

Surviving and Overcoming Poverty: Experiences of Quondam Poor Individuals in a Philippine City

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Abstract

This paper explored the processes undertaken by quondam poor individuals to survive and overcome poverty in Dapitan City, Philippines. Dapitan City is one of the third-class cities and, unlike other cities in the Philippines, is not highly urbanized. Hence, surviving and overcoming poverty in this economic condition yields a different reality. This pilot study employed the grounded theory approach, which generated a paradigm based on the experiences of quondam poor individuals. Central to the participants' experiences in surviving and overcoming poverty were the realization and acceptance of their conditions and their determination to succeed and achieve their goals. The choice and use of means of overcoming poverty were relative to the participants' contexts and personal-social conditions. Surviving and overcoming poverty is a conglomeration of internal and external factors in the lives of individuals.

Keywords: poverty, surviving, overcoming, Dapitan City, Philippines, qualitative

Introduction

In 1990, about 35% (1.85 billion) of people in the world lived in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2016). The target of the Millennium Development Goal was that by 2015, this poverty rate would have been reduced by 50% (UNICEF, 2014). Based on the recent estimates of the World Bank Group, in 2013, about 10.7% (766.6 million) of the world's population lived in extreme poverty, but the figures have significantly decreased since 1990 (World Bank, 2016). In 2022, about 685 million people were estimated to be extremely poor, while the global goal to end extreme poverty was extended to 2030 (World Bank, 2022). Nevertheless, despite this decrease in previous years, poverty is still widespread.

The effects of poverty on the development of a country and the well-being of the poor, in particular, necessitate solutions. Based on the basic

needs approach (BNA), being poor entails the inability to secure basic needs (Watson 2014). On an international scale, the 'International Poverty Line' set by the World Bank and revised in 2015 considers a person surviving with less than 1.90 international dollars (int.-\$) a day to be in extreme poverty. This assessment is based on the person's consumption of monetary value (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina 2013). Additionally, poverty is defined by the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (designed by the United Nations Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in 2010) as deprivation of at least one-third of the weighted indicators across three dimensions: health, education, and standard of living. Given this concept, different factors, therefore, connect to poverty. Drobotya et al. (2021) classified the causes of poverty into political, economic, demographic, regional and geographical, social, qualifying (education), and personal. With this, they emphasized that the solutions to overcome poverty include a strong civil society, individual entrepreneurship, and a change in the income structure of the population.

In the Philippines, the World Bank is optimistic that it can overcome poverty due to the decline in poverty incidence from 26.6% in 2006 to 21.6% in 2015. In the latest poverty estimates of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2022), 2021 the Philippines had a poverty incidence of 18.1%. The decline in the past six years is attributed to expanding jobs outside agriculture, conditional cash transfers, school enrollment, and health insurance. Hence, the World Bank accentuated the need for policies supporting employment, access to quality education, inclusive rural development, social protection, and a remedy to opportunity inequality (World Bank, 2018, 2022). Similarly, to combat poverty, Reyes (2021) discussed factors related to those policies in addition to access to reproductive health services and risk management tools for agriculture. Moreover, these factors were also eyed in the 8-Point Socioeconomic Agenda of the Marcos administration, such as boosting health, improving education, increasing income-earning ability, ensuring food security, and rationalizing social protection (National Economic and Development Authority, 2022).

While entrepreneurship is also found to help increase the probability of movement from poor to non-poor (Cudia, Rivera, & Tullao, 2019), Ayoo (2022) praised more expanded avenues to reduce poverty. They include stimulated economic growth for increased and expanded employment opportunities, enhanced resource utilization through economic and institutional reforms, prioritization in the national development policies of the basic needs of the poor, promotion of microfinance programs, development of the marketing system for improved production, granting of

incentives to the private sector, and a cash transfer program that would reach the intended beneficiaries.

Considering the abovementioned poverty reduction, poverty is not merely an income deprivation but a complex web of interconnected issues. Because it is multidimensional, no single solution can be offered, especially when looking at its causes contextually. This is true especially when poor people start at a disadvantage due to malnutrition, lack of resources, poor access to quality health care, low education, and skills limitations (Ramachandran, 2021; Luo, 2018).

Among poor Filipinos, two out of five came from Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippines (World Bank, 2018). While the poverty incidence in the country was recorded at 18.1% in 2021, one of the poorest provinces, Zamboanga del Norte in Western Mindanao, recorded a poverty incidence of 40.08% in 2021 (PSA, 2022a; 2022b). In the province, Dapitan City, a third-class city in terms of income, recorded the latest poverty incidence at 36.1% (Laput 2019; PSA 2019). A third-class city has an income ranging from PhP 240 million or more to less than PhP 320 million (Department of Finance, 2008). As a background, from 2007 to 2015, 51.33% of its wage earners were, on average, employed in agricultural and unskilled work, 11.69% were typically employed as government employees, executives, and professionals, and 15.77% were employed in trade, plant and machine operation, and assembly. (National Statistics Office 2011–2013; PSA 2017). Based on the report of the Bureau of Local Government Finance (n.d.), Dapitan is largely dependent on the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), which is an intergovernmental fiscal transfer. Covering the fiscal years of 1992–2018, IRA comprised 92.33% of Dapitan's total income, while only an average of 6.78% was attributed to local sources.

Although government support programs have already been in place and the abovementioned authors identified the causes and solutions, the approach to reducing poverty is more structural or at the community level than individual. Understanding how individuals endure and overcome poverty requires a micro-level understanding of the phenomenon. It is debatable if the above solutions are suitable even in the context of Dapitan City. The experience of those who have overcome poverty is one of the confirming indicators. Furthermore, without a deeper understanding of the internal aspects of poverty, such as how individuals employ strategies to overcome this problem, efforts to resolve poverty may fall short of reality. Given Dapitan's socioeconomic conditions, new realities of surviving and overcoming poverty can provide another vista for a model that can help those who have remained poor while also providing policymakers with a

more precise direction in implementing poverty reduction programs. As a result, this article aimed to investigate how quondam, or former poor individuals, survived and overcame poverty in Dapitan City.

Method

The qualitative approach was appropriate to explore the experiences of quondam poor individuals in surviving and overcoming poverty in Dapitan City. The grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (1990) was employed in this pilot study, resulting in a model with categories such as (1) causes, (2) phenomena, (3) contexts, (4) intervening conditions, (5) strategies, and (6) consequences. The model in this study is relevant to surviving and overcoming poverty. An in-depth interview was done in the field to collect data. The inquiries focused on the participants' previous social and economic circumstances, environment, activities, challenges, and strategies. As a result, the data were presented following the categories proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

Snowball sampling was used to select the eight participants from various Dapitan City barangays. Participants were provided with informed consent. Their responses were recorded with their permission. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used in this study. While eight participants may be small for this study, data saturation was reached in this sample since no new data, codes, or themes emerged (Fusch et al. and Guest et al., as cited in Vasileiou et al., 2018). Such a sample depends on the context of the environment, such as having 11 or eight participants in a similar approach (Morrow and Smith, 1995; Lozano, 2015). A larger sample size was explored; however, due to poverty and Dapitan's socioeconomic status as a third-class city, relatively few individuals fit the criteria stated below, limiting the pool of possible participants. Those who refused to be interviewed were not forced to participate in the study. Given the size of the participants, a thorough exploration of their experiences and an in-depth data analysis grounded in Dapitan's context were conducted.

Participants were those who were poor, as defined by the 2019 MPI (UNDP-HDR, n.d.), as lacking at least one-third of the weighted indicators across the dimensions of health (nutrition and child mortality), education (years of schooling and school attendance), and standard of living (cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets). Aside from a lack of income, they were generally deprived of clean cooking fuel, electricity, a safe source of drinking water, improved sanitation, adequate housing materials, and assets. Other important selection criteria included:

(1) being a resident of Dapitan City and having spent their early adult or adolescent years in the city; (2) any household members who significantly carried the economic responsibility of augmenting their family's income to provide for their basic needs while still living in poverty; and (3) being instrumental in helping their families overcome poverty. Furthermore, seven key informants were also involved in verifying the socioeconomic contexts of Dapitan in the last decades as experienced by the participants to strengthen a better understanding of the context in Dapitan.

To prevent biases and preconceptions regarding the participants' experiences, the researcher took note of his knowledge about surviving and overcoming poverty before commencing the interview. During the data analysis, the researcher did all of the coding. The participants were asked to confirm the formulated codes and coding paradigm prescribed by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

Results

Brief Background of the Quondam Poor Individuals

Eight participants were interviewed about the socioeconomic backgrounds of their families and their experiences of living in poverty.

During the interview, Antonette was 60 years old and a retired government employee. She was born into a vendor family in one of Dapitan City's barangays, although they originally came from Negros, where her family labored as agricultural laborers. Her parents did not complete their primary education. Because no other support systems were available, they relied on vending and labor as their primary sources of income. Since their income was insufficient, Antonette and her siblings were actively involved in specific economic activities assigned to them by their parents. She had demonstrated her ability to endure and overcome poverty by having stable employment and sources of money and investing in real estate.

Nick is the third child in a family of six, but he has significantly contributed to his family's recovery from poverty. His father's parents were well-known for having a large plot of land and leading an affluent lifestyle. However, his father did not properly use such resources, which could have been used as capital or investment to help their family live better. He was obliged to abandon schooling and embrace reality due to his parents' financial incompetence, but this did not stop him from following his aim of assisting his family and improving their social status. Despite his parents' lack of regular support, he tried multiple ways to support his ambition.

Grace was 52 years old at the time of the interview. Grace's life has been challenging since she lost her parents when she was young. Although she received assistance from relatives, it was insufficient to provide her with a comfortable and prosperous life. With the ambition to improve her socioeconomic situation, she stood on her own two feet at an early age, seizing every possible economic opportunity and activating her social networks to obtain additional finances.

Marian was 50 years old at the time of the interview, and her grandparents owned land that could have helped them live a better life. Nonetheless, Marian and her eight siblings had a miserable life as a result of their father's mismanagement of resources, vices, and violent acts. Her parents had no formal schooling and no stable occupations. Marian took on certain family chores at a young age, being the second in the brood. While maximizing her energy and physical abilities, she encountered many difficulties while looking for available sources of income. She used her social networks and guts to provide for her family's necessities. Marian is now a government employee occupying one of the highest positions in her department.

Gabriel was 58 years old at the time of the study and was born to parents with a volatile source of income. Her parents did not finish primary school; his mother was a seller, and his father was a small-scale fisher. Because their family's income was insufficient, Gabriel took it upon himself to provide extra income for his parents' unstable and insufficient source of living. As a result, he worked as a laborer day and night and occasionally pursued other options when his primary source of income was still insufficient. In many circumstances, he led a peripatetic lifestyle, moving from one location to another based on the availability of opportunities.

Agatha was 41 years old at the time of the interview. Her parents were farmers who did not complete basic schooling and whose income was insufficient to provide a comfortable living for the family. Due to the inaccessibility of schools in their location and financial constraints, her parents did not complete their basic education. This difficulty lasted for some time, so she began to work on the farm alongside her parents despite her physical restrictions. She also engaged in other economic activities to meet the family's needs, which were no longer within their financial means. She had faced financial hardships and social challenges such as criticism, pressure, and the like.

Christine was 65 years old at the interview, and her parents were not destitute compared to the other participants. However, neither of her parents completed their education. Christine's family went through a difficult period

after her mother died and her father became addicted to gambling. Christine is currently a retired government official who previously held a high-level position. She now owns properties, which has increased the family income.

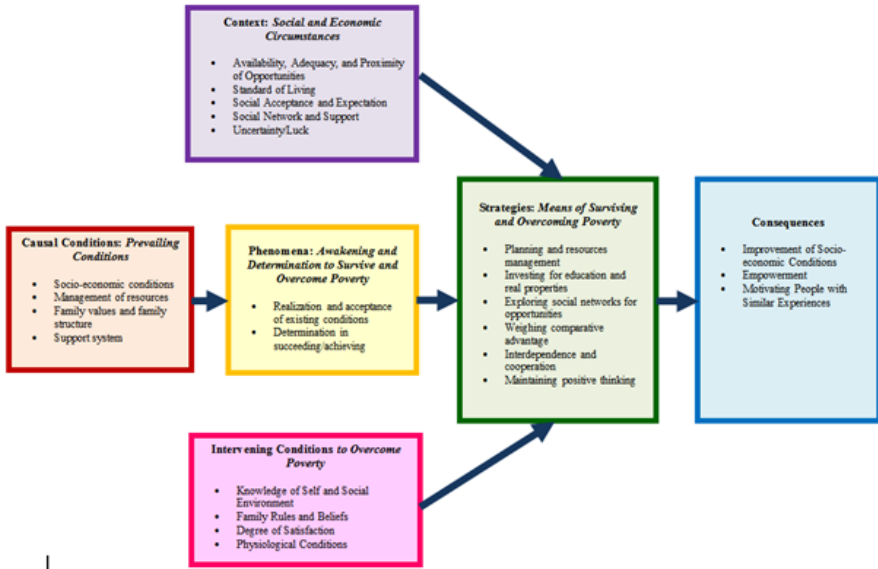
Hector was 49 years old at the time of this study. His parents were farm tenants whose income was insufficient to meet the basic necessities of more than six children. Hector's family lived in one of Dapitan City's barangays without electricity and with a low standard of living. His drive and vision to break the cycle of poverty in his family prompted him to seek immediate economic opportunities, which forced him to be separated from his parents at an early age. Hector was a high-ranking official at one of the trial courts in Zamboanga del Norte at the time of the study.

Paradigm of Surviving and Overcoming Poverty

Using Corbin and Strauss' (1990) framework, the interview transcripts were coded, constructing a paradigm for this pilot study based on the participants' experiences. During open coding, each participant's responses generated more than 300 codes. Throughout the axial coding stage, these codes were used to generate categories. These categories were linked to their subcategories, finally leading to the presentation of a coding paradigm or model that includes causal conditions, phenomena, strategies, context, intervening conditions, and consequences. As seen in Figure 1, categories were linked closely across individuals during the axial coding step. The categories in the coding paradigm for surviving and overcoming poverty served as the themes in the subsequent discussions.

Figure 1

Coding Paradigm for Surviving and Overcoming Poverty



Casual Conditions: Prevailing Conditions

The participants' unfavorable circumstances began with a lack of better socioeconomic conditions. For example, most of the participants' parents had a basic education level. They lacked financial assistance due to their parents' low-paying jobs, such as small-scale vending, farming, and fishing. For example, Antonette said, "My parents, my father is a laborer in the seaport, then my mother is also a vendor in the seaport." Similarly, Nick, Marian, Gabriel, and Hector's parents did not have a steady source of income. This is why Nick refers to his parents as 'day survivors.' During the participants' late childhood years, they experienced poor planning and resource management from their parents, resulting in insufficient food. Christine stated that, as the only legitimate child, her father, a farmer, was the sole heir to the land properties. Despite this, Christine said, "My father, if he had plans...and if he had a strategy, we would not be poor since he was the only son. He had many siblings, but only the legitimate son could inherit the property before." She then added, "...but my father was a gambler."

Nick, Marian, and Christine's parents failed to value education due to their poverty. As a result, they were not sent to school, and instead, despite their financial situation, Antonette, Agatha, and Hector's parents tried to enroll them in schools emphasizing the importance of education. The participants' nuclear family, which includes between 6 and 10 people, is

enormous. In terms of making a livelihood, only the families of Antonette, Agatha, Grace, Gabriel, and Hector helped each other out monetarily.

Phenomena: Awakening and Determination to Survive and Overcome Poverty

The participants all shared the realization and acceptance of their prior circumstances as the root of their poverty. This phenomenon became crucial for the participants in overcoming poverty to better understand what they were willing and determined to do. Antonette expressed, “That was what was instilled in us, that we were born poor, Sir, so we really must have an income...After finishing college, I really made a sacrifice...it was challenging. It was difficult to look for money before...I am known for being a vendor; I’m not shy of it since I could help address our needs.” Similarly, Nick said, “I did not feel tired because, for me, it is just normal to have no money. For me, it [the situation] is just normal since we have been poor since before; it is just normal.”

Moreover, the participants showed an inherent determination to succeed and achieve their goal to improve their lives and end the cycle of poverty. For instance, despite losing her parents at a very young age, Grace explained, “There were many hardships...first of all, I did not grow up having a mother and a father...I am the one who just [takes care] of myself. Then, there are challenges on how I should finish [my studies] by hook or crook as long as I can finish well. So, I motivated myself to yearn for change so that what I experienced would not be experienced by the next generation.” For Agatha, she said, “I wanted to show to them [social critics] that I will finish [studies] and that I have the determination to do what I want to happen, unlike them.”

Furthermore, Gabriel likewise recalled, “During Saturdays and Sundays, I would find time to work so that I can have money for fare. I considered it my obligation to work because I did not want to be penniless. Before, our parents and I would go to the market. We had to walk for how many kilometers...For me, what I wanted was to sustain what I did...My desire was great since I am more obligated to work, go fishing, and do construction work.”

Similarly, realizing poverty, Hector narrated, “Because I had in mind that I do not want to stay as a tenant in my life. I was focused on and determined to succeed because I didn’t know, but when I was still a child in grade 6, I already knew what course to take. I am already determined to become a lawyer in the future.”

Strategies: Means of Surviving and Overcoming Poverty

The participants' challenging socioeconomic circumstances caused them to experience the phenomenon of realizing and accepting their poverty while being determined to make changes in their lives. As a result, participants used a variety of strategies for surviving and overcoming poverty.

Planning and resources management. The majority of participants used resource management and personal planning as strategies. They established their goals and the actions necessary to achieve them as part of the planning process. Goal-setting, being forward-thinking, prioritizing purpose, planning for uncertainties, and considering options were some of their particular actions.

Although Antonette had become accustomed to her family's way of life, she explained, "Then I would always go to school since it was my 'target' to really finish because...life would be comfortable if [I] finish [my] studies." Knowing his parents' financial capacity, Nick devised plans in advance to reach his target of finishing his studies. Grace also had a similar outlook: "I have to be focused since I am studying." Similarly, Gabriel has a foresight good enough to help him see what lies ahead of him and plan his economic activities in that direction. He uttered, "I had to discipline myself because I was thinking of my daily salary. I had a purpose for it. So, every day, I set my objective. I want to study because while I was fishing, I thought...if this would be my life, and I would surely be married someday and have a family, what would I do to support my family?"

Living and studying alone, Marian planned how she would spend her scant resources. She would walk, forego meals, put in extra time for economic activities, and lend money to friends rather than spend her money.

On the other hand, personal management includes, among other things, efficient budgeting, prioritization, resource management, moderation of lifestyle, self-discipline, self-control, and regard for money/income. Participants like Antonette, Nick, Grace, Gabriel, Marian, Agatha, and Christine efficiently handled their few resources by prioritizing their necessities, including completing their schooling, assisting their families, improving their lifestyles, etc., to achieve their goals. They were able to save for the future using these strategies. They adopted a moderate way of life by spending no more than they could afford.

For instance, Nick recalled, "From third to fourth year (in college), I could save money. Since I really wanted to study...I used the money that I saved from contests to enroll in school. I could earn from the projects I

made because I initiated assignments for other people, and they would give me five pesos, which I saved...I am not extravagant. Yes, actually, I still save 20% of my salary. I really save it.'

Similarly, Christine said, 'The vegetables that I used to carry on my head...each bundle was so big, yet it was only worth five centavos, but the five centavos before could already buy a big piece of bread....What I earned would be used as my weekly allowance. We would buy dried fish that was good for one week, one kilo of fish to be stewed in vinegar good for one week. It was paired with the vegetables we brought.'

Investing in education and real properties. The participants could find opportunities for extra sources of income due to the portion of their earnings they had saved. Knowing their parents could not afford higher education, they invested in their professional development. They believed obtaining a higher education would improve their chances of finding well-paying employment. It was also evident that participants began purchasing tangible assets gradually. For example, Antonette's family used their business savings to purchase hectares of property. She recalled, 'In the long run, through my mother's business, we could buy 4 hectares of land. It was on that top of Elementary School.' In order to improve their catch, Gabriel's family also made an asset investment by getting fishing gear. Nick and Agatha made another investment to establish their own modest businesses, such as bakeries and 'buy and sell,' respectively.

Exploring social networks for opportunities. Participants used every chance that they were presented with as a means of overcoming poverty. Due to social networks that increase their economic potential, this was made more accessible. Grace used her social networks to find alternative forms of financial assistance. She expressed, 'In terms of bigger [school] contributions, I would go to my cousin in another Municipality. We would then gather caviars of shrimps and milkfish...but for small needs like rice, we had a board mate from the other municipality, and we would go there to harvest [corn].' With social networks, Marian, during her younger years, remembered, 'There was one that I begged a family whom we knew...I went to their house and did some babysitting jobs. Then, in another instance, so that we would have something to eat, I told my brother that we should go to his godmother, a coadjutor in the church.'

After graduating, Antonette learned about a job opening, and she immediately applied while still working as a vendor and cosmetologist. Similarly, Nick tried to find alternative ways to achieve his objective of completing higher education. He would not receive a scholarship for higher education from a foreign organization if he did not take advantage of every

option inside and outside his social network.

With Gabriel's vast social network, he came across various economic opportunities and said, "When I went home, I would go fishing again. Since work in the rice field was seasonal...The widening of the road at the seaport...was another construction...I was not a regular student since I needed to sustain my work." Marian also had a different set of opportunities. She recalled, "At the time I was in Grade 4,...I remembered that I would go to my teacher's house where there were mimosa plants that grew...I would dig them up...so we would have something to eat...Before, my mother, as I remember, when I was in elementary, used to make bags out of cement sacks...For me, those were the possible things like what I did as a working student with my aunt...So that I could pay for school fees."

Similarly, Christine also explored available economic opportunities. She said, "When my parents stopped supporting [my education], I became a working student...When I was in college...many would request me to help them with their requirements. Some would pay, some would not...On weekends when I was in elementary...I collected firewood, and then I would sell them to my grandmother." For Hector, he uttered, "Well, I was a working student since Grade 4. I was already working in our landlord's house from the barangay to the City. There was an offer to send me to school, so I grabbed the opportunity at that age. I took up political science, and I was studying varsity tennis. So, I was not paying tuition. I just took the opportunity, and I did not waste that opportunity."

Weighing comparative advantage. The participants selected opportunities that were most advantageous to them. For instance, Antonette decided on chances like being a vendor and a self-supporting student, which were both advantageous. She said, "When I was in college, many teachers saw me, and I was known as a vendor. I was not ashamed of that as vending could help us with our needs.... Since I was good at it [cosmetology], I did a manicure, haircut...Every day, I had an income of 1000 pesos, which was spent on our rice, breakfast, lunch and dinner." In Nick's instance, as class valedictorian, he used and maximized his academic abilities to his advantage. Grace also evaluated her comparative advantage in selecting economic activity that did not interfere with her educational quest. As she narrated, "That was it. Sometimes, I provided laundry service, washed my board mate's clothes, and drew and manicured. I rendered manicure services to fellow students to address in order to earn for my needs. Yes, we would harvest [corn], [and] sometimes, sing in amateur so that we could have rice and sing at Ms.-A-Sing-Along."

Interdependence and cooperation. In order to facilitate the family's

resource accumulation, family members use interdependence and cooperation to assist one another through sharing in economic activities. Antonette and her younger siblings supported their parents at home by working as food vendors and using their skills. Similar to this, Gabriel's family also had specific economic responsibilities to fulfill, and whatever money they contributed was carefully gathered and then allocated to meet their basic needs. Gabriel said, "Fish, shrimp, which he [father] caught...So, my mother used to sell his catch." Further, when Agatha's siblings were still single, they would help the family financially.

Maintaining positive thinking. Positive thinking helped the participants maintain their focus and optimism despite pressure and criticism. Agatha, for instance, used positive thinking to respond to the criticism she encountered in her social setting. Even though she had worked hard to improve things for her family, some of her neighbors dismissed her as doomed to failure. Christine was also subjected to criticism, but she accepted it as natural and worked hard to carry out her goals.

The Context: Social and Economic Circumstances

Nearly all participants acknowledged that the context or conditions in Dapitan affected how they used strategies to overcome poverty. The availability of economic opportunities also depends on how adequate and proximate they are.

Since Antonette's family lived close to the seaport, this circumstance gave them the easiest and closest way to earn revenue. As she narrated, "We would go on board the ship since income or opportunity to sell was there. The sales there were strong, Sir since the previous boat trips would only come from the seaport then Manila. Then, for passengers, that was the only ship they could board. That is why our eggs could easily be sold. Grilled fish were easily sold in our puso [steamed rice wrapped in coconut leaves]."

Gabriel, who also lived close to the coast, seized the chance to fish and occasionally work as a porter or laborer on cargo ships. Unfortunately, Gabriel could not find a better job right away after completing his studies because there were few opportunities. Also, Marian's ways were influenced by the context, as she recalled, "In terms of work, there was none. During my high school days, regarding economic activities, I could only remember [selling] iced candy...there was no opportunity to work except as a working student."

Fortunately for Christine and Hector, they seized the chance that a family friend offered to support their education under the condition that

they were to serve as students. While some participants were fortunate enough to be given or offered opportunities, others only seized those presented to them in the context in which they found themselves.

Additionally, the expectations their parents had for them and the reputation they built for themselves as socially acceptable people set the context for whether or not they had access to employment opportunities. Antonette mentioned, 'My parents were different, Sir. They really wanted us to finish our studies since my mother and father were from Negros where they used to be farmers in sugar cane haciendas. Then, our parents did not want us to become like them. That is why, despite being poor, my mother and father really wanted us to study.' In Nick's context, he experienced criticism from his relatives. He said, 'My aunt made some predictions that I would not be able to finish my studies if I would take back my money. That is why I really tried hard [to finish my studies], but later they [vengeful thoughts] were gone. However, it became one of my motivating factors.' In Christine's case, she mentioned that she was allowed to study because of her good reputation. She uttered, 'Because I was bright according to her (family friend). That was her statement.'

Similarly, Hector's strategies for improving his life would be difficult if he was not socially accepted. He recalled, 'So they took me, , and I do not know why I was selected. Well, I presumed that I was really a good boy when I was still a child. Perhaps our landlord liked me.'

The standard of living in Dapitan was reported to be low despite the lack of opportunities. Grace emphasized that providing for one's essential needs was not too difficult, as she remarked, "But at the time, rice, basic goods were still cheap." Hence, the context of the environment also determines the strategies to overcome poverty.

Knowing and using social networks has proven to be a strategy for the participants, but having a more extensive available social network is important. Opportunities later came to Gabriel, Agatha, and Christine with ease due to their more extensive social networks. For instance, Gabriel was able to seize an opportunity to work in the media because of the existence of social networks. As he related, "I met my high school friends. He was the one who took me to establish the newspaper. At that time, I was already active in politics. I was the coordinator of Brgy. Captains. I was able to get an endorsement."

Sometimes, strategies did not seem to work or succeed because of contextual elements like uncertainty or luck. Nick, Gabriel, Marian, and Hector stated this when they said they were fortunate to have the possibilities they had. Nick's experience further demonstrates the importance of luck.

He said he was amazed that despite his family's misfortune of having their home destroyed by fire, he was very lucky to win multiple competitions that allowed him to make money from the prizes he won; he thought he was just lucky.

Intervening Conditions to Overcome Poverty

In the coding paradigm, intervening conditions and the context of the place also influenced the participants' strategies for surviving and overcoming poverty. Knowing oneself, particularly regarding skills, allowed the participants to employ strategies to accomplish a goal successfully and efficiently.

For instance, Antonette used her cosmetology expertise to earn extra money and consider other opportunities. Similarly, Nick, the valedictorian of his high school, recognized his academic ability and was inspired to give his academic services in exchange for income. Grace gained confidence and autonomy as a result of being able to fully understand herself and the fact that she was left without anybody to turn to after losing both of her parents. The participants' understanding of the social environment went along with their self-knowledge. It was clear from Antonette's story how she and her family's actions and decisions aligned with this knowledge. As she said, "We really did business. Making a living was like a race/competition since that is how you earn money at the port." Her knowledge of the environment persuaded her to work harder to compete economically. On the other hand, Gabriel claimed that by knowing the social behaviors of those around him, he could start again whenever he encountered criticism.

There have been instances where personal or family rules and beliefs have aided or hindered efforts to end poverty. Family rules and beliefs explicitly refer to the participants' and their families' personal beliefs. Nick acknowledged that God's mercy was responsible for the excellent things that had happened to him. He used this conviction to guide him toward significant decisions. Likewise, Christine's beliefs were also inspired by her grandmother's religiosity and dedication to God. Every time she walked and rested on the hill, she would actually speak about her dreams and goals to God. On the other hand, Gabriel had convictions based more on his family than religious principles. Even though he was not the only child, he felt obligated to help the family increase its income.

The participants' degree of satisfaction was another essential consideration when deciding whether to keep employing the strategies to overcome poverty. Antonette, Nick, Grace, Gabriel, and Marian all reported

satisfaction with the strategies they used in this regard. Nick said that he felt satisfied as he acquired new skills and attained improved economic prospects while using strategies for overcoming poverty. Grace similarly expressed her satisfaction with every strategy she used. Because she was happy with everything she did, she was unaware that her economic situation was worsening over time.

Consequences: New Life and Freedom from Wants/Hunger

The participants' lives improved by using all available tools to survive and overcome poverty. The participants' socioeconomic circumstances improved due to the strategies they used. As a consequence of being hired by government agencies after completing their degrees, the participants were able to have a more stable income. Antonette recalled, "Our wall is already made of plywood, then two-storey and with a living room and corner set." In the case of Gabriel, despite being underemployed, his work gradually improved from being a construction worker, foreman, media reporter, and later a public official, and he enjoyed a more satisfying salary and a generally better socioeconomic condition. Even if the participants' socioeconomic standing improved, some kept up habits or lifestyles that enabled them to overcome poverty as quondam poor individuals. Nick said, "I still practice everything I did before; I still like learning and helping my family... I still save. Actually, I still save 20% of my salary."

Empowerment was another noteworthy consequence. Christine, who is quondam poor, felt empowered because she could embrace what she had learned from her experiences, earn her college degree, and find stable work. In contrast, Hector's experiences inspired him to advocate for others who had gone through comparable experiences. He recalled advising the young boys, "That they should think about their future, they should think that ah, they should go to school and that they can actually earn money even if you are just a polot boy (ball boy)."

Discussions

The experiences of the quondam poor individuals demonstrated that poverty resulted from their parents' socioeconomic circumstances. Their parents attended basic education, making it difficult for them to get a well-paying job. They ended up in low-paying jobs like vending, farming, and other manual labor. This lends credence to the body of research demonstrating how disadvantages early in life contribute to poverty (Ramachandran,

2021; Luo, 2018). With this, the results of the study by Akerele et al. (2012) showed that the factors associated with poverty included dependence ratio, household assets, and the household head's educational status, which were all associated with the circumstances of the participants.

Furthermore, the Department for Work and Pensions' policy paper in 2017 (as cited in Lehtonen 2018, p. 91) asserted that "children in workless households are considerably more likely to repeat the poorer outcomes of their parents—an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage" could have occurred among the participants if similar socioeconomic conditions had prevailed in their lives. Government initiatives concerning employment, educational opportunities, and social protection could contribute to the socioeconomic goal of reducing poverty (World Bank, 2018). The direction of these strategies for reducing poverty begins with a government initiative (external and macro-level) and is then directed at the individual (micro level). In contrast, this study examined a different approach to overcoming poverty, such as starting with the individual perspective and moving outward.

The experiences of the participants revealed that there was an internal and individual aspect that drove them in the direction of overcoming poverty. It manifested when they started to be awakened from their ordinary life, marked by an insufficiency of economic resources. Awakening is described in the participants' realization and acceptance of their conditions, recognizing that change was crucial instead of being content as poor. However, it does not portray that the participants were unconscious of being poor; instead, they lived according to their means by realizing and accepting their conditions. This experience is related to the term discussed by Ryff (2014) on eudaimonia, which highlights meaning-making and self-realization. With self-realization and meaning-making, some have high well-being amid challenges like socioeconomic inequality. Also, Manstead (2018) suggested that material situations impact people's personal and social identities, influencing their thoughts and feelings about their social surroundings. Nevertheless, the impoverished condition of the participants did not weaken their desire to overcome poverty.

The role of determination also became vital in the phenomenon (Figure 1) of overcoming poverty among the participants. Self-determination is connected to the concept of individuals making their own decisions, disregarding the influence of others (Bölenius et al., 2019). Among the participants, determination was one of the primary means by which they made their personal choices, regardless of how they intended to realize them. Correspondingly, self-determination is a familiar concept brought

about by internal and environmental variables that require one to know and value oneself, plan and learn, and act and experience outcomes (Field & Hoffman 2010). It is apparent that this phenomenon in the paradigm is internal among the participants, emphasizing that when one wants to overcome poverty, the decision must come from within.

Based on the paradigm, what follows from the phenomenon [as described as the awakening and determination to survive and overcome poverty] are the strategies employed by the participants towards surviving and overcoming poverty. Despite starting in a disadvantageous state due to limited socioeconomic resources, they pursued viable strategies to overcome poverty. However, their experiences contradicted those of Mullainathan and Shafir (as cited in Spears, 2011), who argued that when experiencing stress due to scarcity of resources, people tend to focus on situations where resources are scarce. As a result, they may inadvertently exclude other significant decisions. Despite the participants' socioeconomic disadvantages, it did not limit or distract them from solely focusing on providing their immediate basic needs; instead, they decided to explore opportunities that would enable them to overcome poverty. Otherwise, they would be stuck acquiring material resources just for survival. Among the strategies to overcome poverty, planning resource management and investment in higher education were commonly employed. They finished higher education by utilizing available resources and opportunities, such as engaging in various jobs such as vending, construction work, farming, fishing, house helpers, and other manual labor. Although income from the jobs they were engaged in is unstable and small, saving a portion of it over time became valuable in their pursuit of higher education, which offered them an edge in acquiring better jobs compared to their parents. The participants' experiences proved contrary to some studies that, although poor people shared common goals to attain economic security, they could not achieve them because they were poor and lacked resources. Hence, poor people are characterized by an "increased focus on immediate goals" instead of focusing on long-term planning (Rutherford, as cited in Sebstad & Cohen, 2003; Fell & Hewstone, 2015).

With an increase in their income, they could save better, and some started to purchase tangible properties like farmland and establish small businesses. Mihai et al. (2015) recognized that the educational system is vital in achieving upward social mobility. Time was also an essential resource among the participants, and they managed it effectively by responding to the demands of the basic needs of their families while pursuing higher education. This experience reinforced Saboor et al.'s (2016) study about the connection

between time and poverty. One way of looking at poverty is by examining people's time use. "Time use poverty" means inefficiency and inadequacy in using time, which leads to poverty. Despite economic and social challenges, the participants were optimistic that things would turn out well, as poverty is never permanent. Optimism is a buffer from the ill effects of economic adversity among families (Taylor et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Figure 1 depicts the influence of context and intervening conditions on the success or failure of the strategies for overcoming poverty. The context or socioeconomic conditions in Dapitan posed a challenge among the participants, who before mostly did not own land properties or assets while faced with limited opportunities. This further tested their determination to apply better strategies to overcome poverty. The differences in the prospects availed by the participants portrayed the role of the context in Dapitan as to the availability, adequacy, and proximity of opportunities. In particular, some participants could vend and work in the construction as residents near the seaport, where passengers flocked while seaport development was active. However, those in a different context could not avail themselves of similar opportunities.

Consequently, being into housekeeping and a working student became the closest and most available opportunities for some, while other used their other skills (i.e., singing, farming, academic-related skills, etc.) to earn a living. This corroborates Macionis (2009), who argued that a person's ability and initiative shape his or her social status. Indeed, the participants explored and utilized every available opportunity to overcome poverty.

While exploring every available opportunity, social networks paved the way for job and scholarship referrals and played a crucial role. Networks of friends and acquaintances facilitated referrals and recommendations regarding the available job and scholarship opportunities. This has widened the participants' hunting ground for better opportunities, and some became working students, institutional scholars, and part-timers for a job. However, in their decisions to avail themselves of opportunities, they used the strategy of weighing their comparative advantage so that their abilities and priorities matched such a choice. For instance, instead of studying within Dapitan, which is farther away, one of the participants transferred to a nearby city so that she could manage to sell at the seaport and use her cosmetology skills among the referred clients.

The acquisition of opportunities and weighing the participants' comparative advantage in choosing such opportunities entail that they must know themselves, such as their objectives, skills, and general strengths and weaknesses. Participants did not venture into anything they knew they would

fail. Correspondingly, knowledge of the social environment and the context of Dapitan, in general, played a role in the choice of strategies to overcome poverty. Their better understanding of the social environment opened an avenue for channeling their strategies in the right direction regarding the availability of economic and social opportunities. As Manstead (2018) emphasized, social environment, as 'contextualism' for individuals in the lower class, means a psychological orientation that motivates them to deal with external challenges and threats. For the participants, knowledge of the social environment offered them a better view of effective strategies to overcome poverty regarding economic and social opportunities. Generally, just as in the work of Goffman (1959) on dramaturgy, people are discrete beings who are always prepared to play a particular role, knowing the context of their social environment. Therefore, the success of the poor in undertaking strategies to overcome poverty in any environment is influenced by the availability, adequacy, and proximity of economic opportunities and how well they know themselves and the environment.

Consequently, the foremost result among the participants' means of surviving and overcoming poverty is the improvement of their socio-economic status, as higher education places them at a competitive advantage at work. Their new life empowered them as they were no longer deprived of the necessities, but rather, it afforded them social services for their own families, such as health, education, etc.

The participants' experiences as quondam poor individuals revolved around realizing and accepting their existing conditions and their determination to achieve their goals. These became the core categories of their experiences, where the strategies to overcome poverty ensued. Additionally, the use of strategies was influenced by the participants' contexts and knowledge of themselves and their social environment. Thus, realizing and accepting is challenging if the situation blinds one. Simply put, the participants' realization and acceptance of their impoverished condition became their turning point, where all their efforts were redirected and aimed toward the common goal of freeing themselves from the bondage of poverty. In connection with this, the theory of individualism, as discussed by Rank (as cited in Sameti, Esfahani, and Haghighi, 2012), has emphasized the individual as the root cause of poverty. A person's ability to acquire basic needs depends on his/her hard work and is, therefore, his/her sole responsibility. The work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) on the social construction of reality reinforced the participants' experiences by positing that reality is socially constructed and that the analysis of the sociology of knowledge is crucial to understanding how reality occurs. Although poverty

as a natural phenomenon has already existed, poor people can reconstruct it. With their determination to change their reality instead of just accepting it and exerting minimal effort to break free from it, they can explore all the strategies for change.

Conclusions

Poor participants started at a disadvantage because of their parents' low socioeconomic status, wrong practices in managing available resources, and the structure and values of the family. Participants' realization and positive acceptance of being impoverished and their determination to escape poverty are crucial steps in surviving and overcoming poverty. They drive participants to identify and consider strategies to overcome poverty. The participants' experiences manifest that the context and personal-social conditions intervening in their lives cannot be disregarded in the choice of strategies. Though there are various opportunities from which the participants can choose to overcome poverty, they are not equally and readily available to everyone. This is due to the differences in the contexts and personal-social conditions that either facilitated or impeded their availability and access. Hence, there is no single approach to achieving the goal of overcoming poverty.

Poverty is not only the result of the socio-economic context of the place but also the consequence of an individual desire to be free from the bondage of poverty, intelligent decisions, and the ability to discern appropriate strategies to achieve such a goal. The study proved that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that entails the inability of individuals to overcome the deprivation or limitation of material possessions, education, social networks, opportunities, positive social expectations, self-control, proper resource management, desirable values, knowledge of themselves and their social environment, health, and a secured position in the economic structure in general. Hence, helping the poor overcome poverty should not only constitute external initiatives such as government programs for poverty reduction by immediately providing basic needs, employment opportunities, social protection, and others; rather, it necessitates that individuals realize the need to change their conditions and are intrinsically determined to overcome it. Therefore, developing better mindset, planning, and management skills among poor individuals are some of the significant considerations. The poverty reduction program may also consider the context in which it will be implemented. Moreover, the pilot study hopes to explore other similar and unique contexts and circumstances in the lives of

poor individuals similar to those in Dapitan to strengthen the position of the model or coding paradigm in surviving and overcoming poverty.

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