

The Lived Experiences of Muslim Internally Displaced Persons in Cotabato City, Southern Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of cases of poverty and human-made disasters has exacerbated the issue of displacement in previous years. Narratives of the experiences of the Internally Displaced Persons living in the cities have not been thoroughly reported in the local context. The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experience of the internally displaced persons currently residing in Cotabato City, Philippines. This research utilized a mixed methods design in the triangulation of the results, and a quantitative approach was used in the first part of the study. Descriptive-qualitative data were gathered through Focused Group Discussion and in-depth interviews. Generally, this study discovered that IDPs consistently faced financial difficulties living in poverty in rural areas, which motivated them to resettle and live in urban areas. It was revealed that living in the city was privileged for their peace of mind in terms of source of income which helped their husband sustain and augment their financial status, and being inspired in religious gathering. Moreover, the IDPs preferred to stay in the city where their children pursue education, are financially sustained, strengthen gender roles in Islamic teachings, and have access to health care services.

Keywords: financial status, Internally Displaced Persons, lived experience, poverty, urban areas.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of poverty incidents in the regions has been linked to the problem of displacements in previous years. Human-induced activities also added to the unfavorable economic crisis of poor sectors in the present society. Various surveys have found that most displaced families had stayed in the cities to look for the most instant means of survival.

The role of different stakeholders, particularly the local government sectors, is considered, and governance is one of the strategic venues for communication. One of the greatest challenges of the world today is on difficult recovery of economic deficits due to the ever-increasing desire for wealth by

some selfish capitalists and leaders in our modern society. As a result, there is a continuous burden on the third world countries to develop their own system of economy. In Western countries, institutions have been established to support the government with its financial requirements. Enhance institutional arrangements within the international humanitarian sector to meet the relief and protection needs of IDPs.¹ The support from the Guiding Principles on Improving the Implementation of the IDPs Law and Policies set out a range of responsibilities and supports to the IDPs on the part of the State and other actors.²

However, the Philippines does not have special laws relating to IDPs. In contrast, the legal guidelines for the State's response in cases of IDPs are based on the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (PDRRMA) Act of 2010, as stated in the Republic Act 10121.³ Further, The PDRRMA has also provided guidance on establishing special trust funds for emergency response in which local governments have to transfer unused balance from previous years, but some local governments have failed to do so, weakening local capacity to respond.⁴ Thus, this study provides significant data on the lived experiences of the IDPs in light of the beneficial effect of living in urban areas. The results of this study will generate policies to sustain their emerging needs.

Cotabato City is a region in Southern Philippines. It has an area of 176.00 km² with a population of 325,079 based on the 2020 census, with a Muslim majority, and the rest are Christians, Buddhists, and others. Since 15 December 2020, the city has officially entered the jurisdiction of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.⁵ In many parts of the world, many people experience social problems from economic, educational, or cultural aspects. In several Southeast Asian countries, it has happened, for example, in Indonesia and the Philippines. Several factors caused it, including sociocultural conflicts, socio-religious conflicts, natural disasters, and other causes. Because of these social problems, many people left their hometowns and moved to places considered safer and more comfortable. The place in question was an urban area, which most migrants consider to be better than their original place.

Big cities in Indonesia every year get new settlers for economic and welfare reasons. Some are for career development reasons. The same thing happened in Cotabato City, in Southern Philippines. The case experienced by Muslims in Cotabato is the focus of this study. There have been several similar studies that have been carried out by previous researchers. One of them is research conducted by Batubara et al. on marginal groups living in cities in Indonesia. They stated that the uneven development in cities and villages caused gaps between urban and agricultural development in rural areas. The rural communities can not feel the pleasure of development, so many of them migrate to cities, even though after migrating, they live in poor ecological areas, flood-prone, and slums. Even though they live in urban areas, they are still marginal communities.⁶

Meanwhile, Putra, in his research on the relationship between disaster and poverty in Indonesia, stated that natural disasters negatively affect people's lives, including the family's economic incomes. They can be the cause of increasing poverty that afflicts the community.⁷ A similar study was conducted by Awasthi on a case in Nepal, mentioning that natural disasters due to climate change or human actions such as infrastructure development and deforestation have exacerbated people's suffering, leading to increased poverty.⁸ Another study by Sawada sought to discuss the relationships between disasters and the formal and informal guarantees against disaster risk. Stakeholders must be concerned about the relationship between disaster and poverty to take action to overcome it. The government needs to involve the community to overcome disasters on the side of the poor successfully.⁹ Another

study examined the physical damage caused by the disaster, which then impacted the poverty in the community around the disaster area. In contrast, natural disasters caused a change in the environmental poverty levels. Natural disasters have had a very bad impact on the poverty level among low-income communities.¹⁰

To the Muslim community, Islamic teachings indeed command families to pay attention to the future of their children, lest they live in weakness after their parents die. In the holy book of the Quran 3: 9, it is explained that this verse gives advice to the believers to pay attention to the fate of their children when they become orphans. And let them be afraid that in the future, they leave weak children who are orphans who have not been able to be independent and worry about their welfare because they are neglected, weak, and live in poverty.¹¹ The study aimed to describe the life situation and experiences of the Internally Displaced victims currently residing in Cotabato City. Further, the study sought to find answers to the following questions: (1) what was the socio-demographic profile of the IDPs in terms of their age, civil status, educational attainment, and place of origin? (2) what were lived experiences of the IDPs in urban areas? why do the IDPs prefer to choose to live in urban areas?

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a mixed methods design. The quantitative approach was utilized in the socio-demographic profile of the IDPs, and the qualitative approach was used in interpreting the narrative responses of the IDPs. Focus Group Discussions were conducted among IDPs currently residing within 10 years in Cotabato City, and in-depth interviews among concerned government officials. Coordination from City Government to the barangay level was executed to seek approval for the data collection. Moreover, the collection of data used was a purposive sampling technique. Participants were chosen with the assistance of the Barangay Chairman and the Market Administrator.

A semi-structured self-made questionnaire was used in the FGDs, and in-depth interviews were translated into a vernacular language. Before the interviews, a recorder was used with the consent of the participants. The statistical tool was used through frequency in terms of the socio-demographic profile and thematic analysis on the presentation of the IDPs' narrative responses.

Results

I. The Socio-Demographic Profiles

Table 1: Age

No	Range of Age	Number	Percent
1	25 – 35 years	7	14%
2	36 – 45 years	21	42%
3	46 – 55 years	15	30%
4	56 – 65 years	7	14%

Table 2: Civil Status

No	Status	Number	Percent
1	Single	1	2%
2	Married	37	74%
3	Widow	7	14%
4	Divorced	5	10%

Table 3: Educational Attainment

No	Grade	Number	Percent
1	Elementary School Graduate	7	14%
2	High School Graduate	25	50%
3	College Graduate	8	16%
4	Arabic Level	10	20%

Table 4: Place of Origin

No	Grade	Number	Percent
1	Talayang	8	16
2	Datu Piang	19	38
3	Pikit	15	30
4	Shariff Aguak	8	16

There were fifty (50) IDPs in Cotabato City. Thirty of them were from Purok Ulandangen II, and 20 were from Purok Masigay, Poblacion Mother Barangay participated in the focused group discussion, aged from 25 to 65 years old, 37 of them were married, 7 widows, and 5 were divorced. Twenty (25) were high school graduates, ten (10) finished Arabic education, and 8 (eight) were college graduates who finished BS in Education (4), BS in Public Administration (3), and BS in Commerce (1). Furthermore, most of the participants came from Datu Piang, Maguindanao, who preferred to stay in Cotabato City.

II. Lived Experiences of Internally Displaced Persons Before Living in the Urban Areas *Financially Unstable due to Man-made Catastrophe*

Participants in the Focus Group Discussions share common experiences in their place of origin as “*Mapasang*” (difficulty), in a sense of financial crisis because of limited income. Often, the cause was war between government soldiers and rebels, a political conflict for more than 50 years, but sometimes it was due to family feuds. In addition, the participants similarly described their lives during the presence of conflict as so hard to forget. This matches the responses of the Market Administrator during in-depth interviews based on the record. Most of the IDPs in the market suffer difficulties while living in the rural areas due to financial crises that encourage them to relocate to the city.

The conflict occurred outside Cotabato City, namely neighboring towns, whose people were evacuated to Cotabato so that they would not be involved in or become victims of the conflict. Otherwise, poverty that caused IDP, among others, were floods and typhoons. In addition, it was also caused by a mixture of natural disasters and disasters caused by men made.

Kalima from Datu Piang said: When the times of war conflict, we hide inside the cave so that people cannot see us because there were so many guns like M79. We need to hide frequently. If we stay outside, the plane will see us." The women's intense sharing of their experiences was mostly on their fears and safety on how they overcame the conflict.¹²

Most of their experience was fear during the war conflict. As Subayda said: I recalled during the morning prayer when the soldiers raided our house, they arrested my two brothers and brought them somewhere. My one brother died as they killed him in 1972. My other brother surrendered so that the soldiers never hurt him. This happened during Martial Law, and so many got imprisoned by the soldiers.¹³

People moved to a safer place, namely in the city. The problem became complicated when these two causes occurred, natural disasters followed by conflicts. They were running away from man-made disasters people and wanted to find peaceful life in other places. According to the report of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GDIP) in 1998,¹⁴ escaping from the consequences of natural and man-made disasters motivated people to relocate to other regions where peace of mind could be achieved. Implications are likely significant for these IDPs.¹⁵ It is related to the study by despiting aside the very real human cost. War also has serious financial costs: a declining working population, inflation, shortages, uncertainty, increased debt, and disruption to ordinary economic activity.¹⁶

Living in the Urban Areas Safe and Secured

People in disaster areas did not get certainty for their welfare, so they chose migration to cities, where most people saw that living in cities gave more promising welfare. Apart from that, many thought that living in the city felt better in terms of security. Most of those who migrated to the city had no relatives, but they were determined to try their luck there.

The majority of the women answered that they are more secure in the city. They described their life in the city as "We are more satisfied here." Aida, a participant from Purok Ulandangen II, described her life as: "We are fine here because we can sleep well... even at night we can go outside because the streets are bright and concrete...there is the presence of Tanod roaming around and curfew hour to regularly discipline the residents here."¹⁷ They were generally informal workers or did not have any permanent jobs. When they migrated to the city, they did any kind of work, such as sewing.

Religious Gathering

Similarly, Annie from Purok Ulandangen II described her life in the city as good: "When we transferred here in Cotabato City became worthy by means of curfew every night, it's good to stay here."¹⁸

Sharida also shared, "We have time here in the teachings of Islam, reading the Qur'an, methods of child-rearing." She also added: "There are organized women's committees here. Women organization responses in terms of conducting various occasions like symposium... gatherings... we planned for it for its betterment."¹⁹ While Saima narrated that "I preferred to stay here in the city because I have lots of opportunities here for my family and my children as well."²⁰

III. Preferred to Stay in Cotabato City Education of the Children

Samina voluntarily left her hometown due to the continuous war. Thus, she and her family decided to stay in the city to find peace and for the safety of her children's education: "Our children took their good schooling here in the city, and lately we have our good business (selling) here."²¹

The other participants described their lives in the city as good and fine. Where their children could focus on their studies. Annie said: "It's good because we found a source of income here until I got married, and my children are studying here."²²

Common answers of the participants were: "It is fine to live here in the city." Others added: "We could earn a living well." Ate Saya narrated: "We are happy because we are living no matter how little it is, and my children have good education here."²³

Financially Sustained

Most participants revealed that living in the city was a privilege for their peace of mind and, most importantly, having a regular source of living. Tarhata said: "Our living here is safe because there is a curfew hour to follow."²⁴ The same answers with other participants like Hadja Nora, Subiya, Rahima, and Kalima said, "It is easy to get a source of income here because there are many work opportunities."²⁵ It is inferred from the 2013 collaborative study conducted by the Global Forum on Migration and Development from Turkey that the program enlightened people on business opportunities. It reaps benefits in various business activities, which results in continuous innovation in business investment.

Lheds added: "We also have women's organization here to help us."²⁶ Likewise, Alma added: "There is a distribution of supply we received when there is flood, and we also benefited other services from the barangay."²⁷

Strengthen Gender Roles in Islam

Noticeable among the women participants who shared experiences living in the city are the roles they play as family members. They said that at home, even their husband worked but sometimes did household chores. Like, Sarida said: "My husband helps with household chores. In terms of decision-making, we both agreed on the decision... Sometimes, it depends upon the situation. If he is tired, he does not help inside the house."²⁸

The women participants also shared that they took part in earning a living for the family. When asked about what else they contributed to financial matters, some said to help earn a living. Their husband's source of livelihood mostly engaged in businesses. Commonly answered sources of income of the women are sewing, owning a variety store, and assisting their husbands in the business.

Nheds said, "We did our sewing when we were in our places before, but when we transferred here in the city... we sew more because we have more customers."²⁹

Access to Health Care Services

With regards to the accessibility of women to health services, most women always find ways to go to the nearest health center. As Bainot narrated: "I always went to a health center to check my blood pressure and to know if I am sick."³⁰ Aida added, "Sometimes I go to the health center to request medicine for my cough. It's free."³¹ The same answer as Nora: "When I was pregnant, I visited a health center because It's free. I only gave donations, and it also provides free medicines with free

immunization.”³² They responded when they asked if there were no health centers in their place of origin. Lheds answered, “There are some, but it’s far away. We have to wait in the morning to reach the health center. It would be better if there were early staff on duty. Here, it’s easy because you only have to ride a tricycle to go through the health center.”³³

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and the research findings, it was revealed that Internally Displaced Persons faced financial difficulties when living in rural areas. Meanwhile, living in the city was undisputedly advantageous for their peace of mind, as they could find safety and security while staying in Cotabato City and being inspired by religious gatherings. Furthermore, Internally Displaced Persons preferred to live in cities where their children could pursue education, be financially supported for their family's needs, strengthen gender roles following the teaching of Islam, and have access to health care. They seldom visited their provinces on special occasions.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Phill Orchard, “Improving the Implementation of National Internally Displaced Persons Laws and Policies”, UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, Asia Pacific, 2012.
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- 6 Bosman Batubara, et.al., “Urbanization in (post-) New Order Indonesia: connecting unevenness in the city with that in the countryside,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, (2022).
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- 8 Pallavi Awasthi, “A Relationship between Natural Disaster and Poverty,” *Journal of APF Command and Staff College* 2, No. 1 (2019), 67–69.
- 9 Yasuyuki Sawada & Yoshito Takasaki, “Natural Disaster, Poverty, and Development: An Introduction,” *World Development*, Volume 94 (2017), 2-15.
- 10 Dalbyul Lee, “The Impact of Natural Disasters on Neighborhood Poverty Rate: A Neighborhood Change Perspective,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 40, No. 4 (2020).
- 11 Kementerian Agama, *Al-Qur’an & Tafsirnya* 2, Jakarta: Lentera Abadi, 2010, 123-124.
- 12 “Su timpo na kinambakwit name na nagen a kami sa takub, madakel ged a mga timbak i gailay ko 79 a timbak, para di kami melay na nagen a kami temandang sia sa aden paksul nin ka lemyu kami na melay kami na plane”.
- 13 “Niako katanudan na oras na suboh na ni raid kami lu sa walay, kinuwa na mga sundalo su mga suled ko a mama, su duwa kataw na kinuwa nilan pidtapik nilan, su sakataw menem a suled ko a mama na minatay, inimatayan na sundalo, kanu 1972 a langun intuba na su sakataw pan a suled ko a mama na midsurender den endu di den kasakitan, niaba nanggula na kanu timpu nu Martial Law san tuba, madakel a mga taw a pembilanggun na mga sundalo.”
- 14 Ocha, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, Geneva: United Nations Publication, 2004
- 15 Win Naude, Melissa Sigel, Katrin Marchand, “Migration, Entrepreneurship and Development: Critical Questions,” *IZA Journal of Migration*, 6, no. 5 (2017).
- 16 Tom Pettinger, “What is the Impact of Foreign Military Intervention on Radicalization?”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 5, Winter (2015).
- 17 Aida, a participant from Purok Ulandangen II said: “Siya gapiya i ginawa name ka pakatulog kami sa mapya... apiya magabi menem na gapakay kami behyu ka malinawag i lalan endo kalsada na sineminto den... aden mga taw a tanod a pedswroy uman magabi endu aden pan curfew para madisiplina su manga pegkakaleben siya.”
- 18 Annie also said: “Su kina alat nami siya sa Cotabato City na nakagkapia benal i aden curfew uman magabi, nia bun mapia i kapendalpa sia.”

- 19 Sharida said: "Aden oras nami siya sa kapentiyitala sa agama Islam, kapembatya sa Qur'an, ukit a kaped tarbiya sa manga wata." She added: "aden mga committee endu organization. Organization na mga babay ka amengka aden mga pakalagyan siya na ya gatawag na su umpungan nu mga babay a makanggalbek sa ento ba. Ya nin upaman na amengka aden symposium.... kanduli Na bamagumpung kami a manga babay san ngin ba i makagkapiya kanu ento ba a kapendidilimudan."
- 20 Saima said: "Yako temu i siya ako den mun sa city ka madakel i mapiya a nanganggula ko siya taman kanu pamilya, manga wata ko".
- 21 Samina said: "Su mga wata nami na sia den namakapangagi sa mapia siya sa city taman pan sa nakandagang kami sa mapia."
- 22 Annie said: "Mapia bun ka nakapangelay sia sa koyagan enggo sia ako den nakagkaluma. Madakel pan i nakilala ko sia sa Cotabato endo nakapangagi pan i mga wata ko siya."
- 23 Ate said: "Gangapya i ginawa nami siya ka pakapantiyali kami sa mapiya apiya manot den mun a kabaguyag endo siya nakapangagi sa mapya i mga wata ko."
- 24 Tarhata answered: "Su kapendalpa nami na safe bun ged ka aden curfew uman magabi".
- 25 They said: "Malemu a kabaguyag ka madakel a koyagan siya sa city".
- 26 Lheds added: "Na aden su mga organization na manga babay siya a makadtabang sa lekami".
- 27 Alma said: "Aden su mga bangenggay sa supply ka pakaamung kami sa bagenggan amengka pegkadalem siya endo pakabenebisyo kami pan sa kaped a ibangenggay nu barangay."
- 28 Sarida answered: "Si kaluma ko na pedtabang bun penggalbek siya sa walay. Amengka pendisisyun sia sa ludep na walay na sekami bun sa mga kaluma name... depende sa kaluma mama amengka penggalbek endu galugat na di den pedtabang sia sa ludep na walay."
- 29 Nheds said: "Kabamanay i pantiyalian name siya, kanu lu kami pan sa naganatan nami na bamanay kami bun uged na endo su naka alat kami siya na kabamanay bun pantiyalian name uged na mas madakel den i bamanen nami siya ka madakel den i costumer nami".
- 30 Bainot said: "Saki na istidi ako belu sa health center para pabpagelay sa lugo para gatawan u aden sakit ko."
- 31 Aida replied: "Ananto na belu ako bun sa health center ka bangeni sa gamut para sa batuk endu sepu".
- 32 Nora said: "Kanu kagingay ko pan na lu ako bun sa health center pebpawang ka libre... donation bu i ibangenggay taman sa ananto na pakakwa ako bun sa gamut a libre enggo amengka kapapem bakuna sa mga wata ko na libre bun".
- 33 Lheds answered: "Aden bun uged na sobla i kawatan nin... angapan nengpa pan i kagkapita tupan ka pakalu ka sa health center na mapiya pan u aden gauman nengka lu sa mapanay. Siya na ape ka bu blu bagedan bu sa sikad na makauma ka den. Ya tabya na sapto enggo akad ka closed mambu i health center."

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