(REVIEW ARTICLE)

Unheard voices: A qualitative study on the lived experiences of street vagrants in Cabanatuan city

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of street vagrants in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, aiming to foster empathy and a deeper comprehension of their lives. It investigates the underlying causes of their perceived deviation from societal norms and evaluates the impact of their living conditions. Employing a qualitative research design, purposive sampling was utilized to conduct semi-structured interviews with city street vagrants across four selected barangays. The participants disclosed various factors contributing to their vagrancy: economic instability, displacement, and familial discord. Homelessness exposed them to insecurity in shelter, harsh weather conditions, and social ostracization, compounding their challenges. Immediate attention is warranted for food security, necessitating assistance programs and systemic interventions. Notwithstanding the difficulties encountered, participants displayed resilience, drawing strength from spirituality and a sense of familial duty, enabling them to surmount obstacles. The analysis revealed a spectrum of perspectives, some aspiring for education while others grappled with hopelessness amidst uncertainty. This study acknowledges the impact of homelessness on individuals' perceptions of their future beyond tangible adversities. It provides an understanding of the difficult struggles experienced by people living on the streets and emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive support structures and systemic interventions, aiming to forge enduring solutions and alleviate the hardships faced by this vulnerable demographic.

Keywords: Economic Instability; Familial Discord; Homelessness; Insecurity; Resilience; Social Ostracization; Spirituality; Systemic Interventions; Vagrancy

1. Introduction

1.1. "Idle, shiftless, and worthless man who did not attempt to follow any legal calling, and whose habits of life were those of an immoral and dissolute good for nothing." - Justice Carson describing a person guilty of vagrancy

Before its decriminalization in 2012, vagrancy was considered a crime according to Article 202 of the Revised Penal Code. This rule infringes on street vagrants' liberties, such as the right to association, and the ability to move around and travel, which are concepts of crime that have been contested by human rights defenders worldwide. Former President Ninoy Aquino sign

ed a Republic Act to repeal the aforementioned anti-vagrancy statute since it was seen as *"outdated"* and *"anti-poor."* Sen. Estrada concurred, arguing that the vagrancy legislation has been used by authorities to oppress the impoverished and the homeless. They both supported Republic Act 10158, which decriminalizes vagrancy. Although it was clear that it has been recognized by law, the injustice surrounding street vagrants remains in the perception of individuals across the country.

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In Nueva Ecija, specifically in an urban area such as Cabanatuan City, discrimination toward street vagrants has been alarmingly normalized. They frequently have limited access to numerous locations and areas that people who live in a home visit regularly, such as restaurants, stores, and malls, for instance. Their community often isolates them because of the stigma inflicted on their names. They are frequently ignored by onlookers or made targets of stares, which only reinforces their status as outsiders by keeping them invisible or only making them visible through negative attention. Its outcome rests in people overlooking their daily hardships. Many were arrested due to people accusing them of stealing or provoking them. The public should acknowledge that arresting or charging people who do not have a roof under their heads does not help end vagrancy. Tearing down encampments on public property where people try to survive does not allow people to overcome misery. It simply adds to the misery.

In a study by T. Fuseini and M. Daniel (2017), people tend to perceive vagrants with prejudice without looking at these people's economic and socio-political phases in society and the common problems they often experience when it comes to health. Vagrant's lived experiences do have commonalities and differences. Their daily survival and the causes that pushed them towards vagrancy have created and shaped their common subjective interpretation of their life in the street. Several researchers have conducted a study using phenomenological thought to elucidate the lives of vagrants.

In the study of Tufeiru (2016), he found out that the condition of begging was seen as degrading by society. Also, he argued that vagrants found their begging life more understandable as they saw themselves as poor, and resorting to begging would give them economic relief. In addition to limited social and occupational participation, homeless young people are at risk for poor mental health outcomes and difficulty transitioning to adult roles, which further influence the cycle of homelessness and limit young people's options for their future. Due to the reality that they experience barriers to accessing formal health and social services and often lack informal support systems, homeless young people may be unable to take advantage of opportunities to develop life and work skills or work toward residential stability. (Simpson et al., 2018)

Child beggars faced physical and psychological abuse, which can have long-term consequences. Child beggars often face physical stressors and poor living conditions and may be beaten by their parents, marabouts, or mallams. Verbal aggression can lead to psychiatric and temperamental problems, cognitive impairment, and low self-esteem in child beggars. Children's involvement in begging can have long-term effects, such as making them prone to criminality and victimization.

Homeless people are at a disproportionately greater risk for acute and chronic illnesses. There is a body of evidence suggesting that homelessness is linked to various medical and mental issues. At the same time, it is difficult to collect precise data on the incidence of certain illnesses among homeless persons compared to those among non-homeless people. Recent Social and Demographic Research Institute data and specific published papers in the medical literature demonstrate this. (Watson et al., 2015).

According to the study by S. Stephenson (2017), homelessness can be viewed from two primary perspectives: a lack of housing or a breakdown of 'normal' social relations. It has been argued that the concept of social exclusion encapsulates various factors affecting vulnerable groups in capitalist societies, making it a useful framework for studying homelessness. Santiago and Santos (2022) emphasize that the exclusion of homeless individuals encompasses several interconnected dimensions: exclusion from the labor market, social citizenship rights, and ideological and housing exclusion. Much of the literature on social responses to homelessness, including works by Santos (2023), focuses on poverty and the lack of stable employment. Homeless individuals are often perceived as 'undeserving,' 'dangerous,' or 'disreputable' poor. Extremes of poverty, unemployment, or involvement in morally and legally questionable occupations (such as begging or prostitution) lead to social exclusion, stigmatization, and persecution.

Contrary to perceptions of vagrant street children, most belong to regular families; however, despite having families, more than fifty percent of the children do not live with them. Some, however, were found to return to their families for their night stay, which is not a regular habit. The family institution becomes relevant in this context as it is the first level of contact of a child with society. When the family cannot afford protection and care for children, they develop problems of adjustment with society. Children become vagrants due to many reasons, some are circumstantial, and some are deliberate. Broken homes, dysfunctional families, displacement from home due to riots and natural calamities, and being forcibly separated from their families due to poverty abduction are some reasons for the circumstances under which children are forced out of the protection of their families. Children sometimes fall into bad company and make drastic decisions to leave their families. Hence, children as young as 12 years have been found to have run away from home with friends and other associates. Many of the vagrant street children are seen to have rural origins and find themselves in urban locations.

Homeless youth generally have more negative experiences with family relationships than their housed peers. Homeless youth usually run away from home because of family violence, substance use, and conflicts. Despite the prevailing belief that homeless youth have little family contact and that their social networks are mainly made up of transient peer connections, research indicates that many homeless youths report family connections. They receive instrumental and emotional support from parents and family members. As research indicates, low levels of family cohesion and high levels of family conflicts are associated with poor treatment adherence for suicide treatment. High levels of family network satisfaction are likely to strengthen the treatment outcomes among homeless youth.

In the study by Fiorati et al. (2017), their interviewees provided a life project with three elements, including a desire for housing and employment. Nonetheless, three people said they would die; another three thought they would certainly die if their living circumstances did not change. The remaining people displayed uncertain life plans, some of which contained insightful language referencing anguish and skepticism in the options provided by health services and social welfare aid, together with a desire for change.

In the study of Moore, G., Gerdtz, M., & Manias, E. (2013) homelessness affects men and women, young and old, singles, and families. Homelessness can be short-term, usually after a crisis, to long-term and exist over a lifetime. Homeless people may have no place of abode, live in a boarding house, or reside in unstable housing. While health issues for homeless people are equally varied and complex, all are characterized by poverty and lack of secure permanent accommodation. The homeless population comprises people of all ages; men, women, and children. These individuals often have a history of chaotic family situations, drug-related problems, mental health issues, chronic disease, and intellectual impairment. Due to the chaotic nature of their lifestyles and the chronic nature of their illnesses, homeless people can habitually attend an emergency department when in crisis. These people often perceive that they have nowhere else to go or do not have the resources to access alternative services when they experience a psychosocial problem.

Homeless people experience difficulty accessing health services, and health service providers have limited resources, flexibility, and understanding to help the homeless. As a result of these difficulties, "the homeless have more health impediments and disabilities, and experience higher mortality and morbidity rates than the general population." Individuals who are economically and socially disadvantaged suffer from a range of medical conditions due to increased susceptibility to risk factors, including smoking, malnutrition, alcoholism, and illicit drug use. This increased susceptibility leads to exposure to disease-causing agents and reduced host resistance.

According to the study by K. Rewathy (2021), homelessness is more prevalent in developed countries compared to developing countries. Hence, more research on people experiencing homelessness is being carried out in the Western world compared to developing countries, especially South Asian countries. Scholars have found various problems homeless people face from different perspectives - health issues (Kiser & Hulton, 2018), social issues (Mabhala et al., 2017), and economic problems. Some scholars stated that the prevalence of homelessness is universal. Many women and families, including young children, are homeless because of insufficient housing and resources. Homelessness exists in all countries and most communities in the world. Therefore, it is known that homelessness is the most prominent social problem that the whole world faces in the twenty-first century (Alowalmer, 2018). Health and sanitization of the homeless communities are also considered in some research. Homeless mothers continued to have significantly less social support and mental guidance. Mothers with a history of abuse and poor social integration were likelier to have children with persistent mental health problems. Few studies have tried to find the causes of homelessness, such as deviancy in behavior, social, economic, health, and ignorance. The homeless community is sometimes considered undeserving of support; they are frequently stigmatized as mentally ill and out of control and viewed by some as personally responsible for their situation. Most researchers said that homelessness was a terrible issue in the USA. Homelessness began to emerge as a US national public policy and global issue in the 1980s due to widening income disparities in the developed world and the developing world, growing urbanization, and natural disasters. Which gradually becomes a problem in developing countries as well. Very few studies were conducted in Sri Lanka related to urban homelessness. Rewathy (2018), in her work regarding the homeless, managed to explore the challenges faced by the homeless people, which included mental illness, economic loss, substance abuse, deteriorating physical health, and lack of access to healthcare and hospitals. Furthermore, she found in her research that elders are mostly abandoned on the street and willfully become homeless due to their mental health issues, family problems, lifestyle changes, and physical disabilities. So, the study only focused on the causes and problems of homeless people but not the requirements of the community.

In the Philippine setting, government agencies and several administrations have formed and implemented numerous laws and policies which would help to control and minimize the rapidly increasing cases of such a phenomenon. The Anti-Mendicancy Law or Presidential Decree No. 1563 was issued by Former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos in

1978 and was designed to control and eradicate the condition of beggars and street vagrants in the country. Under this provision, those minors who are caught begging will be in the custody of the Department of Social Services. Those who are used for begging will be rescued and adults who are caught will be imposed with heavy fines and can be imprisoned and those people who give alms to the beggars are also accountable for being fined (RetiredinSamar.com, 2016).

Vagrancy is a major contemporary social problem that the world faces, specifically in third-world countries such as the Philippines. Vagrancy cases are widespread all over the country; it is estimated that there are 22.8 million Filipinos in Metro Manila who are homeless (Orosa, 2014). Despite the social welfare services, vagrancy still remains a big social problem in the Philippines. In the study of Aoki (2013), it was reported that there were 1,581 persons in 2008, 1,571 persons in 2009, and 1,091 persons in 2010 arrested by the Manila Police District for vagrancy in the City of Manila.

As stated in the study by Dator, L., Pedro, A., and Reyes, J. (2018) about the Live Experiences of Badjao Street Children in Cabanatuan City, Philippines, many Street vagrants in Nueva Ecija belong to the Sama-Badjao community. During the early rise of the Bajao people in Nueva Ecija, their ordinary residence was the Central Transport Terminal of Cabanatuan City and the streets of the town proper. With a large number of families from the tribe, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has devised a program called The DSWD for Sama-Badjaos and its Core Shelter Assistance Program (CSAP) for housing and development which had the 391 Badjao families as the pilot beneficiaries in early 2017. The program started the elevation and decency of the lives of the Badjao people and their children. But despite the move of the government to assist these families, many have not stopped working in the streets to beg, allowing children to stay on the roads with the risks of running for jeepneys. Children of the Badjao community are primarily with other children begging for coins, giving letters of solicitation in white envelopes and folders, and singing in exchange for cash or any amount.

Additionally, a study by A. Sagbisal, J. Acebeque, and J. Bretana (2019) showed that the public view of vagrants is often one-sided, negative, and internal. Vagrant's lived experiences do have commonalities and differences. Their daily survival and the causes that pushed them towards vagrancy have created and shaped their common subjective interpretation of their life in the street. Moreover, Aoki (2013) argued that the street policy of the local and national government also significantly influenced the increasing number of vagrants, wherein due to the growing cases of squatter eviction, the condition of vagrancy had also increased.

The researchers undertook the study with the belief that cultivating empathy, particularly for society's most vulnerable members, such as street vagrants, is essential for individuals, including social workers and other professionals. The study aimed to foster a deeper understanding of the lives of street vagrants, illuminating the reasons behind their engagement in actions considered deviant due to their inability to conform to societal norms, and to explore how their living conditions influence their perception of life. This perspective aligns with the findings of A. Sagbisal, J. Acebeque, and J. Bretana in 2019, which highlighted that street vagrants are often perceived negatively and marginalized by society due to a one-dimensional and superficial view.

The researchers aimed to give street vagrants an opportunity to share their life experiences and articulate their hopes amidst adversity. The study sought to address gaps in previous research by focusing on the occupations and incomes of homeless participants, aspects not extensively explored before. Examining their economic circumstances provides a more nuanced understanding of their challenges, offering insights for more targeted interventions and policies.

Additionally, the study aimed to raise awareness within the broader community about a segment of the population often overlooked. These individuals, frequently found at the fringes of society, seek opportunities for progress in an environment too vast to be called home. The study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the life experiences of street vagrants in Cabanatuan City, addressing the following questions: What are the lived experiences of street vagrants? How does being a street vagrant affect their living conditions? How do street vagrants see their lives ten years from now?

2. Methodology

The study employed a case study and phenomenological method, focusing on an in-depth examination of specific instances to understand the complexities and dynamics of street vagrancy. The phenomenological approach aimed to explore and comprehend the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals, gaining insight into the meanings they ascribe to their situations. The research was conducted in four barangays in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija—Brgy. Hermogenes Concepcion, Brgy. Padre Burgos, Brgy. Mabini Extension, and Brgy. Sangitan West—chosen due to the substantial number of vagrants observed begging for assistance in these areas. The sampling procedure involved purposive sampling to select participants most suited for the study, ensuring that qualitative responses would lead to

better insights and more accurate findings. Participants were chosen based on age groups, ranging from youth (13-20 years), adults (21-59 years), to senior citizens (60 years and above), and their capacity to respond to research questions, focusing on individuals without permanent housing who linger and ask for alms on the streets. The study included twelve participants representing diverse sectoral groups, interviewed using semi-structured methods to explore their lived experiences, challenges, and perspectives within the specified barangays. The scope of the study was limited to street vagrants within the defined geographic area, not encompassing those outside the specified barangays or not fitting the criteria of street vagrancy or homelessness. The research instrument involved semi-structured interviews and observations, guiding the interview process while incorporating conversational aspects to probe for additional details. Interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes, were voice-recorded and transcribed, ensuring participants' comfort and genuine responses. Data gathering procedures involved obtaining consent from participants, explaining the study's purpose, and encouraging questions for a thorough discussion. Individual interviews were conducted to ensure participants' comfort and safety. The data analysis utilized thematic analysis to identify patterns and create themes, providing a rich, intricate, and sophisticated characterization of the data. Ethical considerations were paramount, ensuring no coercion, maintaining confidentiality, and safeguarding participants' dignity. Researchers obtained informed consent, protected participants from harm, and adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173). The study aimed to benefit society by sharing participants' experiences, gaining knowledge about their conditions, and potentially modifying societal perceptions to reduce stigma.

3. Results and discussions

3.1. Lived Experiences of Cabanatuan City's Street Vagrants

The study examined the life experiences of twelve street vagrants in Cabanatuan City, spanning various ages and backgrounds. Participants, identified by code names like "Fishball" and "Siomai," ranged from 13 to 65 years old and were found in crowded areas such as Freedom Park, the Public Market, the hospital, and transportation terminals. Their educational attainment varied, with some being out-of-school youth and others having incomplete elementary or high school education. Most of them relied on begging as their primary source of income, with occasional part-time work as garbage collectors or baggage carriers.

Consistent with data from UNICEF, the study found a high prevalence of out-of-school youth among the participants. This aligns with national statistics indicating a significant number of youth not completing primary education. The participants' frequent presence in crowded urban areas supports findings from the Philippine Statistics Authority, which reported millions of homeless Filipinos, many residing in urban settings.

Economic challenges were a prominent theme, with participants' daily incomes from begging falling within the range of 200 to 500 pesos, which is comparable to the minimum wage for certain jobs in Nueva Ecija. Despite this, their incomes remain unstable and insufficient for a decent living standard. The study revealed that while some participants occasionally found work as garbage collectors or baggage carriers, begging remained their primary means of subsistence.

The lived experiences of the participants were categorized into several major themes. Economic factors, displacement, and family issues were primary causes of their vagrancy. Safety and security concerns were prevalent, with participants experiencing a lack of shelter security, social harassment, and food insecurity. Despite their hardships, many participants expressed a sense of purpose and fulfillment through their faith and family support. However, there was a pervasive sense of despair regarding life improvement and personal or educational fulfillment.

Participants also highlighted the role of government services and benefits, expressing a need for more substantial support and better access to social services. While some received minimal assistance, the desired level of support was often unmet, reflecting gaps in the current social safety net for the homeless population.

The study provided a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by street vagrants in Cabanatuan City. By examining their economic conditions, safety concerns, and personal aspirations, the research offered valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and policies to improve the lives of this marginalized group.

3.2. The Causes of Vagrancy Among Participants

The study revealed several factors contributing to the vagrancy of the participants. Through their narratives, three primary causes emerged: economic factors, displacement, and family dynamics.

Economic factors played a significant role in the participants' homelessness. Economic instability forced four participants into street living, as highlighted in their stories. For instance, one participant, formerly renting a room and employed, became homeless after losing his job and lacking financial support from family. Another participant moved from Manila to Nueva Ecija for work but ended up living on the streets due to the financial strain of raising children and paying rent. Similarly, another participant's family left for other countries and sold their house, leaving him homeless. The youngest participant recounted how his siblings sold their family house, leaving him without a place to stay, and his grown children had their own families. These stories underscore the impact of job loss, economic instability, and lack of financial support on their descent into vagrancy. This aligns with Kovalenko's (2014) findings, emphasizing that economic hardships and systemic issues often underlie vagrancy.

Displacement emerged as another critical factor. Participants were displaced due to sudden evictions or family crises. One participant recounted how his family was evicted from his aunt's house after his father's death, leaving him to search for work and live on the streets. Another participant lost his home when the property owner reclaimed the land, forcing him to seek shelter in Freedom Park. One participant relocated from Isabela to Cabanatuan after his father was severely beaten and referred to a hospital there, leading him to sleep by the shops. Another participant's home was washed away by a typhoon, and subsequent familial disputes led them to live on the streets. These narratives reflect the harsh reality of displacement and its role in exacerbating homelessness, supported by Dahris Siregar (2023) and Kabbanji and Kabbanji (2018), who highlight the profound impact of displacement on vulnerable populations.

Family factors also significantly influenced participants' vagrancy. Conflicts and dysfunctional family dynamics left them without a reliable support system. One participant ran away due to physical abuse when he couldn't provide money to his family, preferring the streets over mistreatment at home. Another was abandoned by his parents in childhood, leading to a life of wandering. One participant lost both parents, and after an unsupportive experience with an aunt, chose street living. Another participant's mother remarried, and he was left with his unemployed grandmother, resorting to begging and odd jobs for survival. These accounts highlight the detrimental impact of family conflicts, abandonment, and lack of support, emphasizing the need for comprehensive interventions that address underlying family issues (Mohd Fadzil Ali Ahmad, 2023).

The participants' experiences of vagrancy are rooted in economic instability, displacement, and troubled family dynamics. Addressing these factors requires a multifaceted approach that tackles both immediate needs and underlying systemic issues to provide meaningful support and solutions for the homeless population.

3.3. The Safety and Security of the Participants

Safety encompasses both the physical environment and the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals, each constituting crucial components of a sense of security. Given the elevated incidence of exposure to violence and trauma, daily struggles in meeting fundamental needs, and strained interpersonal relationships, ensuring safety becomes imperative for individuals grappling with homelessness and vagrancy. The study's narratives highlight several common themes regarding the safety and security of the participants.

Lack of shelter security emerged as a significant issue for the participants. Without stable and secure housing, they faced adversities, especially during natural disasters. Participants described seeking shelter in various places, such as bus terminals, markets, and under store awnings, often feeling embarrassed and unwelcome. For instance, one participant mentioned taking shelter at a terminal during the rain, only to be met with complaints and hostile looks from passersby. Another participant, who frequently moved from one temporary shelter to another during rains, emphasized his body's resilience to sickness due to long exposure to such conditions. Many participants recounted similar struggles, highlighting the precariousness of their living situations and the health risks they faced due to inadequate shelter. Physical health concerns, such as frequent illnesses and injuries, were common among them, exacerbated by their exposure to the elements and lack of access to safe, stable housing. These conditions, coupled with societal judgment and isolation, significantly impacted their well-being, aligning with findings from other studies that investigate the health status of homeless populations (Lafuente, 2014; Harris et al., 2014).

Social harassment was another pervasive issue faced by the participants. Living on the streets exposed them to various forms of mistreatment and discrimination from society. Participants described encounters with bullying, verbal abuse, and physical harassment. For instance, one female participant spoke about being deceived and harassed by men around the market area, who stole her change and made inappropriate advances. Another participant mentioned being taunted and called derogatory names by tricycle drivers. This harassment added to the daily stress and insecurity of living on the streets, contributing to a hostile and unsafe environment. The study underscores that social harassment significantly impacts the emotional and psychological well-being of homeless individuals, as they constantly navigate a landscape of

prejudice and mistreatment (Johari et al., 2022). Additionally, Armas et al. (2019) highlights that similar patterns of harassment and exclusion can also be seen in the workplace, indicating a broader societal issue of bullying and mistreatment.

Lack of food security was also a major concern for the participants, who struggled to find reliable sources of nutritious food. Many described scavenging for food, relying on the generosity of strangers, or begging to meet their basic nutritional needs. One participant mentioned picking up food from crossings and asking for spare change to buy meals, while another relied on leftover food from friends' workplaces. The narratives revealed the uncertainty and inadequacy of their food supply, often leading to hunger and malnutrition. The constant worry about securing the next meal added to the participants' physical and emotional burden. This lack of food security not only posed immediate health risks but also perpetuated the cycle of poverty and vulnerability among homeless individuals. The issue of food security among the homeless is well-documented, with studies indicating that many homeless individuals face severe nutritional deficiencies and related health problems (Booth & Smith, 2016).

The study highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by homeless individuals in terms of safety and security. The lack of stable shelter, exposure to social harassment, and food insecurity create a precarious and hostile environment for these individuals. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that focus not only on providing immediate relief but also on tackling the systemic and institutional factors that perpetuate homelessness and vagrancy.

3.4. The Purpose and Fulfillment in Life of the Participants

The purpose and fulfillment in life for individuals experiencing vagrancy refer to their sense of meaning, goals, and satisfaction despite facing homelessness or unstable living conditions. Based on the collected data, the participants' narratives highlight diverse purposes and forms of fulfillment that drive them to persevere in their challenging life journeys.

Faith played a crucial role in providing resilience and hope for the participants during adversity. Many turned to prayer and their belief in God as a source of strength and comfort. One participant expressed that giving up would lead to nothing, so praying for God's help was his way to keep going. Another found solace in praying whenever she felt hopeless, believing that God had kept her alive despite not always having food. The participants' faith acted as a beacon of hope, enabling them to face life's obstacles with courage. Their belief in a higher power offered a sense of purpose and a reminder that even in the darkest times, there was hope for a brighter future. This aligns with Gravell's (2013) findings, which suggest that religious beliefs and practices can provide meaning, structure, and hope for homeless individuals.

Family support and care also emerged as vital sources of strength and motivation for the participants. The narratives revealed a profound sense of responsibility and love towards their family members. One participant mentioned that his mother was his strength, and despite the hardships they faced after his father's death, he wanted to help her by continuing to beg for assistance. Another participant shared similar sentiments, expressing that he needed to keep going to care for his grandmother, believing that God would not abandon them. These narratives underscore the critical role of family bonds in motivating individuals to endure challenging circumstances and strive for a better future. According to Smith and Johnson (2015), family ties and the desire to support loved ones are significant motivators for street vagrants, highlighting the importance of familial relationships even in the face of adversity.

The participants' sense of purpose and fulfillment in life was deeply rooted in their faith and family connections. These elements provided them with the strength to navigate the hardships of homelessness and maintain hope for a better future. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing the spiritual and familial needs of homeless individuals to support their resilience and well-being effectively.

3.5. Services and Benefits from the Government

The services and benefits received by participants from government bodies aim to alleviate the challenges faced by homeless individuals in meeting their basic needs. The narratives reveal two main sub-themes: the assistance already received and the services participants desire to enhance their well-being.

The services and benefits currently received by participants primarily involve food assistance from governmental institutions. For instance, one participant mentioned receiving food packs, which he sometimes sold because he lacked cooking facilities. Another participant relied on food stubs distributed by friends at the market and the municipality, while others highlighted receiving relief goods during adverse weather conditions like rain or storms. These forms of assistance emphasize the role of government programs in addressing food insecurity among homeless populations. The

narratives indicate that food packs, stubs, and relief goods are critical resources for the participants, demonstrating the interconnected efforts between government and community networks to support the vulnerable. This finding aligns with Ionski (2015), who emphasized the significance of government-led programs and community-driven initiatives in providing essential aid to those in need.

However, the participants also expressed a desire for additional services that they believe would significantly improve their situation. Many sought financial support to meet daily needs and pursue opportunities for education or work. One participant wished for assistance to resume his studies, while another hoped for financial aid that could also cover educational expenses. Several participants emphasized the need for monetary aid to buy food, highlighting the inadequacy of income from begging. Others sought help to return to their families or to address specific medical needs, such as a participant's father's medical expenses. The desire for stable housing and job opportunities was also prevalent, with participants wishing for better earnings and improved social standing through employment. These narratives underscore the urgent need for comprehensive government assistance addressing financial, medical, and social aspects of their lives.

These sentiments reflect overarching themes in existing literature on poverty and social assistance. Studies consistently highlight the crucial role of financial aid in addressing immediate needs and the struggles associated with inadequate income sources. The call for attention to housing and medical needs aligns with insights from homelessness research, emphasizing the necessity of holistic government intervention to tackle these issues. Psychological research on living in unpredictable and challenging conditions also underscores the importance of stable employment opportunities and comprehensive support in breaking the cycle of poverty and uncertainty (Adioke, 2016).

While the participants benefit from existing government assistance programs, there is a clear need for more targeted and comprehensive services to address their broader needs. Financial aid, educational support, stable housing, and employment opportunities are critical areas where government intervention could significantly improve the lives of street vagrants. The participants' narratives highlight the importance of addressing both immediate and long-term needs to foster a sense of stability and hope for a better future.

4. The Perception of the Participants to their Future

The perception that individuals experiencing homelessness or vagrancy have of their future reflects their outlook, hopes, and expectations despite their current circumstances. The narratives shared by the participants provide a compelling glimpse into how their experiences as street vagrants have profoundly shaped their perspectives, hopes, and aspirations for what lies ahead.

Despair in life improvement refers to the deep sense of hopelessness and resignation that individuals experiencing homelessness might feel about the possibility of improving their lives. Participants expressed feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty due to their circumstances, highlighting the negative effect of their situation on their perception of the future.

One participant shared that he sees no significant change in his future and has resigned to the belief that he will remain in the same situation, accepting whatever comes his way. Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating that he expects to continue wandering the streets due to the difficulty of life and his lack of employment, which he believes leaves him with no hope for improvement even after ten years. A third participant expressed a similar outlook, feeling stuck in his current situation despite his desire to study, as his relatives continually discourage him by saying he will achieve nothing. Another participant succinctly summarized his outlook by saying he will likely still be in the same situation, while another felt he might not be around anymore. These responses illustrate a deep sense of resignation, hopelessness, and uncertainty about the future. The participants' narratives underscore the significant emotional toll of vagrancy and homelessness, leading to despair and a lack of optimism about future opportunities. Addressing these emotional and social factors is crucial in supporting individuals facing such challenging circumstances and helping them find paths to stability and well-being. As supported by Johnson and Smith (2015), despair is a significant barrier to life improvement among vagrants, negatively impacting their mental well-being and hindering their ability to take positive steps toward stability.

Personal and educational fulfillment refers to the achievement, satisfaction, and sense of purpose that individuals experiencing homelessness can derive from personal growth, education, and self-development. This fulfillment serves as a beacon of hope, guiding individuals toward a brighter future despite their current challenges.

Four participants shared a collective vision for their future centered on education as a transformative force. They view education as key to personal growth and advancement, demonstrating resilience and determination to overcome challenges. One participant hopes to return to school to eventually provide a home for his mother, believing that education can lead to a better life. Another participant envisions studying to achieve something in life, aspiring to have the means to enjoy simple pleasures and secure employment. A third participant dreams of studying and reuniting with his siblings, while a fourth participant hopes to return to school and secure a decent home for himself and his grandmother. These narratives show that the participants see education as a pathway to a better future, offering opportunities for personal growth and advancement. Their vision for themselves a decade from now serves as a testament to their resilience and determination to overcome the hurdles that lie ahead. They refuse to be defined by their current circumstances and are determined to create a brighter future through education. According to Goldrick-Rab et al. (2019), students from poverty-stricken backgrounds, including those experiencing homelessness, often have persistent aspirations for higher education and take tangible steps to pursue it despite the hurdles they face. They view education as a means to transcend adversity and create a better future for themselves.

While the participants' experiences of vagrancy have instilled a sense of despair in some, others hold onto hope through their aspirations for personal and educational fulfillment. Their diverse perceptions of the future highlight the importance of addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of homeless individuals to support their resilience and well-being effectively.

5. Conclusion

The study reveals a complex interplay of factors driving individuals into precarious living situations, emphasizing economic instability, displacement, and family conflicts as key contributors. Economic instability creates a web of uncertainties, pushing individuals toward unpredictable financial landscapes and precarious living conditions. Displacement, often triggered by economic and environmental factors, exacerbates vulnerability and marginalizes individuals. Family conflicts further intensify these issues, turning the familial unit into a battleground where external pressures and internal strife collide. Participants face significant challenges related to safety and security while experiencing homelessness. Social harassment, including bullying, discrimination, and verbal abuse, adds another layer of hardship, making their already difficult circumstances even more challenging. Struggles with food security highlight the immediate need for assistance programs and broader societal efforts to address the root causes, aiming for sustainable solutions for this vulnerable population. The ability of participants to overcome obstacles is rooted in multiple sources of strength. Their faith or spirituality provides a broader perspective and inner fortitude, serving as guiding principles during difficult times. Additionally, their deep sense of responsibility towards their families acts as a powerful motivator, propelling them forward and giving them a compelling reason to persevere, ensuring a better future for themselves and their loved ones. Participants' shared desires for specific government services underscore a comprehensive plea for assistance, particularly financial aid. These pleas resonate with existing literature on poverty, social assistance, and the challenges faced by marginalized individuals. The importance of holistic support, including financial assistance and stable employment opportunities, is acknowledged as integral to breaking the cycle of poverty and uncertainty. Despite their challenges, participants maintain hopefulness and aspire to pursue education, reflecting resilience and a determination to improve their circumstances. Conversely, the acknowledgment of hopelessness and uncertainty among certain participants sheds light on the emotional toll that homelessness can inflict. The psychological strain of homelessness significantly shapes individuals' perceptions of their future, highlighting the need for support that addresses both tangible and emotional challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the study's results and conclusions, the researchers have formulated several recommendations to address the issues surrounding street vagrancy effectively. Community leaders, social service organizations, and advocacy groups should promote empathy and understanding towards street vagrants, actively working to reduce stigma and support these individuals. This can foster a more inclusive and compassionate community. The Local Government Unit (LGU) should develop and expand programs offering job training, skill development, and employment opportunities for street vagrants experiencing economic instability. Providing these individuals with the tools to gain stable employment can significantly improve their living conditions. The Cabanatuan City Social Welfare Development Office (CSWDO) should broaden access to food assistance programs, such as community kitchens, food banks, and mobile food services, ensuring that street vagrants have consistent access to nutritious meals. Additionally, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) should develop and implement comprehensive support programs that address the immediate needs of street vagrants. These programs should encompass mental health services, addiction treatment, and employment-related support to help individuals overcome their challenges. Furthermore, the City Social Welfare Development Office (CSWDO) should recognize the educational aspirations of street vagrants and create opportunities

for them to pursue learning and skill development. Scholarships, vocational training programs, and academic support can empower these individuals to break free from their current situations and build a better future. These recommendations aim to provide a holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by street vagrants, emphasizing the need for empathy, comprehensive support, and opportunities for personal and professional development.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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