

ABSTRACT

Title of the Research: **THE EXPERIENCES AND SEARCH FOR MEANING IN A POVERTY-STRICKEN COMMUNITY IN CAVITE: BASIS FOR A LIFE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

Author: **ERNESITA P. PAREJA**

Degree: **MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION**

Major: **GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING**

The study described the different ordeals being experienced by ten individuals from the same “walks of life” due to extreme poverty.

The sole criterion for choosing the respondents was based on description of poverty as material deprivation. The co-researchers of this study are residents of Barangay 10–B Kingfisher, Bacoor Bay Sta. Cruz, Cavite City. In order to determine the poorest families living in the area, a survey on socio-economic status was administered among residents of the barangay. The results of the survey became the basis for choosing the ten co-researchers.

This study used the qualitative-phenomenological research design. It centered particularly on the combination of existential and transcendental phenomenology, where both the lived experience and meaning of the experience are interchangeably observed, described and

analyzed. Through both empirical and reflective methods, it probed into disclosing the lived experience of the ten samples of the household population suffering from extreme poverty.

The study aimed to distill meaning from the lived experiences of the co-researchers. The study used the procedure of two schools of thought of phenomenological inquiry: the empirical and reflective methods with focus on macro thematic reflection approach. The former used data gathering procedures like interview in order to provide a detailed or graphic description of a lived experience, and the latter delved on the interpretation of a lived experience account. After gathering and interpreting (i.e. "reflecting") all the data, a life enhancement program that encourages productivity through the improvement of the co-researchers' mental, emotional, social, and spiritual conditions was developed.

An Interview Guide Questionnaire was used during the conduct of the interview with the co-researchers from March 2008 to June 2008.

The ten co-researchers were observed and interviewed in their respective homes or in their natural environment. They were meticulously observed by noting every detail of the events or the cause that might occur prior, during and after the interview proper. To maintain objectivity, the results of the observation were validated through an interactive interview with the co-researchers. After gathering the data, the macro

thematic reflection was used to completely grasp the meaning of the co-researchers' experiences.

The findings of the study revealed that the following indicators or symptoms of poverty are common to all co-researchers:

1. Fear of eviction
2. Health problems
3. Lack of educational opportunities for their children
4. Underemployment and unemployment

Based on the analysis of the data, the study uncovered the following facts regarding the coping mechanisms employed by the co-researchers in order to survive from extreme poverty. These can be categorized as follows:

A. Income Generation

1. Accepting any jobs, even those low paying and hazardous like buy and sell of plastic bottles and sewage cleaning
2. Work primarily involves manual labor like laundry; garbage collecting; bus dispatching and water delivery, jeepney/pedicab driving
3. Engaging in low capital and cottage based-businesses. (e.g. sari-sari store, rag making and confectionmaking)

B. Domestic Management

1. skipping meals to economize

2. not using electrical appliances

3. limiting the choices of food to the point that sometimes all they eat is rice, or none at all

4. asking food from relatives and neighbors when there is none

5. borrowing from loan sharks even at high interest rates

C. Emotional/Psychological Coping

1. Optimism; believing that their lives are going to change for the better

2. Prayer; faith in God

3. Holding on to each other; believing that they are not alone in their suffering; they have God and their family.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that experiences are utterly subjective. Two individuals may experience the same phenomenon but perceive them differently. That is especially true when the concepts of acceptance and hope are delved. Below are the findings on the two central themes:

Acceptance. Acceptance is subjective. Majority of the co-researchers, particularly females, are traumatized either by poverty or other experiences that they fail to “move on”. Instead of facing the reality they are in, they resort to escape tactics, which eventually leads to more

serious problems. Others resort to less harmful means like defense mechanisms such as repression and rationalization.

Hope. Hope coexists with acceptance and meaning. When one finds acceptance he will have meaning; and in having meaning there is hope. For an individual to achieve authentic hope there should be a concrete action or a “devotion to goal”. The co-researchers showed genuine devotion or intention in seeing to it that they provide good future for their children. Their love for their children is a good starting point in cultivating meanings in their lives. However, this should be properly guided for when misdirected, it could turn to a self-centered pursuit which may only lead to further frustration.

The themes of acceptance and hope will always be included in the underpinnings of logotherapy, for the proponents of this technique consider these two the panacea for all of mankind’s psychological and spiritual ills. Since the experiences of the co-researchers are traumatic in nature, discussion of these themes surfaced naturally in the study; and that is where it became more individualistic for the co-researchers. Since experiences are subjective, and ultimately depend on the experiencer or actor, rehabilitation needs to be tailored to the client. Nonetheless, the ten co-researchers may be considered a good representation of the entire barangay in general, or even of the entire urban and rural poor sector.

Hence, any recommendations and findings that can be drawn from the study could be useful.

Based on the analysis and reflections poverty could be symbolized as, or be compared to, “*a pair of eyeglasses*”. Poverty depends on the weariness of the eyeglasses. A person with myopia would see it differently from someone who has a normal vision if he does not wear appropriate glasses.

This study concludes that phenomenological inquiry is highly relevant in fields like anthropology, sociology, philosophy and psychology. For example, for situations like that of the co-researchers, since the problem has already been determined and addressed by studies like this, the personnel (e.g. counselors, psychologists) could use the therapy technique of their choice. They can use, for example, techniques lifted from logotherapy like “Paradoxical Intention” (Frankl, p. 196); wherein, in the course of the therapy or counseling the patient is going to be required to confront the very thing that causes the trauma or disturbance.

This study therefore recommends the replication of the study considering the paradigm of the study, coverage of the study and subjects of the study. Future researchers may use a different concept of poverty, such as poverty of isolation or poverty of depression, as another main variable. Likewise, two or more barangays from different places or towns

from a specific province in the Philippines could help future researchers arrive at a more in depth observation and life enhancement program.

Moreover, in order to determine the effectiveness of the proposed Life Enhancement Program, it should be initially tried out to the co-researchers of this study through the school's Community Development Office or Outreach Institution.

