more financially secure since they became 4Ps beneficiaries as generated during the interview ("*It was difficult before because we have so many liabilities. Now, that there is the 4Ps, it helped us lessen our debts.*"; "*It is helping us in a way. We have something to buy already; that is why we have lesser debts.*"). Financial security refers to the peace of mind you feel when you are not worried about your income is enough to cover your expenses. It also means that you have enough money saved to cover emergencies and your future financial goals. If one is financially secure, stress levels go down, leaving one free to focus on other issues [15].

Educational Support. The informants have narrated that the government program has helped vulnerable people, especially those who aimed to improve their daily living, and helped the informants who wish to send their interested children to school for their dream to a brighter future. Moreover, the results of the study revealed that socio-behavioral changes could be seen on the priority given to the children's education ("*We can already buy the school supplies needed by our children.*"; "*This can help us a lot, especially in the school aspect of our children.*"; "*It can help with the school needs of our children.*"). Reyes, Tabuga, Mina, and Asis [16] assessed the impact of the 4Ps on Filipino children's school participation. They found out that the school participation rate of children aged 6-14 led to an increase of 3 to 4.6 percentage points. This is consistent with the CCT program, *Progresá*, in Mexico, which expanded considerably in 2001 to offer additional subsidies and grants, including financial incentives for adolescents to finish high school, cash transfers to purchase school supplies and uniforms, nutritional supplements for infants, and cash transfers for senior citizens

[17]. The study of Peruffo and Ferreira [13] supports this finding because they have observed that the *Bolsa Família* of Brazil effectively increases schooling and reduces child labor over the long run.

Improved Lifestyle. Informants also reported other signs of improvement as 4Ps beneficiaries. It was revealed that their living status improved from a survival level to subsistence, subsistence up to the self-sufficient standard of living. It can be implied that after becoming a recipient, informants could afford school and class activities requiring fees. Most of them always wanted to uplift their way of life, which they only obtained when they became 4Ps beneficiaries (*"Our lifestyle has improved."*; *"There is an improvement in our living status."*). This result is confirmed by the study of Flores, Espinoza, Enrico, and Casimiro [5], where ninety-five percent (95%) of the respondents in the study believed that they could focus more on their studies after receiving cash grants through the 4Ps. Somehow, the result expresses the contribution of 4Ps toward improving the lives of economically-deprived Filipino families. The findings of the current study also gleaned that the 4Ps beneficiaries lived various experiences that developed their way of life resulting from the continuity of process that they created through the interaction of their interpretation and analysis of their experiences as reflected from Dewey's concept of experience [1]. Through these active meaning-making processes, as they considered their experience of maximizing the money they get from the program valuable learning, they each learned an individualized version of principles, understandings, and attitudes directing their present and future life. Dewey articulated that the beneficiaries benefit from a balance between having life-changing experiences of being a beneficiary and reflecting on their experiences.

Empowering Beneficiaries. The 4Ps also promote gender empowerment as the responsibility of managing the cash grants are given to the mother. This decision is based on the experience in Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs showing that women make relatively better use of grant money by using it to purchase food or other necessities such as medicines, transportations, and school supplies (*"I do the budgeting for our needs like food, medicines and school supplies of the children."*; *"I am in charge of budgeting for the food and school supplies they need."*). Increased participation of women in decision-making in community affairs was also noted in the study. Informants revealed that they could be involved in the decision-making regarding the family's concerns in the budgeting process. This was also revealed by Engracia [3], where she found that many women also mentioned having greater peace of mind as they were no longer always anxious about how to make ends meet. They reported lesser quarrels with their spouses over money problems.

Informants pointed out their increased community participation where there is an increased number of attendees during "Brigada eskwela" (*"I attend the school clean up if my wife has other things to do. We also maintain the garden."*) and other community activities. Other than the children's welfare, one of the requirements of the 4Ps is the Family Development Sessions (FDS), wherein one of the parent

beneficiaries is required to participate once a month. The informants were encouraged through these sessions, especially the unempowered, to send their children to school (*"I am getting older, but I still attend the meetings because they also encourage me that they should go to school."*; *"Education before is nothing because we lack money, but now with this FDS, I want my children to go to school and even accompany them."*). This finding can be supported by the human capital theory which states that when capital is invested in education and training programs, then human capital will improve. Human capital can make an impact on the individual (employment opportunities), organizational (core competencies and competitiveness), and societal (socio-political development) levels. The findings of the current study also point to empowerment at various levels. It was observed that the Family Development Session (FDS) had increased the knowledge and skills of the informants. The informants appreciated the new knowledge they learned from the topics provided to them. Knowledge gained on backyard gardening encouraged some informants to establish their backyard gardens. The program may be considered a factor in the formation of values and new dynamics of society's family and community spheres. This finding is supported by the Planned Behavior Theory which states that people's behavior depends on the opportunities and resources they have. The awareness and participation of 4Ps beneficiaries on livelihood rely on the inputs such as Family Development Session as an area for the beneficiaries to acquire knowledge, their life experiences, and the availability of resources and technology. In the case of the 4Ps, the structure of conditionality formally and informally calls on women to be the ones to physically receive the transfers, perform community chores related to CCT program administration, and ensure the compliance of other household members so that the state continues to subsidize their children's education and other household members' health care. In contrast, men are viewed as having very few to no responsibilities under the mandates of CCT participation. Qualitative research in Nicaragua, Mexico, Chile, Argentina [6], and Turkey [19] has supported this claim, revealing how responsibilities from CCTs fall disproportionately on women as a signifier of "good mothering" and mostly leaving beneficiary men alone, subsidizing a clear division of labor between women in the home and men outside it. Similarly, Perez [12] analyzed the CCTs in El Salvador and Costa Rica, which offers a discouraging analysis of CCTs' capacity to promote gender equality. She concluded that CCTs do little to promote women's access to paid work but instead encourage their confinement to the household.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The program's cash grant is a big help to address the beneficiaries' immediate needs, especially when it comes to the schooling and health of their children. Continuing and improving the program might make the beneficiaries live a better life and by sending their children to school, they will give their children a better and brighter future compared to their current living status.

This study suggests that the Department of Social Welfare

and Development (DSWD) may continue the program provided that the expenditures of the beneficiaries are strictly monitored. Also, to ensure the sustainability of their improved lives, monitoring of the day-to-day activities of the beneficiaries should be implemented. The convergence committee on poverty reduction should craft interventions to enable beneficiaries to pass through survive. These interventions may include livelihood seminars and activities that can help augment or sustain family income and increase financial stability.

This study was only limited to the informants' life changes as 4Ps beneficiaries. To have a more relevant result, a research study on the program's weaknesses may be conducted. With this, the government can amend the program to address the present needs of the people.

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