



RESEARCH ARTICLE

“DYING IN DRUGS”: A PHOTO ELICITATION TECHNIQUE ON A MATERNAL PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS THE PHILIPPINE DRUG WAR

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ABSTRACT

The use of illegal drugs or illegal drug abuse has always been an economic issue around the world for ages. It is always described as a threat to all countries. Every country shares the same predicament. The current administration in the Philippines imposed a campaign against the use of illegal drugs. However, this anti-drug campaign is not as peaceful as it sounds. There are numerous emerging perspective on the controversial war on drugs and one of which is the perspective of the mothers. This study seek to discover the perspective of randomly chosen mothers about the Philippine's war on drugs. A photo elicitation technique was used in the study. The results shows that the mothers have generally expressed negative emotions—specifically pain, pity, and sadness. The themes generated can be generalized form the sentiments of the mother reflects the state of the war on drugs as it affects the smaller scales of the society.

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INTRODUCTION

“We were just chatting on Facebook the night before his death. His classmates had bikes. He said, ‘Mama, I want a bike too.’ But I told him to wait 10 days. He got excited.” This was one of the last memories of Lorenza delos Santos had with her son, the slain teen Kian Loyddelos Santos. Little did she know that her son would be killed in an anti-drug operation. This is simply one of the many emerging perspectives on the Philippine's controversial war on drugs the perspective of a mother. The use of illegal drugs or illegal drug abuse has always been an economic issue around the world for ages. It is always described as a threat to all countries a threat to health, security, society, and economy. Every country shares the same predicament. Knowing how it affects a nation immensely, illegal drugs place serious constraints on the ability of the development of a country, making it a huge obstacle to sustainable economic growth. According to the 2015 Nationwide Survey on the Nature and Extent of Drug Abuse in the Philippines presented in September 2016, there was approximately 1.8 million drug users out of the total populace of 110.98 million. Because of the persistent abuse of illegal drugs, several presidents took actions against this. The most notable is the current president of the Philippines. He was vocal during the election period that war against drugs will be his main focus. Not too long after his term, the government ramped up its action against illegal drugs. However, this anti-drug campaign is not as peaceful as it sounds.

An alarming number of killings have also taken place. These killings raise serious concerns over the rule of law and the overall effectiveness of the anti-drugs campaign. As a result, the controversial war on drugs campaign of the President divided people's opinion and beliefs whether to agree or disagree with the said campaign. This paper aimed to determine the perspective if the randomly chosen mothers on the existing war on drugs campaign by showing a photo related to the Philippine drug war. The participants will be requested to express their sentiments with regards to the photograph.

Statement of the problem: The controversial war on drugs of the current President draws several opinions and beliefs from the people about the campaign. The researchers were curious on the sentiments and opinions of the mothers on the campaign of the current administration on the use of illegal drugs. Since, Goldsmith (2013) stressed that mothers are the emotional backbones of the family. They provide the holding place of everyone's feelings and do their best to keep the members of the family from being hurt. Moreover, this study aimed to analyze the participants' point of view with regards to a photographic scene (a woman grieving over the body of her dead son) shown to them.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions

- ✓ What are the sentiments of the mothers towards the photo?
- ✓ What themes will emerge from the perspective and sentiments of the mothers?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design: Photo elicitation method was used in the study. Photo elicitation is one of the most widely known and frequently used techniques in research, it is based on the fairly simple principle of using one or more images in an interview and asking the participants to comment on them. (Bignante, 2010). This study used the technique in order to evaluate the point of view of the participants with regards to the photographic scene (a woman grieving over the body of her dead son). This technique allows the researchers to gain the point of view of the participants, not only with their verbal responses, but also with their emotions and perspective of the issue.



Figure 1. Early October 2017, Nanette Castillo is seen grieving over the body of her dead son, Aldrin. He was killed by "unidentified assailants" and was a suspected drug user. Photo by Noel Celis, Agence France-Presse

Data Collection: Data collection was done through an interview using the photo elicitation technique with the qualifying participants. The participants was asked a single question about their opinions on the photograph. Below is the photograph used in the research.

Participants of the Study: Only mothers were considered as qualifying participants. This is the sole criterion that the researchers used to determine the qualification of a participant.

Data Analysis: The recorded interviews were transcribed into field texts. Thematic Analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The method of analysis was used to help the researchers move from a broad reading of the data toward discovering patterns and framing global themes (Howitt and Cramer, 2007). The method enabled the researchers to develop deeper appreciation for the participants perspectives and sentiments about the photo specifically on the Philippine war on drugs.

Ethical Considerations: As drug abuse is a sensitive topic in modern society, the researchers have decided to keep the participants' anonymity. Their age was also be asked to allow the researchers to see how the opinion of the mothers varies by their age. The researchers did not ask other identifying information such as address, birth date, place of birth, and other related personally identifiable information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the photo elicitation technique, the researchers have come up with a varied and broad range of responses from the participants. Their responses were analyzed accordingly, and codes were extracted from these responses. Using thematic analysis, the researchers were able to come up with overarching, universal themes that encompass and express the various views and sentiments of the mothers with regards to the issue. The researchers were able to extract five main subthemes out of the varied responses of the participants.

Theme 1: Grief

The three codes that were identified and grouped together under the subtheme of "grief" all exhibit the characteristics of loss and bereavement experienced by parents when they lose or are threatened with losing their child. One of the participants said who is a 35 – year old mother, "*Bilangusakananay, makuriguditomakarawatna an atonmgaanakmasusugadlahhito. Mamamatay la hinsugad napamaagi.*" (As a mother, it is hard to accept that our child will be like that, died in that way). The participant expressed her thoughts and feelings as a mother. Previous research and works such as those by Gorer (1965) in his book, *Death, Grief and Mourning* have already established that the loss of a son or a daughter is far worse psychologically than the loss of a significant other. Losing a child will more likely entail and require psychological intervention for the parent than losing a spouse. Humans are nurturing creatures by nature, and thus a great deal of psychological meaning is given to parent-children bond. Parents who experienced more traumatic loss of children such as those by accidents, particularly situations with circumstances that are quite vague and make little to no sense are more likely to report a greater intensity of grief.

In a separate study conducted by Arnold and Gemma (2008), they established that grief is a lifelong process that parents continue to live by. This is because parents express grief as a way of reconnecting with and reliving the memories they had with their dead child. As the studies have presented, the grief that comes with losing a child leaves a psychological scar that the parents will live by for the remainder of their lives. The intensity of grief is often positively related to the circumstances by which their child died. In traumatic deaths, such as sudden executions that happen to suspected drug users, the levels of grief are generally higher and more intense.

Table 1. Thematic map

Theme 1: Grief	Theme 2: Children should be raised properly	Theme 3: Justice for the suspected drug user	Theme 5: Victim Blaming	Theme 6: Negative effects of illegal drugs in the society
- Painful for the Mother	- Mother has shortcomings	- Suspected drug users shouldn't be killed	- Speculations about the victims	- Drug eradication
- Pities her child	- Proper guidance for the children	- Proof of drug involvement	- Child is the only one to blame	- Society as part of the problem
- Sadness	- Vigilance with the children	- Unjust killings	- Stop drug abuse	- Drug problems cause crimes
		- Justice for the victims		- Presence of vigilantes

Table 2. Global Themes

Global Theme 1: Mothers feel empathy for vulnerable population	Global Theme 2: Mother Perceived drugs as a major problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Grief •Children should be raised properly •Justice for the suspected drug users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Victim Blaming •Negative effects of illegal drugs in the society

Theme 2: Children should be properly raised: Guidance and familial attention are important things that can be factored in when dealing with the issue of drugs. Many mothers interviewed responded with sentiments expressing pleas for better and proper guidance of the parents to their children. *“Kumo us aka nanay, atonuntabantayanhinmaupay an atonmgaanak, desiplinahonatonhinmaupaykutob hit atonmakakaya. Kay aadagudito ha kaganaklabina ha nanay. – (42 – year old mother)”* (As a mother, we should take good care of our children, we should discipline them to the best we can. Because it is in the parents especially to the mothers). Another participant also believed that every members of the family should have intervention or they should bond each other so that their children will not go astray, she said *“maupaygud it mayda bonding it pamilya o dingannagkakaurustorya para magigiyahan it mgaanak para dire mapapariwara”*.

The mothers' belief is unfounded. There are studies that support the idea of family intervention in treating and preventing drug and substance abuse, particularly in teenagers. Liddle, Dakof, Turner, Henderson, and Greenbaum (2008) have shown that adding multidimensional family therapy (MDFT) in treating drug dependents resulted in significant reductions in the consumption of drugs (cannabis, in this particular study). The topic on family-based therapy comes from a much earlier study conducted by Ozechowski and Liddle (2000). They sought to establish an increased reliability of this therapy by reviewing 16 different controlled trials and four therapy process studies. Family-based therapy has since then been viewed as powerful means of safely removing a child from the effects of drug abuse. The subject of the attention given by the family to the adolescents is highlighted in the study published by Goldfarb, Tarver, Locher, Preskitt, and Sen (2015). They looked into the correlation between family meals and the likelihood of adolescents to venture into risky behaviors. The study has found that there is indeed a significant level of correlation between family meals and the risks taken by adolescents. It should be considered that family meals is an avenue for open conversation between adolescents and their parents, which would lead to higher perceived levels of guidance and love.

Theme 3: Justice for the suspected drug user: Mothers believed that those suspected drug users should not be killed and the government should give justice to the victims. In the context of the participants, most of them shared sentiments with common themes of stablishing involvement with drugs before judging them. If they were to be judged, then the participants generally favored methods which preserved human life. The participants viewed the deaths of suspected drug users—those without proof of involvement to be simple moral violators, not outright violators of social norms. This means that they were readily more empathetic to these victims.

Theme 4: Victim blaming: On the flip side, people can also express feelings of hostility and rejection towards rumored drug peddlers and users. This often occurred with respondents who generally viewed the drug problem as inherently evil and

destructive, as with the case of Respondent 10. This also relies greatly on the moral judgment that these respondents have with regards to the drug issue. The majority of the respondents expressed empathy for the victim, provided that it was not yet proven that he does indeed use drugs. There are respondents who also speculated about the circumstances revolving around the nature of the victim's death. These speculations, as shown in the study by Vaidyanathan, Khalsa, and Ecklund (2016), are a form of social control. It was considered that gossips and rumors are part of the human in an attempt to express dominance over perceived social control. In this case, people who have generally ill feelings and ideas against drugs and, by extension, drug users, express their dislike through speculations. Humans also tend to be on the lookout for negative behaviors indicative of problems relating to morality. This was shown in a study by Skowronski and Carlston (1987) where it has been established that people are more acute with weeding out negative behaviors and immediately marking them as indications of a morally questionable disposition. In the context of drug use and abuse, people generally perceive drug dependents as negative by virtue of the negative behaviors they have committed, such as felony and other crimes. This is exactly the case with a few respondents, the most notable of which is Respondent 10.

Theme 5: Negative effects of drugs in the society: The participants generally viewed the drug problem to be something that the society also plays a part in. There are social aspects to the war on drugs that, without a doubt, contribute to the problem itself. Slow waiting times between indictment and judgment lead people with extreme tendencies to take matters into their own hands and form renegade, vigilante groups. These groups commit crimes, thinking that the end (fewer drug users and peddlers) does justify the means (murder), which is not always the case. Stigmatization and marginalization are also big problems that people in the society often pose to drug dependents. By publicly denouncing drug users, it makes it more difficult for them to actively seek healthy and effective means to overcome their drug dependency. The use of illegal drugs proved to distort the mental states of a person, thus they are prone of committing crimes. Under an extreme state of drug addictions, it can push a person to commit heinous crimes which can harm a vulnerable set of population. This is what makes the issue of drugs something that a lot of people, most in the society, take part in. If left unchecked, the drug problem can rapidly escalate into a crisis that will increase the likelihood of committed crimes. Two global themes can be derived from the five subthemes. The first global theme groups together the subthemes of grief, proper guidance for the children, and justice for the suspected drug user. They are all related under the theme “empathy for vulnerable populations.” The three subthemes interact with and are closely related to one another. Grief is related to how a parent would perceive the world after the loss of his or her child. It would then drive him or her to pay more attention to his or her children thereafter. All the while, he or she will be seeking justice for the child he or she had lost to drugs. Moreover, the said experience will allow him or her to have more empathy for

suspected drug users who were killed without any proof first. Under the second global theme, the subthemes are victim-blaming and negative effects of drugs in the society. The two themes reflect the way that society views the drug problem, hence the global theme "Mothers view drugs as a problem." The two global themes interact with each other in a positively reinforcing way. The society seeks to protect the vulnerable population in this case, the children and the adolescents. At the same time, it also views drug as a problem.

Conclusion

From the data that the researchers have gathered and analyzed, the sentiments of the mother tend to lean towards a nurturing nature. The mothers have generally expressed negative emotions specifically pain, pity, and sadness. They have also expressed that the problem can be avoided if the children were guided properly, a belief backed by several previous studies. At the same time, they have condemned the killings, generally calling it "unjust" and wanting justice for the victims. The themes that can be generalized from the sentiments of the mother reflect the state of the war on drugs as it affects the smaller scales of the society.

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