

Villagers' Coping Strategies: The Case of Northern Samar

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Abstract

This study analyzed the coping strategies of poor family-4Ps' family-head-recipients in four geographical areas in Northern Samar, Philippines

Through purposive sampling, the researcher described the coping strategies of families in relation to income generation, provision of basic needs and family spending. The power patterns among poor families were also examined. It also discussed the coping mechanisms of poor families in terms of income generation, provision of basic needs and family spending.

Among the parents' emergent role on income generation, giving of the whole income for the family was frequently practiced while accepting immediate paid labor and leaving the major source of income was least or occasionally practiced. On the provision of basic needs the frequently performed role was the daily preparation of food by the parents and the least frequently practiced was the provision of regular budget for food. On family spending, the frequently performed role was that the parents make the final decision, making authority and the occasionally practiced was that, the parents don't tell the family on significant matters.

Among the family power patterns, the frequently played was the voice of the father is the law in the family while the least manifested power pattern was that, the father is the head but not the breadwinner, thus obedient to the breadwinner.

In terms of income generation, family coping strategies of poor families in Northern Samar, the frequently practiced strategies was generally, the culture of sharing is observed in the family while the seldom practiced was a member of the family has to stop schooling and work to augment the income of the family. On the provision of basic needs, the occasionally practiced was that the father doubles his major task to support and satisfy the basic needs of the family while the seldom practiced is, the eldest child of the family has to go to an urban/city area for a job to finance the basic needs of the family. Any member of the family is consulted for decision on spending matter is the occasionally shown coping strategy while, in all family affairs, decision on spending is always put upon the shoulders of the close friends was the seldom coping strategy shown.

Keywords: Family role, coping strategies, poor families

Introduction

The concept of poor family has standard social science definitions; however, the word poor family in this

research study would mean those whose monthly family income is set within the bracket of poor by respective government agencies like the NEDA. Poor family by social context could be projected as a scene of tragedy, struggle and shame; some others consider it a venue of hopelessness.

This study brings in the voice of the unheard in the desire to pushing up front the voices of the poor families of Northern Samar (the researched). The researcher being a social scientist put more premiums on the voices of the marginalized and their roles and their coping strategies to surface. But why Northern Samar; and why the poor people? Educational management must not be confined only in the formal academic environment, but the school must be radiated to areas with unheard voices. This ushers the opportunity of curving education-based intervention to welcome poverty eradication as the next concept and concern for future research studies.

To speak of social structure is to speak of differentiation among people/families, as social structure is defined by distinctions people make, explicitly or implicitly, in their role relations. No other discipline undertakes this important task, and sociologists have too long neglected it (Costello 1983). The researcher would be failing in a great dismay if her being a Social Science teacher one of the lowly groups of the society; the poor, will not be given a little concern in terms of research, thus; this study.

Family members therefore are enmeshed daily in a network of family interaction. Many beliefs, notions and ideas about the entirety of the family have sprung from daily experiences and observations from within, outside and/or from other families. The family is so close and familiar to anyone that we feel we already know everything about it. However, there is still a need to stand back and view the family critically from the outside because personal experiences are very limited and may not be representative of other families in the larger society (Medina 2001). There is a need therefore of assessing what roles poor families have in the real life setting. Results will then form part of more precise information and broader generalizations about how and what functions and responsibilities poor families play in the real context with specific focus to Northern Samar.

Essential is education to development that access to basic education is now considered a human right, and not merely an ingredient in the recipe for economic development. The right to education is recognized. Article 26 which is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights further strengthens that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. With these, parents have the prior right to choose

the kind of education that shall be given to their children (United Nations, 1948).

Poverty situation in Eastern Visayas steadily worsened for almost six years. In 2003, it ranked 7th and 5th very recently in terms of severity among the 17 regions all throughout the country. Magnitude of poor families in the region has increased between 2003 and 2009 bringing the total number of poor families to 287,156 or 1.7 million individuals. Northern Samar is categorized by the National Statistical Coordinating Board same board as “cluster 1”, considered as the poorest provinces in the region. This goes with the findings that 1 in every 7 families in the region cannot even meet the basic food requirements (NEDA Report undated).

As reported in the provincial profile of Northern Samar, the province is the new entrant in the list of 10 poorest provinces with poverty incidence of 52.2%. It ranked number 7 in the entire country, while first in the region (Provincial Profile, 2009). Having this incidence of poverty, it is but a logical point for research especially for a Social Scientist like the researcher to consider what the emergent roles poor families have in the real functional context of poor families in Northern Samar. Data from the same source noted that 3 out of 10 families in Northern Samar are not capable of providing the basic food requirements. With this scenario at present, to whom shall the blame be put? Is it to the parents' shoulder, or the children's? What are the existing functions of the family members that may or may not contribute to the welfare of the family? These are among the concerns of Social Science, thus fascinated the researcher's interest and the discipline where academic strength comes and push that intellectual urge to design one, thus this study.

Method

Mix methods were used in this study. A researcher made survey questionnaire helped analyze the roles played by the different members of the family; and to ensure validity of the data, face to face interview was employed.

The members of the poor families have their construction of what and how is it being poor. This means that information and knowledge are but realities and realities are just out there in multiple structures.

Furthermore, the use of qualitative method, the interview, gave the marginalized poor their own voice the accumulation of their construction of the varied roles they use to really play in the accomplishment of the family's functions; making them visible and enabling their version of reality not an outsider's view and perspective to be heard and known (Hugo and Thompson, 1995:53 as cited by Cabatac, 2009). It also shows recognition not only of their knowledge but also of them as knowledge-bearers, generators and source.

Interviews

Informal interviews were used in the collection of the data. The informal interview which is not usually favored and preferred by many informants, was done while family members had no major family activity and or during break from their work. This technique ensured naturalness and authenticity of responses as the informants were on their natural setting and environment. Conversations in an atmosphere like this more often than not lead the informants to recall and relate their rich past experiences with the present knowledge of their roles in the family. This authentically gave the researcher the excellent data as observation came along this technique. Data gathered employing this technique was validated through the key informant interviews.

For the key informant (KI) interviews, the reconnaissance visits were conducted upon approval of the research proposal. This reconnaissance visits gave the researcher enough opportunity to identify key informants.

Results and Discussion

Roles of Family Members

Basically parents of every family have their respective roles attached and expected of them. This part discusses the roles of parents in relation to income generation, provision of basic needs and family spending.

Income Generation

Among the parent's roles on income generation, “The parents give the whole income for the family” ranked first. This means that parents earn entirely for their families. “The parents observe thriftiness with regards to unnecessary spending” ranked second while “The family members work all throughout the waking hours to earn money” ranked third. It can be inferred that really parents spent just for the need of the family.

On the other hand, the least or occasionally performed roles were “The parents accept immediate paid labor and leave the major source of income”, “The family members avoid over spending”, and “The parents give only a part of the income for the family”. It can clearly mean that parents avoid overspending to prevent them from doing extra work and concentrate more on their major livelihood strategy.

TABLE 3.1
Role – Income Generation

Roles	Mean	Rank	Inter.
The family members give the whole income for the family.	4.41	1	Frequent
The family members observe thriftiness with regards to unnecessary spending.	4.14	2	Frequent
The family members work all throughout the waking hours to earn money.	4.07	3	Frequent
The family members dominate much of the earnings for the family.	4.00	4	Frequent
The family members work 7 days a week and 8 hours a day.	3.81	5	Frequent
The family members do not engage in any vice to ensure that income is intact for the family.	3.80	6	Frequent

The family members accept extra work whenever possible to ensure enough income for the family	3.54	7	Frequent
The family members give only a part of the income for the family.	3.43	8	Occasional
The family members avoid over spending.	3.33	9	Occasional
The family members accept immediate paid labor and leave the major source of income.	2.94	10	Occasional

Provision of Basic Needs

In terms of the roles in the provision of basic needs, the first three frequently performed roles were; “The parents allocate budget to start up the education of the young”, “The parents prepare the food daily”, and “The parents are responsible in the construction of the house. Through these findings, it can be inferred that really parents are responsible in providing the basic needs of their family.

On the contrary, the least frequently performed roles in the provision of basic needs were, “The parents provide regular budget for food”, “The parents provide all the needs of the family” and “The parents provide all the other needs of the family”. Bringing back the discussion into the monthly and source income of the family, these two factors may lead to the least performance of such roles. It can be inferred therefore, that having a meager income, parents can hardly exercise their responsibilities in terms of providing what the family needs.

Family Spending

In terms of family spending, Table 3.3 shows that the frequently performed roles were “Closely monitor when family members are doing tasks”, “Share much of the responsibilities”, “Tell the members of the family what has to be done and how to do it”, “Lead the family activities”, “Affairs of the family are our responsibility”. This means that parents are authorities, guide and direct the family in terms of spending the resources of the family, however to the utmost involvement of family members in the spending affairs of the family.

The parents least or occasionally performed the following spending emergent roles; “On significant matter/s about the family, I don’t tell my family”, “Make consider suggestions made by other members of the family”, “Ask for the ideas and inputs of the family members on plans of up-coming projects”. These findings still adheres to the basic culture of the Filipino family of reminding family members of their weaknesses with the end in view of properly guiding and directing family members to the best path of life.

TABLE 3.2
Role – Provision of Basic Needs

Roles	Mean	Rank	Inter.
The parents allocate budget to start up the education of the young.	4.54	1	Always
The parents prepare the food daily.	4.53	2	Always
The parents are responsible in the construction of the house.	4.53	3	Always
The parents plan out for the education of the young.	4.48	4	Frequent

The parents provide the food according to its availability.	4.46	5	Frequent
The parents are responsible for the clothing needs of the family.	4.46	6	Frequent
The parents manage the repair and maintenance of the house.	4.42	7	Frequent
The parents provide all the other needs of the family.	4.4	8	Frequent
The parents provide all the needs of the family.	4.31	9	Frequent
The parents provides regular budget for food.	4.25	10	Frequent

Family Power Patterns

This part traces how the patriarchal or matriarchal role is played in the family. It was found out that the power patterns which were frequently played were “The voice of the father is the law in the family”, “Headship or dominance and authority was after being widowed or separated”, “The father respects the decision of the partner”. This brings to an inference that no matter what, the father is still the head of the family, making the final decisions that affect the family. Furthermore, in the absence of the father, the power of the mother is equated to that of the father.

On the other hand the least or occasionally manifested power patterns were “The father is the head but not the breadwinner, thus obedient to the breadwinner”, “The voice of the mother is the law in the family”, “Accomplishes necessary functions that of the father and mother”. This pushes to a clear inference that among poor families of Northern Samar the father is never dependent on the other members of the family in the performance of these roles, which may imply that they (fathers) are responsible in the performance of what are expected of them as heads of the family.

TABLE 4
Power Patterns

Power Patterns	Mean	Rank	Inter
The voice of the father is the law in the family.	4.32	1	F
Headship or dominance and authority was after being widowed or separated.	4.27	2	F
The father respects the decision of the partner.	4.07	3	F
Decisive authority, decision-making and managing of the household is that of the father.	4.06	4	F
Democracy is observed in the family.	3.94	5	F
The dictum, “Follow what I say, do not follow what I do” is observed in the family.	3.88	6	F
Monopolize the power and authority due to the temporary absence, disability, etc. of the father.	3.86	7.5	F
Mother maintains a “walk a tight rope” in the exercise of her role as head of the family.	3.86	7.5	F
Leadership, control and authority are nobody’s autonomy.	3.76	9	F
Power and leadership is bestowed on the shoulders of the father	3.75	10	F
Power is equated to men in the management of the family.	3.67	11	F
Extrinsic assistance makes the family survive.	3.65	12	F

The father respects the voice of the children and other members of the family.	3.62	13	F
The eldest child leads and manages the affairs of the family.	3.44	14	O
Every member of the family runs his/her own life.	3.34	15	O
Democracy is observed in the family.	3.32	16	O
The mother respects the decision of the other members of the family.	3.31	17	O
Accomplishes necessary functions that of the father and mother.	3.3	18	O
The voice of the mother is the law in the family.	3.19	19	O
The father is the head but not the breadwinner, thus subservient to the bread winner.	2.67	20	O

Family Coping Strategies –Income Generation

Table 5.1 shows the mechanisms of how poor families cope with their income generation, provision of food and family spending.

Among the coping strategies of poor families, the frequently practiced strategies were, “Generally, the culture of sharing is observed in the family”, “The father accepts extra works to augment income” and “Married children shares financial burden with the family”. This means that the father has to find ways and means to earn a living. Undeniably, the Filipino culture of sharing still freshly lingers in the lives of the poor families in Northern Samar.

Least or seldom practiced on the other hand were, “Depend on dole out from neighbors, relatives and friends”, “A member of the family has to stop schooling and work to augment the income of the family”, and “Ask regular financial contribution from the children whether married or not”. This clearly means that in the culture of sharing, dependency from other families with no relations is not cultivated. No one is sacrificed of his/her education in the process of providing/adding income to the family which runs counter to what had been observed by the researcher in some of the visited families who are 4Ps recipients.

TABLE 5.1
Coping Mechanisms - Income Generation

Coping Strategies	Mean	Rank	Int.
Generally, the culture of sharing is observed in the family.	4.21	1	F
The father accepts extra work to augment income.	3.57	2	F
Married children shares financial burden with the family.	3.02	3	O
Everybody in the family enters extra work for extra pay.	2.81	4	O
The mother accepts regular extra work from neighbors and other people.	2.8	5	O
Married children helps in the generation of income for the family.	2.6	6	O
Children schooling are made to work every Saturdays and Sundays or as the need arises.	2.4	7	S
Ask regular financial contribution from the children whether married or not.	2.22	8	S
A member of the family has to stop schooling and work to augment the income of the family.	1.89	9	S

Depend on dole out from neighbors, relatives and friends.	1.88	10	S
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Provision of Basic Needs

Looking at the ranking of the coping strategies under provision of basic needs, it can be gleaned in Table 5.2 that the occasionally practiced were “The father doubles his major task to support and satisfy the basic needs of the family”, “The mother accepts extra work like doing laundry, caring for other family’s children on a daily payment basis”, and “Borrow money and other non-cash in exchange of future paid labor”. It can be inferred that both parents in the family worked hard for them to provide the basic needs of the family. Furthermore, the relatives are best support system of the family in the provision of basic needs.

“The eldest child of the family has to go to an urban/city area for a job to finance the basic needs of the family”, “Any member of the family has to go to an urban/city area for a job to finance the basic needs of the family”, and “The mother works in the city and sends money to finance the basic and other needs of the family”. Were least or seldom practiced/done in the provision of basic need of the poor families of the province. This may be because of the satisfaction of the family on the income earned from livelihood strategy which they are used to. Looking back at the data in Table 1.4 the major source of income of the majority is farming, thus an inference can be drawn that the same suffice the basic needs of the family.

TABLE 5.2
Coping Strategies- Provision of Basic Needs

Coping Strategies	Mean	Rank	Inter.
The father doubles his major task of money making to support and satisfy the basic needs of the family.	3.33	1	Occasional
The mother accepts extra work like doing laundry, caring for other family’s children on a daily payment basis.	2.78	2	Occasional
Borrow money and other non-cash in exchange of future paid labor.	2.66	3	Occasional
Resort to borrowing money and other non-cash needs from relatives.	2.59	4	Occasional
Older children are made to work on non-school days like pedicab driving, being sent to errands by relatives, well-to-do families, etc.	2.55	5	Occasional
Resort to borrowing money and other non-cash from neighbors.	2.37	6	Seldom
Borrow money and other non-cash in exchange of any errand to any member of the family.	2.34	7	Seldom
The mother works in the city and sends money to finance the basic and other needs of the family.	2.27	8	Seldom
Any member of the family has to go to an urban/city area for a job to finance the basic needs of the family.	2.23	9	Seldom
The eldest child of the family has to go to an urban/city area for a job to finance the basic needs of the family.	2.17	10	Seldom

Family Spending

In terms of family spending table 5.3 revealed the coping mechanisms occasionally done were “Any member of the family is consulted for decision on spending matter”, “Never leave the children unattended by either a father or a mother”, and “ In the absence of both parents, a specific member is assigned to manage the family spending activities”.

On the contrary Table 5.3 shows that the least or seldom shown coping mechanisms on family spending were “In all family affairs, decision on spending is always put upon the shoulders of the close friends”, “In all family affairs, decision on spending is always put upon the shoulders of non-relatives” and “In all family affairs, decision on spending is always put upon the shoulders of the close relatives”.

The findings finally meant that decisions relative to family spending were the major task of the parents as well as the other members of the family.

TABLE 3.3
Roles - Family Spending

Roles	Mean	Rank	Inter.
Closely monitor when family members are doing tasks.	4.2	1.5	Frequent
Share much of the responsibilities.	4.2	1.5	Frequent
Tell the members of the family what has to be done and how to do it.	4.16	4	Frequent
Lead the family activities.	4.16	4	Frequent
Affairs of the family are our responsibility.	4.16	4	Frequent
Make the final decision-making authority in terms of spending within the family.	4.15	6	Frequent
Allow family members to carry out the decisions to do the tasks.	4.14	7	Frequent
Allow family members to use their creativity and ingenuity in solving family problems.	4.07	8.5	Frequent
They command and they do the command.	4.07	8.5	Frequent
Give freedom to exercise self-direction and let them show their self-worth.	4.06	10	Frequent
When there are differences in role expectations, we work with them to resolve the differences.	4.04	11	Frequent
Allow family members to determine and decide what needs to be done and how to do it.	3.99	12	Frequent
When things go wrong, they usually think and do strategies to keep things running on schedule.	3.95	13	Frequent
Delegate tasks to the members of the family.	3.93	14	Frequent
When something goes wrong, s/he tells the family members that a procedure is not working correctly/properly, and establishes a new one.	3.92	15	Frequent
For every major decision, they ask approval of each member of the family.	3.9	16	Frequent
Create an environment in which every family member is part of any activity of the family. Allow them to participate in the decision-making process.	3.87	17	Frequent
They get my family members' advice.	3.83	18	Frequent
Expect the family to do tasks related to objectives, household affairs, community involvement and political affairs.	3.72	19.5	Frequent
Direct or threats family members with punishment in order to get them achieve the	3.72	19.5	Frequent

family affairs/activities.			
Always employ win-win decision.	3.69	21	Frequent
Use leadership power to help the family members grow.	3.64	22	Frequent
Command and never do the share in doing the tasks.	3.62	23	Frequent
When a family member makes a mistakes s/he is/will be/given a corresponding punishment.	3.5	24	Frequent
When a family member makes a mistakes, I tell him/her not to ever do it again.	3.49	25	Occasional
Ask for the ideas and inputs of the family members on plans of up-coming projects, etc.	3.47	26	Occasional
Make consider suggestions made by other members of the family.	3.29	27	Occasional
On significant matter/s about the family, I don't tell my family.	2.98	28	Occasional

Conclusions and Implications

A majority of the poor families belonged to the absolute poverty level, which can be implied that they have less financial potential and that they have roots which/who are poor families, too. Educated people have higher income potential, and are better able to improve the quality of their lives.

A greater majority were nuclear families, with special skills whose economic status speak up of their being poor. Their special skills made them resilient to social misfortunes. This implies that their being poor seem to be handed down from the wrong discipline of their parents.

Poor families as they are, parents are but responsible in the performance of their patriarchal and matriarchal responsibilities. It implies therefore that poor families have the heart of willingness to solve problems and overcome them according to their skills and experiences.

Every member of the poor family especially the parents have their specific responsibilities. Power patterns emerge according to their experiences and occurrences in life. It implies that respect and awareness of family members' responsibilities made poor families survive the turmoils of life.

Poor families have their unique and strategic coping mechanisms in generating income, providing the family's basic needs and family spending. This implies that how poor families are, they instantly design mechanisms for them to be resilient to occurrences and circumstances.

Various parameters interrelate with the emergent roles of the parents of poor families. This implies the need for poor families to be more than aware of various coping mechanisms, the occurrence of unexpected power patterns and give utmost attention in the improvement of the quality of their lives.



To speak of social structure is to speak of differentiation among people/families, as social structure is defined by distinctions people make, explicitly or implicitly, in their role relations.