

Lived Experiences of Prolonged Beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program in Cagayan De Oro City: Basis for Program Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

This study was done to find out why some homeless beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program are prolonging their stay as beneficiaries. The current duration of the program is 12 months. Each beneficiary is provided interventions and services within this period. Some families are observed to have marked improvement in their life conditions; however, some others have very little to no improvement at all. The researcher used a qualitative, phenomenological method of study. Three sets of participants were engaged in this study, the heads of families, a few children, and the handling social workers. The data gathering methods included focused-group discussion, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews. Three themes came out after the data analysis, which are, experience of trauma, difficulty in complying with the requirements, and prolonged stay in the streets. The major difficulty experienced by the clients and the handling social workers were establishing their legal identities and to prove their residency so they could avail of high impact interventions such as permanent housing. Their experience of trauma, on the other hand, made it difficult for them to fully maximize the interventions provided to them. Despite the challenges, the prolonged beneficiaries were mostly grateful for the permanent housing service because it gave them a sense of permanence and security. But more than the physical house, the Program provided them the opportunity to hope for a better life for their children.

Keywords: Homelessness, homeless families, experience of trauma, prolonged beneficiaries, street life, Oro Alagang Pamilya Program

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness remains a significant global concern, affecting approximately 150 million people worldwide, while about 1.6 billion individuals lack adequate housing (Chamie, 2017). The United Nations (2019) emphasizes that homelessness is not only a social issue but also a violation of fundamental human rights, including dignity, security, health, and access to basic services. Despite its magnitude, accurately measuring homelessness remains challenging due to varying definitions and limited governmental capacity to collect comprehensive data (Chamie, 2017). These limitations hinder the development of effective policies and interventions aimed at addressing the issue.

In different national contexts, the extent of homelessness continues to rise. For instance, in Thailand, surveys revealed increasing numbers of homeless individuals and beggars between 2014 and 2015 (Quinley, 2016). In the Philippines, the situation is even more alarming, with an estimated 3.1 million homeless individuals, including 1.2 million children (Tee, 2015). At the local level, Cagayan de Oro City reported tens of thousands of residents without permanent housing, with projections showing a continuous increase due to factors such as migration, disasters, informal settlements, and infrastructure development (Orias, 2016). These conditions highlight the urgency for localized and sustainable interventions.

In response to this issue, the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) of Cagayan de Oro developed the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program, which targets families of children rescued from the streets (Sarip, 2019). The program was designed after recognizing that many street children return to the streets due to their

families' living conditions. It aims to provide permanent housing, livelihood opportunities, improved health and nutrition, and enhanced parental and life skills. Through these comprehensive interventions, the program seeks to transition families from survival to self-sufficiency, demonstrating the critical role of social workers in designing responsive welfare programs.

Despite the program's objectives, some beneficiaries remain in the program longer than expected, referred to as "prolonged beneficiaries." Each year, while most families improve within the given timeframe, a small number extend beyond one year without significant progress. This raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of interventions and the challenges faced by these families. Understanding their lived experiences, as well as the barriers that prevent them from fully benefiting from the program, becomes essential in evaluating and improving the initiative.

However, there is a notable gap in research focusing on the specific experiences and struggles of prolonged beneficiaries within localized social welfare programs such as the Oro Alagang Pamilya. Existing studies largely emphasize homelessness at a macro level, with limited attention to program-level outcomes and beneficiary perspectives. This study addresses this gap by examining why certain families fail to maximize available interventions and by identifying the challenges they encounter. Its significance lies in providing evidence-based insights that can guide the enhancement of program strategies, improve service delivery, and ultimately contribute to more effective and sustainable solutions in addressing homelessness at the community level.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Research highlights that homelessness is deeply connected to economic conditions. Many individuals remain on the streets as a means of survival, engaging in informal work that provides daily income (Sescon, 2015). Long-term homelessness is often viewed as an economic adaptation that eliminates housing costs but sacrifices long-term stability. Scholars argue that homelessness is increasingly driven by structural economic forces such as globalization, urbanization, income inequality, and rising housing costs (Horn, 2018; Macewan, 2022). Despite this, many homeless individuals are willing to work but face barriers such as lack of identification, low education, and limited access to opportunities (Aleman, 2016). These findings emphasize that homelessness is not merely an individual failure but a broader economic issue affecting marginalized populations.

Migration to urban centers is another major contributor to homelessness. Large numbers of homeless individuals are rural migrants seeking better opportunities but end up in unsafe and informal settlements due to limited resources (Chandran, 2018). Factors such as unemployment, disasters, and poverty push families toward cities, often resulting in overcrowding and strained services (Dutta et al., 2016; Srinivas, 2022; Mythiane et al., 2022). Alongside migration, personal factors such as mental illness, addiction, financial problems, and family breakdown further increase vulnerability to homelessness (Ponio, 2021; St. Paul's Hostel, 2021). Domestic violence is also identified as a leading cause, particularly among women and children, often forcing them to leave their homes and enter cycles of abuse and homelessness (Quinn, 2019; Doorways, 2021; SafeLives, 2018).

Structural failures within society significantly contribute to homelessness. These include lack of affordable housing, weak social safety nets, discrimination, and income inequality (Kottke et al., 2017; Davis, 2021; Ponio, 2021). The literature also explains homelessness through theoretical perspectives. Conflict theory attributes homelessness to social inequality and unequal distribution of resources in capitalist systems (Frances, 2018; NursingAnswers.net, 2020), while the functionalist perspective views it as a dysfunction of societal systems failing to meet citizens' needs (GradesFixer, 2024; Draxler, 2016). Additionally, family breakdown is consistently identified as a major trigger, especially among youth, where conflict, separation, or abuse often leads to housing instability (Moschion, 2017; Howell, 2019; Gill, 2016).

The literature further reveals the profound impact of homelessness on families, particularly children. Homelessness exposes children to trauma, abuse, health risks, and developmental challenges (Quinn, 2019; SAMHSA, 2022; McGee, 2021). It affects their education, mental health, and overall well-being, leading to issues such as anxiety, substance abuse, and social isolation (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021; Phillips, 2019; Head Start, 2021). Moreover, the lack of legal identity documents creates significant barriers to accessing housing, employment, and social services, further trapping individuals in poverty (Homelessness

Initiative, 2017; Murad, 2021; Kolb & Pokempner, 2017). These challenges demonstrate how homelessness creates a cycle of disadvantage that is difficult to escape.

Lastly, homelessness is recognized as a major human rights issue and is further intensified by disasters. It represents a violation of fundamental rights such as housing, health, and social protection (UN Office of the High Commissioner, 2016; Farouq, 2018). Disasters such as floods and earthquakes displace millions annually, increasing homelessness, especially in vulnerable regions (Suliman, 2017). Homeless individuals are particularly at risk during disasters due to lack of resources and safe shelter (Bailey, 2018). Overall, the literature underscores that homelessness is a complex and multifaceted issue caused by both structural and personal factors, with severe and long-lasting consequences for individuals, families, and society.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the lived experiences of prolonged beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya in Cagayan de Oro City for the enhancement of this program.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the prolonged beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program in Cagayan de Oro City?
2. What are the circumstances that led them to become a beneficiary of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program?
3. What are the interventions that the beneficiaries availed of while in the program?
4. What are the difficulties and challenges encountered by the program's beneficiaries?
5. How do they see and feel about their being homeless?
6. What are the positive impacts of the interventions and services the beneficiaries availed of?
7. What suggestions can be made to improve the program?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore why certain families remain prolonged beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program despite receiving various interventions. It focused on understanding the lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions of these families regarding the program's impact on their lives. Data were gathered in Cagayan de Oro City through multiple methods, including focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth interviews (IDI), and key informant interviews (KII), guided by structured interview questions. The instruments explored participants' experiences prior to and during the program, the challenges they faced in complying with interventions, the perceived benefits, and their recommendations for improvement. Ethical standards were strictly observed, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the protection of participants from any potential harm.

The participants included four heads of families identified as prolonged beneficiaries, three children from these families, and four social workers involved in managing the program. These participants were selected based on criteria such as length of program involvement and lack of significant improvement in living conditions. Data collection was conducted in coordination with the City Social Welfare and Development Office, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to process the data, where responses were coded, grouped, and organized into themes. Through this process, three major themes emerged, capturing the shared experiences and underlying factors contributing to the prolonged stay of beneficiaries in the program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section contains the results of the data gathering activity. In this section, the emerging themes are presented and discussed in relation to the research problem. In the discussion, the results of the focused-group discussion and in-depth interview with the research participants were correlated with the responses from the Social Workers and their professional view of the clients' cases.

This study was conducted to find out why some clients of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program were becoming prolonged beneficiaries. Per experience of the social workers implementing the program, the 12 months of providing the beneficiaries with interventions/services and intensive case management would have yielded marked improvement in their condition. However, some families would exhibit very little to no improvement at all, leading them to stay in the program for more extended period. These families are referred to as prolonged beneficiaries.

This study wanted to know why the prolonged beneficiaries were not responding to the interventions and services like all the other families under the program. It specifically wanted to discover the difficulties and challenges of the prolonged beneficiaries while journeying in the program. It is hoped that the data gathered could be used to improve the interventions and services under the Oro Alagang Pamilya to minimize or hopefully prevent families from prolonging their state as beneficiaries.

For clarity and better appreciation of the data gathered, its presentation follows the questions in the statement of the problem.

Lived experiences of the prolonged beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program

The lived experiences of the prolonged beneficiaries are capsulized in three themes that emerged from the research participants' responses. The themes were stated as experience of trauma, difficulty in complying with requirements, and prolonged stay on the streets.

The discussion below explains each of the themes that emerged.

Experience of Trauma. In the case of the participants, trauma is brought by the troubled relationships among family members that often lead to domestic violence, mainly perpetrated by the male spouse to his partner/wife and, or their children. All the research participants had this experience. This is, in fact, the reason why they left their homes.

During the focused-group discussion, Participant 1 shared that “gakulatahon ko sa akong bana Ma’am. Apil ang mga bata iyang gapasakitan.” (*My husband is beating me including our children*). Participant 1 further shared that “adtong batan-on pa ko, na inpluwensyahan sa barkada nga magrubby ug magistambay sa dalan kay di ko ganahan sa among balay kay gubot.” (*When I was younger, I was influenced by my friends/peers to sniff ruby/solvent and to stay in the streets because I don’t like to stay in our house because its chaotic*).” In this same note, Participant 2 expressed that “akong bana ako nang gipapriso Ma’am (*I have filed legal action against my husband and he is now in jail*).”

The life they had on the street was also a source of trauma for the research participants. They expressed the difficulty of their life in the street. Participant 1 shared that “ang among mga anak gadagan dagan sa tunga sa kalsada hangtod nanga ligsan, nanga bangga sa taxi ug sa jeep.” (*Our children would run along the roads, some got run over or hit by taxi or jeepney*). Further describing their hard life in the street, Participant 1 continued saying that “unya paka kuan ma’am ulanan sad mi kanang gilantan sad amo mga anak kay ulan init baya unya ug usa pud abog ana bitaw.” (*We would be drenched when it rains, this would result to our children getting sick with fever because they are exposed to both rain and heat from the sun coupled with a dusty atmosphere*).”

Participant 2 described that “kanang akong na bati ato kay init, kapoy.” (*When we were living in the street, it was hot and tiresome*).” She continued her narration saying that “ubos mag banig lang mi ug karton tas ulan sad Ma’am. Magtapok man mi tanan didto tas mag sikit sikit mig higda.” (*Our mat and cardboard from boxes lie*

low on the ground, so when it rains, we would get wet. We will group together and sleep near each other). Participant 3 described their harrowing experience of having to beg when they were young saying that “kanang kuan ko usahay kanang kung mulakaw among ginikanan bati-on mig kagutom ana dayun mao ng makatuon dayun mig panglimos sauna mga bata pa kaayo mi.” (*When we were still very young, sometimes when our parents are away and we would get hungry, we learned to beg.*)”

When asked about how they felt living in the streets, Participant 1 said that “bilar, hago, magsige ug away ang magti-ayon dayon madamay ang mga bata ma’am.” (*We can sleep, its difficult, my husband and I would always quarrel and our children would be affected.*)” Participant 2 added that “kapoy, maulanang, ang mga gamit walay insaktong kabutangan sige ug kawala.” (*Its tiring, we would get rained on, our stuff would always get lost because we do not have a secure place to store them.*) Participant 3 described life in the street as “walay insaktong CR ug kaligu-anan, maski asa matulog, init ug ulan.” (*We do not have a comfort room, no bathroom, we would sleep anywhere, we were exposed to both rain and the sun.*)” Participant 4 chimed in saying that “walay kauli-an, unya magsige ug dagan dagan kay dakpon sa pulis.” (*We do not have a house to go home to and we are always on the run because the police are after us.*)

The children-participants were also asked if they liked living in the streets, and they firmly said no. Child Participant 1 said, “dili kay kung ting ulan kay maglisod man mi asa mi mubalhin.” (*I do not like it because when it rains it difficult to find a dry place to sleep on.*) Child Participant 2 supported this statement saying that “dili diay ma’am alang kay ga ulan.” (*I also do not like it, especially when it rains.*) Child participant 3 agreed saying that “dili, kay mag ulan, maglisod ta.” (*I do not like it because when it rains, it is very difficult.*)

The Home Link (n.d), a membership charity organization, working with homeless people in England, emphasized relationship breakdown as the most common cause of homelessness.

This was concurred by Ponio (2021) when he cited failed relationships and family problems as factors causing homelessness.

Family breakdown as the leading cause of homelessness was also reinforced by Kelly (2017) when she reported that almost one-third of the families in Dublin for the first six months of 2017 lost their housing because of family breakdown. Moreover, she cited the report from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive that says more families are homeless because of family circumstances that include overcrowded accommodation, breakdown of family relationship between family members or partners, than those homeless because of being served notice to quit by their landlords.

Again, family relationship breakdown as the leading cause of homelessness is mentioned by Gill (2016) when she said that 59% of the youth who came to the Center had to leave home because of family relationship breakdown. Additionally, more evidence also cites that family relationship breakdown is the primary cause of youth homelessness.

SafeLives (2018), cited that homelessness and domestic abuse were issues that coexist. Each could feed the other resulting in a chronic cycle of abuse and homelessness. They said further, that for women who were made homeless because of domestic abuse, getting a permanent accommodation was complicated and was often dependent on the response of the service providers. Often, the survivors of domestic abuse have to transfer to a different locality to have a safe place to live.

SafeLives (2018), said that once homelessness starts either as a result of domestic abuse or some other reason, it will be increasingly hard to break it. In a 2016 Crisis Survey, repeat homelessness was common among homeless women. These women are also vulnerable to multiple forms of gender-based violence, thereby creating a cycle of homelessness and abuse.

A CSWDO handling social worker of the beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya during the key informant interview said prolonged beneficiaries exhibited “behavioral manifestations, parent-child relationship are poor, psychosocial activities are not fully implemented (some beneficiaries have history of trauma that needs to be address).” She further said that for the prolonged beneficiaries “there is NO FAMILY SUPPORT who will

encourage the beneficiaries. Sense of Individuality. And the determination to change their life for good.” She concluded that the experience of trauma and lack of family support had prevented some beneficiaries from fully maximizing the services provided to them, hence leading to their prolonged stay in the program.

The Social Worker’s conclusion is supported by the statement of Quinn (2019) when she said that traumatic experiences affect how women and children think, feel, behave, and relate to others. Trauma that is not recognized and not addressed can have potentially disturbing implications for the development across the person’s lifespan. Hence, the lack of awareness of trauma within the service setting can increase the risk of causing more harm.

Difficulty in complying with requirements. Any service provided by a government social welfare agency requires documents to back the release of funds. The services under the Oro Alagang Pamilya are no different; the primary documentary requirement is a certificate of indigency from the barangay of residence. As the services become more high-impact and permanent, more documents are required.

When asked about which service or intervention the participants found difficult to follow, Participant 1 shared that the “permanent housing kay daghan requirements nga lisod kuhaon.” (*Permanent housing because there were several requirements that proved difficult to acquire*). Participant 2 added by saying that “gipipangitaan mi ug barangay certification, sketch map ug daghan pa.” (*We were required barangay certification, sketch map and many more*). Participant 3 chimed in saying that ‘daghan-daghan gyud gipangayo.’ (*There were really several requirements*).

Participant 1, moreover, recalled that they also needed to spend an amount when she said that “kuan, ang kanang NSO, kana pa gyud mga birth, timingan sad wala mi kwarta.” (*We were asked NSO birth certificate, and it so happened that we do not have money at that time*). Based on her experience, she suggested that the “requirement sa permanent housing and dapat hatagan ug dugang panahon kay lisod kuhaon.” (*The requirement for permanent housing should be given more time because acquiring those is difficult*).

The social workers handling the Oro Alagang Pamilya beneficiaries during the key informant interview explained “basta ing-ana kay diba number one kung balay kay number one pangayuon kay birth certificates, halosa pa gyud nila ana kay mga wala pa gyud na rehistro.” (*with permanent house intervention, number one requirement is birth certificates, most of them are not registered*). Meaning that the difficulty in complying with requirements was because they did not even have the basic legal documents such as birth certificates. “Mao ng dako pa kaayo siya nga trabaho-onon.” (*Establishing their legal identity takes a lot of work*). This was one of the reasons why they were prolonging in the program.

The Center Head of Mother Theresa Foundation, where the rounded up/apprehended children are brought, reinforced this statement during the key informant interview when she described that “during the initial interview and individual sessions, some clients couldn’t give information about their family members, their birthday, and other important information necessary in the helping process.”

The Homelessness Initiative (2017) of the State of Hawaii supported this statement saying that the lack of valid government identification documents (I.D), or vital documents needed to obtain an ID can be a significant hindrance to housing and employment for many people experiencing homelessness.

Taylor (2017), writing for the Homeless Hub, supported the idea of the need for a legal identification when she said that having a valid identification was a need that many took for granted. In Canada, a parent or a legal guardian should go through the process of securing documentation and identification for their dependents at a very young age, including a birth certificate. Adults, on the other hand, have the responsibility of renewing their health cards, driver’s licenses. These are chores they must do as a member of society.

However, Taylor (2017) mentioned that the reality for someone experiencing homelessness might be more complicated when obtaining and keeping identification safe. The circumstance of not having stable housing or being employed also makes obtaining an ID very difficult.

Pasqualini and Bazzani (2021), in a research study of homeless residents in Milan, Italy, also supported the need for legal identity when they mentioned that to access many forms of social and economic assistance in the country, people need to give a proof of residence registration. To obtain such, people also need proof of legal identity. Homeless people have either not had or have lost their residence registration. The Italian Residence Population Registry removes people who are deemed unavailable or not living at the residence address. They mentioned that according to Italian law, when a person is not recorded in the Residence Population Registry, they can lose significant social, political, and civil rights. Kolb and Pokempner (2017) reinforced this result when they stated that in the world today, identification was needed to move around, access services and benefits, and take advantage of all opportunities for education and employment. Identification is needed for just about anything, such as, to enter buildings, proof of eligibility for public benefits and services, and enroll in educational institutions or get a job. They further stated that when one cannot prove his or her legal identity, it is hard to establish oneself in the world as an adult who can live on his/her own, work, pay bills, and complete the daily tasks required to take care of oneself, much less build a future. While state-issued identification, Social Security cards, and birth certificates— are vital to a youth's success as an adult, it can be highly challenging to obtain these documents when the one needing the identification is homeless and a young adult who does not have a parent or family to provide aid.

Another reason seen in the clients' responses as to why they were having difficulty complying with the requirements was the low educational attainment of beneficiaries. When asked about their highest educational attainment, Participants 1 and 2 said that they had reached the second year in high school while participant 3 and 4 both completed elementary level.

The three handling social workers agreed during the key informant interview that the low educational attainment of the beneficiaries had contributed to their prolonged stay in the program. They said that *"most of the parents have lowest educational attainment and their children are drop outs."*

According to one of the handling social workers of the Oro Alagang Pamilya, *"tapos isa pud sa ilaha ana ma'am kanang mga wala bitaw nahuman gyud kay mataha sila mulihok sa ilang mga requirements tungod kay kanang maulaw or dili sila kabalo."* (*One thing is that since they do not finish school, they are hesitant to work on their requirements either because they are ashamed or do not know how*). This means that the beneficiaries had a hard time navigating the formal institutions such as the barangay or the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), formerly known as NSO or the National Statistics Office, and other institutions that might be the source of any certification or legal document either because they are embarrassed or a hard time understanding instruction in filing up required forms. The Social Worker said that there were times when *"kami na ang nag adto sa ilang barangay para magkuha ug indigency."* (*They were the ones who went to the Barangay Hall to acquire a certificate of indigency or barangay certification*).

Another handling social worker said that their low education and hesitation or difficulty in dealing with institutions was why it was difficult for them to comply with the requirements of the high impact services of the program.

Prolonged stay in the streets. Another theme that emerged why beneficiaries were prolonging in the program is their prolonged stay in the streets before they became program beneficiaries. When asked about how long they had been living in the streets before becoming beneficiaries of Oro Alagang Pamilya, Participant 1 said that *"12 years Ma'am. Gikan ko ug 20 years old hangtud 32 years old. Maski ap ag mi sa programa gabalik lang gihapon mi kay mamaligya ug sigarilyo ug magparking."* (*12 years Ma'am. Starting from about 20 years old to 32 years old. Even when we were already in the program, we still go back to the streets to sell cigarettes and assist in parking vehicles*). Participant 2 said that she more or less lived in the streets for about the same number of years with the statement, *"mga pareha ra mi Ma'am. Mga sobra ten years pud."* (*Same with her Ma'am. About more than ten years*). Participants 3 and 4, who happened to be siblings, said that they had been living in the street for an extended period when they said that *"gikan pa sa among ginikanan Ma'am, taud-taud na gyud."* (*Starting from our parents Ma'am, we have been in the streets for a long time already*).

When the children were asked how old they were when living in the streets, Child 1 said, “3 paingon sa dyes (*three to 10 years old*).” Child 2 shared, “8 paingon sa mga 11.” (*Eight to 11 years old*). Child 3, on the other hand, answered, “Kuan 5 paman ko paingon sa 11.” (*About five to 11 years old*).

When these children were asked about their activities while living in the streets, Child 1 said, “manglimos. Magdula sa dalan hapit manga ligsan.” (*Beg, play in the road getting nearly hit by vehicles*). Child 2 shared, “manglimos. Magdula sa tunga sa plaza.” (*Beg, play in the middle of Plaza Divisoria*). Child 3 added, “Manglimos, maski kinsa lang.” (*Beg to just about anyone*).

During the key informant interview, the Center Head for Mother Theresa Foundation, a city-government owned and run facility for children, gave support to this result when she said that “*the clients’ exposure in the streets for so long is a contributory factor why they are prolonging in the program. She further said that despite being given services in the Center, the clients would go back to the streets because they found a sense of belongingness and love with their peers in the street that they did not find in their families.*”

The head social worker of the Oro Alang Pamilya program reinforced the Center Head’s statement saying that “*some beneficiaries find it hard to fully let go of the street life where they lived for so long.*” In the streets where they make their own rules, they do not follow any routine or are not responsible for anyone except themselves and their survival, and where they earn “easy money” through assisting in vehicle parking, street vending, and begging. The head social worker further said that when they were new in the program, they “*quite struggled with the new environment,*” This means they were struggling to fulfill their responsibilities to follow the rules and comply with requirements for the services given to them.

Heerde and Chiarolli (2019) concurred with this result when they concluded in the research paper that the longer one stayed in the street, the more damaged one became.

The Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura states that behavior is learned by observing and imitating the behavior of others. In the social work parlance, people imitate the behavior they observe in their environment, especially if these behaviors are reinforced in others. The beneficiaries of Oro Alagang Pamilya had strongly imbibed the ways of living in the street, especially for those who had been exposed to the street life at a very early age and had stayed there for an extended period. The learned behavior covers the means of earning a living, guarding turfs, sleeping arrangements, view of persons in authority, and several others. The longer they stayed in the streets, the more they imbibed street life.

This is probably the reason for the handling social workers’ observation that the prolonged beneficiaries were having a hard time letting go of their street life. Getting into the program meant a new set of rules and means of doing things. Street life is something that they are comfortable with. The Oro Alagang Pamilya requires them to do things differently, exacting responsibility for their children and their lives by following a set of rules that they have little or no control over.

Circumstances that led the participants to become beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program

The research participants expressed that they became participants of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program because they were apprehended or rounded up. Participant 1 said that “*di Ma’am, na dakpan mi Ma’am bantug mi naapil sa programa.*” (*We were apprehended/rounded up that is why we became beneficiaries of the program*).

One of them recalled being approached by a social worker one night when the worker’s team was doing monitoring of street children and families around the Divisoria area of Cagayan de Oro City. She said that “*katong first nga kuan nako si Ma’am Social Worker ni duol siya sa ako-a. Gi igna ko niya nga naa siyay gi interview ko niya bahin sa ana mao to ni apil ko sa iyaha. Mao tong gi interview ko niya ni apil ko sa iyang programa.*” (*At first a Social Worker approached me and interviewed me, she told me about her program and then I ended up joining that program*).

During the IDI, when they were asked if they understood why they were apprehended or rounded up, Participant 1 said that “*kanang bawal kuno Ma’am. Bawal daw magpuyo sa karsada.*” (*They said that living in the streets is*

prohibited). Participant 2 added that “duol kuno kaayo mi sa disgrasya kung naa mi sa dalan ma’am. Pero wala man mi lain kapadulngan.” (*We were exposed to danger and accidents when we live in the streets, but we do not have anywhere else to go*).

Interventions that the beneficiaries availed of while in the program. The beneficiaries were provided with numerous services, including transient home, assistance for educational, medical, and legal purposes, rice allowance, a drop-in center for their young children, psychosocial services, training on responsible parenthood, and permanent housing.

The intervention of providing them with a transient home was considered the first step to getting them out of the street. With this intervention, the research participants explained that they were required to look for a house or pad or space to rent with electricity and water supply, and the City Government, through the CSWDO would provide them the funds to rent the place. This would be their temporary home while waiting for a permanent housing unit.

The assistance for educational, medical, and legal purposes, and the rice allowance are provided on a need basis.

The drop-in center intervention is provided to families with very young children (toddlers). The parents can drop their children in the center for about four (4) hours or so, so they can maximize their time in earning a living. This is especially helpful with families with young members without anyone to look after them while they are working.

Psychosocial interventions are given as referral services for family members who are exhibiting any form of negative behavioral manifestations resulting from experiences of violence or abuse of any kind. The staff of the Psychosocial Unit/Section under the CSWDO are the ones providing the services.

Training on responsible parenthood is skill enhancement input given to parents who have been found to have experiences of relationship breakdown with their family members, especially their children, or whom themselves have experienced relationship problems with their parents. The intervention aims to enhance the parental skills of the beneficiaries, which will hopefully enhance their family relationship.

The provision of permanent housing is the ultimate goal of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program. Once the clients have been assessed to have reached self-sufficiency or the capacity to address their own needs by having a sustainable source of income and stable family relationship, they would be referred to the City Government’s program providing permanent housing to families. The payment scheme for the housing program is socialized, hence very affordable.

The case management of the social workers under the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program, does not stop after the provision of permanent housing. They help the families adjust to their new life with their new house.

The difficulties and challenges encountered by the beneficiaries

The difficulties and challenges of the beneficiaries have been articulated in the theme of the difficulty in complying with the requirements of the interventions.

The beneficiaries expressed that it was difficult to comply with the requirements of the interventions, specifically the permanent housing program. When asked about which intervention they find challenging to follow, Participant 1 said, that “permanent housing kay daghan requirements nga lisod kuhaon.” (*The permanent housing because it required plenty of documents that were difficult to acquire*). The same Participant reinforced her answer when she was asked about which intervention they feel that need to be given more time. She articulated that “requirement sa permanent housing ang dapat hatagan ug dugang panahon kay lisod pangkuhaon Ma’am.” (*The requirement for permanent housing should be given more time because we had difficulty complying with those*).

The participants also expressed difficulty acquiring certifications of indigency and birth certificates. When asked about which requirements they had difficulty acquiring, Participant 1 shared that “kuan, ang kanang NSO, kana

pa gyud mga birth, timingan sad nga wala mi kwarta.” (*The birth certificates from NSO, it also happened that we did not have money when it was required from us*).

One handling social worker of the program shared that establishing the beneficiaries’ legal identities proved to be a challenge because several of them have not been registered, including their children. Coupled with low educational attainment, the beneficiaries found it hard to navigate formal institutions such as the barangay or the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), formerly known as National Statistics Office (NSO).

The social worker said that they sometimes had to be the ones to go to the barangay to request for certificate of indigency as proof of their residency and their eligibility to avail of the services under the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program. Most of them were ashamed to approach the people in authority and had difficulty filling out the forms they need for their requests for birth certificates or to apply for late registration.

Feelings of being homeless. The participants revealed similar answers when asked how they felt about being homeless and living on the streets. Their accounts would talk about the hardship of homeless living or life on the streets.

Participant 2 described that “kanang akong na bati ato kay init, kapoy.” (*When we were living in the street, it was hot and tiresome*). She continued her narration saying that “ubos mag banig lang mi ug karton tas ulan sad Ma’am. Magtapok man mi tanan didto tas mag sikit sikit mig higda.” (*Our mat and cardboard from boxes lie low on the ground, so when it rains, we would get wet. We will group together and sleep near each other*). Participant 3 described their harrowing experience of having to beg when they were young saying that “kanang kuan ko usahay kanang kung mulakaw among ginikanan bati-on mig kagutom ana dayun mao ng makatuon dayun mig panglimos sauna mga bata pa kaayo mi,” (*When we were still very young, sometimes when our parents are away and we would get hungry, we learned to beg*).

When asked about how they felt living in the streets, Participant 1 said that “bilar, hago, magsige ug away ang magti-ayon dayon madamay ang mga bata ma’am.” (*We can hardly sleep, it is difficult, my husband and I would always quarrel and our children would be affected*). Participant 2 added that “kapoy, maulan, ang mga gamit walay insaktong kabutangan sige ug kawala.” (*It’s tiring, we would get rained on, our stuff would always get lost because we do not have a secure place to store them*). Participant 3 described life in the street as “walay insaktong CR ug kaligu-anan, maski asa matulog, init ug ulan.” (*We do not have a comfort room, no bathroom, we would sleep anywhere, we were exposed to both rain and the sun*). They would use the paid toilet in the Divisoria area and paid bathroom in the Cogon area. If they did not have much earnings for the day, they would have to prioritize paying for the use of the comfort room. Participant 4 chimed in saying that “walay kauli-an, unya magsige ug dagan dagan kay dakpon sa pulis.” (*We do not have a house to go home to, and we are always on the run because the police are after us*).

The children participants were also asked if they liked living in the streets, and they firmly said no. Child participant 1 said “dili kay kung ting ulan kay maglisod man mi asa mi mubalhin.” (*I do not like it because when it rains it difficult to find a dry place to sleep on*). Child participant 2 supported this statement saying that “dili diay ma’am alang kay ga ulan.” (*I also do not like it, especially when it rains*). Child Participant 3 agreed saying that “dili, kay mag ulan, maglisod ta.” (*I do not like it because when it rains, it is very difficult*).

When asked if the children if they knew the reason why they were living in the streets, Child 1 said “walay kuan, walay katulgan.” (*We do not have anywhere to sleep*). Child 2 has the same answer while Child 3 said “walay kapuy-an.” (*We do not have a house*).

Positive impacts of the interventions and services they availed

To see the impact of the interventions and services the participants availed, they were asked to compare their life prior to becoming beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program and after availing of several interventions and services.

Describing life before becoming a beneficiary of the Oro Alagang Family Program, Participant 1 said that “mamaligya ra mig sigarilyo. Among mga anak pirmi mabutang sa peligro nga mabanggaang o maligsan. Among mga gamit walay insaktong kabutangan, sigeg kawaton.” (*We used to sell cigarettes. Our children are constantly exposed to the danger of getting hit by a car. Our stuff would always get lost because we don't have a proper place to secure them.*) Participant 2 added that “pirmi mi bilar ug pasmo. Hago kay maulana. Walay insaktong katulgan, walay insaktong CR ug kaliguan.” (*We would hardly get any sleep and we always skip meals. It tiring especially when it rains. We don't have a proper place to sleep, we don't have a proper ap agt room and bathroom.*) Participant 3 said as a rejoinder “magsige ug away ang magti-ayon unya ang mapahimungtan ang mga bata.” (*My husband and I would always quarrel and the children would be affected*),

After becoming a beneficiary of the program, Participant 1 described life as “hayahay ang kinabuhi kay naa nay kaulian. Naay suporta ap ag eskuela sa mga bata. (*Life is better because we have a place to go home to. We are provided support for the education of our children.*) Participant 2 said that “ap kay maduolan nga motabang. Karon ap ag mi paglaum nga makahuman among mga anak ug eskuela.” (*We already have somebody to run to that will help. We now have hope that our children will be able to finish their studies.*) Participant 3 added that “ap ag gyud mi insakto nga kapuy-an.” (*We finally have a house to go home to.*)

The intervention on educational assistance is something that the participants appreciated very much. Hence the researcher asked them why it was vital for their children to finish their studies. Participant 1 expressed that “dili namo gusto nga mapareha sila namo. Kung ap nahuman ma-respetuhan ka. Dili ka ma-insultuhan.” (*We do not want them to be like us (homeless and in poverty). If you finished a college degree, you will be respected and will not be insulted.*) Participant 2 added that “kung mahuman makapangita ug insakto nga trabaho.” (*If you finished a college degree you would be able to look to for a proper job.*)

Suggested improvements to the program

When the participants were asked about their opinion of how to improve the program or any intervention, they could offer much.

When asked how they think the services should be implemented to help them more, Participant 1 said, “musunod nalang mi ma'am.” (*We will just follow Ma'am.*)

When they were asked about a service that was not provided to them, but they thought could make their lives better, Participant 1 said, “okay raman ma'am kay, antoson lang gyapon.” (*It is okay Ma'am we will just endure anything.*) Participant 2 chimed in saying, “kung unsay ihatag, okay ra sa amo Ma'am.” (*Whatever will be given, it will be okay for us, Ma'am.*)

When the participants were asked about their thoughts of six to 12 months being enough to help the beneficiaries of the program achieve a better life, Participant 1 said “murag gusto nako ma'am nga dili sila mawala, sa ilang pagsuporta sa amoa, mao lang gyud na ma'am.” (*I don't want them to leave us, to stop supporting us, that it Ma'am.*) Participant 2 said, “mas dugang dugang pagpasabot ug unsa ang responsibilidad kung naa sa programa.” (*We should be made to understand more about our responsibilities when we are in the Program.*)

Researcher's Insights and implications

This study looked into the lived experiences of the prolonged beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program to understand why some of them were staying for an extended period of time as beneficiaries. In conducting the study, I wanted to find out why some families were not able to maximize the services given to them, resulting in their being prolonged beneficiaries of the program. It was hoped that the data gathered and analyzed would enhance the existing program to better serve the homeless populace of Cagayan de Oro City.

In implementing this study, several moments called for reflection on my part as a person and as a social worker.

When I engaged the research participants in an evaluative exercise of the program, I experienced difficulty making them understand the question. I did not get many suggestions or recommendations. Looking at the transcript several times, I realized that they could not evaluate the program because their standard of life was

one that they experienced in the street, earning easy money and not looking very far ahead to tomorrow. This standard is very far from ours or any book that was written about what a decent life is. Our basic standard of living is being able to eat three times a day. For them, once a day is enough, twice, is a lucky day, and thrice is like God smiling on them on that day.

At the end of each day, several of us can indulge in evaluating the day that passed or planning for the next day, or adding items to our bucket lists. To them, every day is a struggle to find the next meal. This is the basic of all needs, and getting nourished is the basic of all rights, and yet it is denied to them.

Being a social worker and engaging with disadvantaged families or individuals has always been a humbling experience. Being a part of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program beneficiaries made me appreciate more every meal I have and the house we have. I cannot imagine sleeping while it rains without roof above my head, dripping wet and the colds seeping through my bones. How harrowing could this be for the children?

From the social work perspective, educating program beneficiaries of a decent standard of living calls for the competence to balance this with teaching them their responsibility to achieve it. When you say you should be able to eat three times a day and have a decent house as shelter, the clients would often think that the government is responsible for giving it to them, thereby espousing dependence. As social workers, our primary responsibility is to teach our clients that their life and how it should be lived is their responsibility. The government is there to catch them or lend them support when they fall into the cracks of crisis or give them a springboard if they did not have any to start a decent life, case in point the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program implemented through DSWD.

Homelessness results from a myriad of interlocking and interconnected factors. The Oro Alagang Pamilya Program, with its ultimate goal of getting families out of the streets and providing them with a decent permanent home, is a step that attempts to start to break these factors. Some families are slowly but surely responding and turning their lives around. However, some others seemed to get glued to the life in the street due to the reasons stated above. Clearly, a different approach is called for help these families truly.

Homeless individuals are a perfect example of a multi-problem client that we talk about in the classroom. Their complicated situations call for the competence of social workers to effectively assess and diagnose the client's problems so they can propose responsive interventions. My salute goes to the social workers working for the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program, who were able to help clients graduate from their homeless life to a "normal life."

The experiences of trauma and the extent of its effect on the client's capacity to utilize help is an interesting area to explore. This can be an area worth putting in time and effort for research.

The effects of trauma and its relationship to the capacity of clients to maximize the help given to them is an area of interest to me and probably to other social workers because most, if not all, clients we serve who come to social welfare and development office or those referred have a history of trauma. It is more interesting because trauma effects are often hidden, and even the clients are not aware of such, but it has a bearing on their capacity to utilize help.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the summary of the significant findings revealed by the results of the research study. This section also contains the recommendations based on the data gathered and processed in the previous section.

This study was conducted to find out the reasons why some beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program were prolonging their state as beneficiaries and were not able to maximize the resources and services given to them. The Oro Alagang Pamilya program is implemented by the City Government of Cagayan de Oro City through the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) for homeless families.

This study is qualitative research using the phenomenological method since it aimed to find out why some families of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program were becoming prolonged beneficiaries despite the given variety of interventions. It explored the lived experiences of the identified prolonged beneficiaries of the program and the difficulties and challenges of the families in the course of their journey as beneficiaries.

The research participants were chosen using a set of inclusion criteria. Four family heads met the inclusion criteria. Furthermore, they were found to be among the pioneering beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya when it was launched. The three (3) handling social workers under the program and the social worker of Mother Theresa Foundation, a city-government-run child institution providing services to the beneficiaries, were also included as research participants for data triangulation and to provide their professional input to the clients' cases. Three children from the selected families were also part of the research participants. Their inclusion was to get a perspective of their condition as homeless, considering that they were the entry points of their parents in becoming a program beneficiary.

Sets of interview guide were made and used during the focused-group discussions (FGD). An FGD was conducted for the family heads while the children were engaged in an in-depth interview. An in-depth interview was also conducted with the family heads to clarify their answers and look deeper into their perspectives.

Another set of interview guide was formulated for the handling social workers of the program and those providing the beneficiaries with services.

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings of this study are stated as:

1. The lived experiences of the participants are capsulized in three themes, experience of trauma, difficulty in complying with requirements, and prolonged stay in the streets. These are also the reasons why they were prolonging their stay in the program as beneficiaries. Their experience of trauma had somehow prevented them from maximizing the services or interventions given to them through the program. The difficulty in complying with requirements was especially true with the permanent housing intervention. The participants found it challenging to acquire birth certificates or certificates of indigency. Foremost because most of them had not been registered. Hence, their legal identity had to be established. Another reason is their difficulty navigating formal institutions such as the barangay or the PSA, either because of shame or because they had difficulty filling out the form to request or apply for late registration. Their low educational attainment could also be attributed to this difficulty.
2. Most of the participants became beneficiaries of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program because they were rounded up/apprehended for staying on the streets. One of them was approached by the social worker and was convinced to join.
3. The beneficiaries were provided with numerous services, including transient home, assistance for educational, medical, and legal purposes, rice allowance, drop-in center for their young children, psychosocial services, training on responsible parenthood, and permanent housing.
4. The difficulties articulated by the beneficiaries while in the program were stated in the difficulty of complying with the requirements. They found it difficult to comply with the requirements of the program especially the permanent housing service. Establishing the clients legal identifies proved to be challenging for both the social workers and the clients. The clients' low educational attainment is also a contributory factor to this difficulty.
5. Generally, the research participants did not like their lives in the street. They found it difficult and hard. However, they could not seem to let it go entirely because their prolonged exposure had let them deeply imbibed street life, meaning the need to survive on a day-to-day basis and earn a living through sheer wit and perseverance.

6. Becoming a beneficiary of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program changed the clients' lives for the better. They now have someone, referring to the social workers, whom they can run to and help them in times of need. They specially made mention of the educational assistance provided to their children. They appreciated the permanent housing saying that they finally had a proper place to come home to at the end of the day. However, the educational support provided to their children allowed them to hope that life would become better not for them but their children. Their children finishing a college degree means not following the hard life on the streets. It means being respected and not insulted; it means getting the chance to apply for a proper job.
7. The participants did not give many recommendations or suggestions to improve the program. The researcher found it challenging to engage them in an evaluative discussion of the services or interventions under the program. This is probably because their standard of living is the one they lived in the street. Eating three meals a day is considered a luxury and not a requirement. Getting by with what the day would offer is the life that they knew. So, whatever is given them, in terms of intervention or service, is something that they would just receive with gratitude. However, they requested that the social workers helping them should continue to support them. They also expressed that the requirements for permanent housing should be given more time to comply with because they find it difficult to acquire.

Looking into the lived experiences of the research participants revealed that life on the streets is hard and dangerous. This was clearly described by the research participants, and all of them lived in this constant hardship and danger for a very long time. Their circumstances and experiences living in the streets made it difficult for them to transition to a life with structure and responsibilities.

Recommendations

Knowing the reasons why some families are becoming prolonged beneficiaries gave insights into the complexity of the clients' lives. While the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program is making headways in taking families out of the streets and into permanent homes to live decent lives, the call to address homelessness in the City of Cagayan de Oro is proving to be a pressing concern.

Upon analyzing the data from the study, the following are recommended:

For the Program implementers of the Oro Alagang Pamilya Program:

1. Creation of an inter-agency taskforce to address the issues/problems of homeless families in Cagayan de Oro City.
2. Creation of a new program standard categorizing homeless clients based on the severity of the history of trauma they experienced and the duration of their stay in the streets. Those with severe trauma and have stayed longer in the streets should be considered for a more extended period of stay in the program and with interventions targeting their history of trauma.

For the Neighboring Local Government Units:

1. Conduct policy advocacy to push for a legislation to address the concerns of the homeless populace of the city.
2. Enhancement of the organizational set-up of the program to institutionalize it.

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