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Quo Vadis? A Phenomenological Study on Graduated Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Beneficiaries

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this undertaking was to describe the lived experiences of graduated 4Ps beneficiaries. The research employed qualitative research methods using the phenomenological approach. It involved twelve graduated beneficiaries in San Miguel, Surigao del Sur. Study revealed that 4Ps beneficiaries had improved their condition through the Program's help from being poor to self-sufficiency. We can also derive from the study, as revealed by the participants, that not only their economic condition has improved, but there is also a manifestation of changed behavior because of their engagement in community activities such as improved responsible parenting, increased community involvement, promoted women empowerment, strengthened self-esteem and career capacity, and improved family relations. Given of the above, the Philippine government needs to continue and strengthen policies in the implementation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. The findings of the study have shown its positive outcome not only in keeping the children healthy and in school for which the government invests in human capital but also in effecting socio-behavioral outcomes among its beneficiaries. LGUs may also implement local social protection ordinances as part of their sustainability plan in providing support or after-care services to graduated households to ensure reduced vulnerability and a sustained level of well-being of these households.

KEYWORDS: *aftercare services, graduation, self-sufficiency, well-being, 4Ps beneficiaries*

INTRODUCTION

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program was institutionalized on April 17, 2019, through Republic Act 11310, or *An Act Institutionalizing the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program or 4Ps Act* (4Ps Act IRR, 2019). 4Ps implementation has gained notable positive reviews with its impact on the lives of 4Ps beneficiaries in its goal to improve health and nutrition, performance in academics, and other aspects of education such as increased school attendance, and increased grades (Acupido, Cabilangan, Padilla, and Tabamo, 2020). The Third Impact Evaluation (IE Wave 3, 2020) also revealed generally positive program impact, such as increased awareness of modern family planning methods, increased access to essential maternal health services, and Family Development Session messages are reflected in the attitudes and behavior among beneficiaries. Also, it helped reduce the discrimination children previously encountered because they could not meet the school requirements. A study by the Institute of Family Life and Children Studies of Philippine Women University (IFLCS-PWU 2016) also described the overall picture of the Program as promoting behavioral and social changes in households and communities where it is being implemented in line with DSWD expectations.

The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) Third Impact Evaluation (Wave 3), which aims to reassess the effectiveness of the Pantawid Pamilya program, showed positive program impacts, such as increased awareness of modern family planning methods, increased access to child health care services, lower incidence of child labor, improved household welfare, and the program show no evidence of dependency among 4Ps members.

According to the International Poverty Centre (IPC 2008), many issues that concern the design of CCT programs are still the subject of debate, including the duration of benefits. (Villatoro, 2005) cited that conflict within the community may arise from families that are not selected for the Program. A similar recommendation was presented by Stampini and Tornarolli 2012 that the government should elaborate graduation policies to facilitate the exit of those beneficiaries who no longer need assistance and, at the same time, improve the quality of program targeting. (Usui, 2011) describes that graduation of beneficiaries seems like a simple idea, but is challenging to define and implement. Usui points explicitly to the graduation criteria on how to assess the self-reliance of the households and their resilience against future shocks. In other words, this poses a challenge if beneficiaries who are targeted for graduation could sustain their improved well-being over time, can guarantee

continued school attendance, and can uphold the health and nutrition status of their children even without the incentives.

Based on existing program guidelines, those tagged as self-sufficient should no longer receive cash grants and must be removed from the roster of active members. The list of beneficiaries and their status are updated regularly in the Beneficiary Update and Management System to identify who is qualified for the cash grants following compliance with the conditions based on the 4Ps Act. The delisting of ineligible beneficiaries goes through grievance redress mechanisms to ensure that only the deserving beneficiaries receive the government's cash grants. As of the 2022 first quarter report of 4Ps, 101,656 household beneficiaries have been delisted nationwide because of validation results that they are no longer eligible to receive program benefits.

In 2021, in line with the second anniversary of Republic Act 11310 or the 4Ps Act, DSWD held a virtual graduation ceremony dubbed *Pugay Tagumpay* for households who have already attained self-sufficiency based on the latest result of the Social Welfare and Development Indicator (SWDI) administration, assessment findings using the Kilos Unlad Case Management Tools and revalidation output of the assigned case managers. This activity means that these graduated households can already provide for their basic needs, have stable incomes, able to send their children to school, and are prepared to protect the household from sliding back into poverty. The department described this as a modest feat of the government in uplifting the lives of Filipino families.

The local government units are tasked to provide an after-care monitoring program to check the sustainability of the well-being of graduated beneficiaries and for the possible provision of assistance to further improve their economic status. The partner agencies are also tapped to assist graduated beneficiaries in maintaining self-sufficiency through livelihood assistance, skills training, and scholarships for their children as part of the DSWD commitment to build poverty-free communities.

Much has been said about the impact of the PantawidPamilyang Pilipino Program on the lives of its beneficiaries, but not about their situation after they graduated from the Program. Implementing the Graduation and Exit strategy of the 4Ps uses three main tools. First, the **Listahanan of DSWD** conducts periodic household assessments through a standardized targeting system (STS) every three (3) years and provides beneficiary updating of household data. Next is the **Social Welfare and Development Indicator (SWDI) tool**, which is used as the basis for social case management and monitoring the improvement of the level of well-being of 4Ps households. The assessment results will determine the type of services and interventions corresponding to the needs of the household beneficiaries. Finally, there is the **Social Case Management** report. The 4Ps utilize the Kilos-Unlad Social Case Management strategy – a process to guide the shepherding of 4Ps households to achieve improved well-being towards stepping up (from survival to subsistence to self-sufficiency level) and out of poverty (graduation or exit). The KU strategy offers opportunities for convergence and support services and referral to other relevant institutions, especially local government, to ensure self-reliance and financial independence after the Program exit of 4Ps families.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of graduated beneficiaries. This research study involves grantees of exited households with the intent of gaining perspective of their situation and how they go with life being no longer part of the 4Ps. The researcher ventured into this qualitative research, knowing that there is minimal literature on the lives of graduated beneficiaries after their stint from the Program. This study concerns the social aspects of the former beneficiaries and seeks to search for truths about events that go on around them (Hancock et al., 2007).

This study is viewed from the lens of Social Capital Theory. (Thomas and Gupta, 2021) Social Capital theory depicts the ability of individuals to secure benefits by membership in social networks. Since the household beneficiaries receive cash grants from the government through membership in the 4Ps, Social Capital plays a significant role in achieving the Program's goal of eradicating extreme poverty within the social network - the community and the government. (Claridge, 2018) emphasized that social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies to improve their condition. This theory means that cash grants given to beneficiaries are a form of social protection as part of the government investment strategy in return for the beneficiaries' compliance with the Program conditions to uplift their well-being in the long run. This theoretical lens will also open more ideas on the distinctions between the motivations of beneficiaries and the Program in exchanges mediated by social capital. Although the motivation of beneficiaries is readily understandable, this study will also help explain the complexity of the motivation or goal of the Program in giving cash grants to beneficiaries without immediate return.

This study seeks to explore the experiences, the impact, and how the lives of the program graduates have changed after benefitting from the 4Ps. This study seeks to answer the following specific questions:

1. What are the experiences of the program beneficiaries as members of the 4Ps?
2. How did the lives of the beneficiaries change after graduating from the Program?
3. What insights and realizations can they share with the community?

The results of this study will benefit extensively the **Social Welfare and Development offices** as a guide for their efforts in designing policy interventions and strategies for those graduated beneficiaries that still need social programs and services for an improved and sustained well-being. This study will also help the **non-government organizations** focused on eliminating poverty-related incidence in a local area, intensify their methods and amplify approaches in determining what types of programs and services should be given to graduated beneficiaries. Aspiring or practicing **Social Workers** in community research can find this a helpful reference relative to graduated beneficiaries. This study will also give insight to the **national government** in instituting measures, policies, and interventions beneficial to graduated program beneficiaries.

II.METHOD

This chapter presents the nature of the study, the research design, the role of the researcher, the research participants, the data collection process, analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations.

1. Research Design

This research used qualitative design. A qualitative research method is a widely accepted and well-recognized method of scientific inquiry. Qualitative research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). This method is concerned with understanding situations and events from the participant's viewpoint. This type of research is also an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013).

This study uses explicitly a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology studies the structure of various types of individuals' emotions, thoughts, perceptions, imagination, memory, and describes the appearance of things as lived experiences. I used the phenomenological approach because it illustrates clearly the specific details of their experience. Thus, this is an appropriate tool in this study to explore and envision the actual experiences of my participants who have already graduated from the PantawidPamilyang Pilipino Program.

In various definitions, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience of persons' perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, and desire and whose purpose is to describe the phenomena or the appearance of things as lived experience, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts. The researcher used the phenomenological approach because it is an effective instrument to understand the participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions based on their experiences. It illustrates clearly the specific details of their experience. Thus, this is an appropriate tool in this study to explore and envision the actual experiences of my participants who have already graduated from the PantawidPamilya program.

Considering that there is minimal literature on the lives of graduated PantawidPamilya beneficiaries, this qualitative research needed a complex and detailed understanding of their lived experience. The researcher also wrote long passages because the evidence must substantiate the claims of these participants and show multiple perspectives. The incorporation of quotes to provide perspectives to participants also lengthens the study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher in this study engaged in a complex, time-consuming data analysis process by sorting large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories.

Qualitative data sources included interviews/conversations, recordings, observations, and documents (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Creswell, 2013). To begin with my data gathering, I observed and followed specific protocols. I went to the local government unit of San Miguel through the Local Social Welfare and Development Office for approval. I presented to them the purpose of my study and the certificate of approval from the University of Mindanao to conduct the study. During the interview, the researcher conducted a brief orientation to the participants and established a good rapport so everyone felt relaxed and comfortable. The purpose of the study was presented, and the extent of their participation was explained based on the informed consent form. In this process, the researcher, must avoid speculative interpretation to ensure that the results reflect a precise description of the experienced phenomenon of the participant. In this research study, I was able to classify themes of the phenomena through purposive sampling, which is a deliberate choice of participants with twelve participants for focus group discussion who are informed about or have experience with the central concept(s) being investigated (Tongco 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Fraenkel et al., 2012). These type of participants who have graduated from the 4Ps are expected to provide a considerable amount of detailed information about their experiences.

2. Role of the Researcher

In this study, the researcher set aside his assumption to avoid misrepresenting the intended meaning of the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As an instrument in the analysis of this study, the researcher must be honest and vigilant about his perspective, preexisting thoughts and beliefs, and developing a hypothesis (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In conducting this qualitative study, I was interested in learning how individuals experience and interact with the social world and how they find the meaning in their experiences, which can only be established by talking directly with them and allowing them to tell their stories (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

During the interview, the researcher conducted a brief orientation to the participants and established good rapport so everyone felt relaxed and comfortable. The purpose of the study was presented, and the extent of their participation was explained based on the informed consent form.

Having a personal stake in this study, being surrounded by 4Ps neighbors in my community, a staff of 4Ps for seven years, and as a student of MSW, I gathered the data by conducting focus group discussions and conducting interviews with all the twelve participants for the FGD which I also facilitated with the assistance of a colleague who took notes during the interviews and FGD and served as one of my independent readers and analysts. Moreover, I asked for assistance from another independent reader and analyst in analyzing the data gathered from the audio recordings of the interviews and FGD. After coming up with the same findings, I employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis and interpretation and, after that, formed my insights.

Since the inception of the PantawidPamilyang Pilipino Program, many families have already graduated from the Program. With the institutionalization of the 4Ps, a yearly graduation ceremony has been held for households, especially those who have attained self-sufficient well-being before graduation. In this light, the researcher sought that it is also essential to explore the lived experiences of these households after graduation from the Program now that they are no longer recipients of one of the government's major social protection strategies to stop the intergenerational cycle of poverty. For this reason, I undertook this study to find out, if needed, factors to contribute my two cents worth to explore their lived experiences towards ensured quality and sustained well-being of former beneficiaries.

3. Research Participants

The identified participants of this study were former PantawidPamilya beneficiaries of San Miguel, Surigao del Sur, who graduated from the 4Ps. There were twelve participants during the conduct of the focus group discussion. For purposes of the study, ethnicity, gender, and age did not matter in the selection process. These identified former beneficiaries have graduated due to waived status from the Program or are tagged as self-sufficient before graduation. These essential criteria for exit from the Program can give significant results in understanding the meaning of the phenomenon and their willingness to share their feelings, thoughts, experiences, and reflections of their current phase.

A Purposive sampling method was used in choosing potential respondents. This method means that the researcher selects participants using his judgment because they can purposefully inform, based on prior information, an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2012). The subject sample was obtained from the list of former 4Ps beneficiaries provided upon request at the MSWDO.

To achieve good-quality results in this qualitative study, the researcher chose to get twelve informants for the focus group discussion. The participants in this research study do not include child beneficiaries of exited households. This study does not include former beneficiaries outside the identified locality. Participation is voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. The participant may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.

4. Instrument

The instrument used in this research went through validation from four internal and one external expert from academics and practitioners of the field of the study before the data collection process. The validation process involves analyzing the accuracy and appropriateness of the instrument's content.

5. Data Collection

In this study, the data collection underwent the focus group discussion process with the participants. Before conducting the interview, the researcher asked permission from the local government unit through the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer to conduct the study and be provided with the list of graduated households of the Program in their locality. The researcher also asked the identified participants to sign the consent form to allow the researcher to conduct data gathering, followed by an orientation about the research study.

Hancock (2009) recommends that during the interview process, the researcher should put the interviewee at ease and have good listening skills to collect data that genuinely reflects the opinions and feelings of the participants concerning the study.

In this interview, the researcher employed a semi-structured face-to-face interview that was audio-recorded with the informant's consent and approval, which involved several open-ended questions based on the topic covered in the study. The interview has a topic guide, which is a list of topics the interviewer wants to discuss (Hancock, 2009). (Fraenkel et al., 2009) proposed that a face-to-face interview is the most effective method in ensuring the cooperation of the respondents where rapport can be established, questions can be clarified, unclear or incomplete answers can be followed up, and so on. This method allowed me to probe more deeply and elicit core information from each participant through rich descriptions of their experiences.

The responses of participants during focus group discussions were documented in writing, with the help of a colleague. There were times when the response of an informant was ambiguous since other participants were not articulate enough to express it. The researcher needed to repeat the question to capture specific details and to confirm from the participants their answers to the questions being asked. To ensure that all information was documented thoroughly, audio and video recording was also applied to capture the actual words conveyed by the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

The open-ended nature of the interview provides opportunities for the interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. The inquirer sought that this approach is the best way to understand the participant's experiences, and go deeper into their thoughts, listening to their views in exploring new issues. In doing this, the researcher was meticulous by not sharing personal opinions, agreeing or disagreeing with their statements, and drawing personal conclusions from the interview but based everything on facts described by the respondents to remove any bias on the results. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher gave his full attention to each of the participants to grasp, in full detail, their lived experiences.

6. Analysis of Data

In a research project, the data collection process, data analysis, and writing a report can go on simultaneously (Creswell, 2013). The goal of data analysis is to illuminate the experiences of those who have lived them by sharing the richness of their lived experiences (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011).

Data analysis follows three general approaches (Creswell, 2013). First, prepare and organize the data for analysis, then reduce the data into themes through coding and condensing the codes, and finally, represent the data in figures, tables, or discussion.

At an early stage in the analysis process, the researcher organized the data into computer files and converted the files to appropriate text units called transcription. The researcher listened to the recording and transcribed the audio to assess the quality of the data gathered. Although transcribing is an arduous process, Sutton and Austin (2015) emphasized that converting the spoken word to the written word must be done to facilitate analysis. After the organization of data, the researcher continues the analysis by getting a *sense of the whole database* (Creswell, 2013) by reading the entire transcripts several times to get a general sense of their statement before breaking them into themes. The researcher allowed himself to be immersed in the details of the participant's descriptions and wrote notes or memos in the margins of transcripts, which helped the researcher understand critical concepts in the initial analysis process. Unlike the quantitative approach, the data analysis process in a qualitative method can begin immediately (Belotto, 2018) after the first interview for a qualitative study. The researcher continually read the transcripts to be familiar with the content. In this process, the data content was also assessed to determine whether the information needed to be provided based on the research questions was answered clearly or ambiguously. How the interview was conducted was also reviewed for bias and checked thoroughly if more probing questions were needed for the following interviews.

From organizing data, which includes reading and memoing, the next step moves to describing, classifying, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013) by forming codes or categories. The coding process is done by aggregating texts into small categories or clustering similar data and discarding other irrelevant information, thereby reducing the data. In the qualitative approach, these clustered ideas are labeled *themes*. This step is the heart of data analysis, where the researcher constructs detailed description, form themes, and provide an interpretation of the study. In a phenomenological study, the researcher will relate the themes to one another to develop an exhaustive description of the investigated experience (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). The researcher then abstracts the codes to a more significant meaning of the data and linked interpretation to the more significant research literature. Still, these interpretations are seen as tentative, inconclusive, and questioning (Creswell, 2013).

Streubert and Carpenter (2011) explained that once researchers have analyzed all themes relevant to a study, it is reported in a meaningful way to the intended audience. It might be impossible to ignore biases, but the researcher made sure to articulate clearly his position and subjectivities (worldview, perspectives, biases) in a manner that is clear and coherent for readers (Sutton and Austin, 2015)

The conceptual framework of Social Capital Theory was then interpreted from the related literature on the subject in an attempt to explain with a theory the phenomenon being studied by the researcher. The researcher in the data analysis process was deeply immersed, which required commitment to fully gain an understanding of what the data conveys. This process required a significant degree of dedication to reading, intuiting, analyzing, synthesizing, and reporting the discoveries since it is only through rich description that the experiences of others will be explored (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011).

7. Trustworthiness

In a qualitative method, no statistical tests can be applied to measure the reliability and validity of a study. To establish the truth in the study, the researcher employed Lincoln and Guba's model of trustworthiness. (Creswell, 2013) further illustrated the criteria and outlined the purpose of these pillars, which are credibility

(confidence in the truth of the findings), transferability (showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts), dependability (showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated), and confirmability (the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest).

Credibility. To establish the study's credibility, the researcher ensured that an accurate picture of the phenomenon was demonstrated. To do this, the researcher, during interviews, carefully observed to avoid expressing personal ideas and conclusions that could affect the result of the study. This study aims to gather factual data based on the actual experiences of the research participants. With me was my colleague, who assisted me with the note-taking while I was doing the interview. Another friend and a colleague in the field also served as one of my independent readers. Three of us then analyzed the same data and produced an independent analysis for comparison.

Transferability. To ensure that the findings are transferable, the researcher provided detailed descriptions and described sufficiently the context of the research for others to gain confidence to transfer the results of this study. Detailed description of the participant's lived experiences allows other readers to have a proper understanding of the study under investigation that enables them to compare the phenomenon with those they have seen emerge in their situations.

Dependability. This aspect of the study includes careful observation by clearly documenting the research. The researcher in this study ensures careful data recording based on facts and sets aside his reflections during the data collection process. This study also underwent review from professional peers by reading and reacting to data collected and produced independent analysis. The researcher believes that peer scrutiny helped to establish trust from other readers.

Confirmability. To address this perspective as part of trustworthiness, the researcher practiced noninvolvement of personal opinions and judgment to prevent data contamination, thereby achieving precise and accurate results of the study. Although it is inevitable to discard one's analysis of the research being investigated, the researcher applied a bracketing approach and involved other independent readers and analysts for a peer consensus as external validators to shape the trustworthiness of this study, which some authors call *reflexive auditing*. In other words, this study ensures that the findings are the results of the experiences and ideas of research participants rather than of the researcher.

8. Ethical consideration

To protect the researcher-participant relationship, interpretation of data, and the overall design of the research, the process of conducting this qualitative study undergoes Ethics Review from the University of Mindanao - Professional Schools with UMEREC Protocol No. 2022-399 in line with research protocol and ethical principles such as Respect for persons, Informed and voluntary consent, Beneficence, Confidentiality, Risks, Benefits, Plagiarism, Fabrication, Falsification, Conflict of Interest, Deceit, Permission from Organization/Location and Authorship.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the experiences of graduated beneficiaries, the changes in their lives, and their insights and realizations, as well as the concepts which emerged from the information gathered. This part deals with the responses to the Focus Group Discussion questions under each research problem. Nine (9) themes emerged in this study after data analysis. There were three themes for the research question on the experiences of former program beneficiaries as part of the 4Ps: responsible parenting, community involvement, and compliance is important. Three themes also emerged from the research question on the changes in the lives of former beneficiaries: improved economic capacity, improved psychosocial relations, and strengthened self-esteem and career. Finally, three themes also emerged on the insights and realizations: poverty is not a hindrance to success, achieved women empowerment, and strengthened family relations. The results were then discussed based on the themes identified from the data analysis.

1. Experiences of the Program beneficiaries as part of the 4Ps

1.1 Responsible Parenting

This study revealed that responsible parenting, particularly in the locale mentioned, is prevalent. This result was dominantly observed in their responses, as they shared how they learned practical things that made them better as parents. The responses serve as manifestations of participant's gained awareness of their roles and responsibilities as former members of the PantawidPamilya program.

Responsible parenting is the ability of parents to detect the needs and desires of their children and help them become responsible children (Lanjekar et. al, 2022). Considering the case of Benita (pseudonym), who now has a child working as head teacher in DepEd and another in the Department of Agriculture, she shared that as a mother of 6 children, it was tough and challenging, yet through the seminars that she attended to as a 4Ps beneficiary, she was able to hurdle it all with ample time management and great goal in achieving what is best for their children. Benita's various roles in the community as a parent leader of 4Ps and as a Kalahi CIDDS volunteer

leader did not affect her parenting role despite enormous community responsibility and her physical condition as a PWD. Instead, her leadership increased her awareness of parental responsibility evident in her children's present situation.

In the case of Ruth (pseudonym), she also shared that being a part of the 4Ps is not only about cash grants but how it transformed her views because of the Family Development Session, which made their relationship at home stronger. Ruth further stated that with the government's assistance, her family became more inspired and goal-oriented. Linda (pseudonym), on the other hand, said she ensures that her children visit health centers so that they are healthy, more immune to diseases, and free from any health deficiencies. With increased utilization of health services, beneficiaries have better access to responsible parenthood services. These experiences are an articulation of the view of (Durisik and Bunijevac, 2017), who stressed that parental involvement begins at home with the parents providing their children with appropriate learning experiences, a safe and healthy environment, and a positive attitude.

1.2 Community Involvement

The local communities are the primary beneficiaries of any community engagements, such as in the 4Ps implementation. (Flint and Blyth, 2021) emphasized that program beneficiaries have been increasingly viewed as actors in community development rather than being considered passive recipients. Community involvement is further supported by Renata (2020), stating that communities should be empowered to strengthen and improve local conditions and make them part of the decision-making process in community transformation.

Taking into consideration the case of Jocelyn (pseudonym), she happily looked back on her experiences. She compared her previous and current experiences, stating that before, without 4Ps, she was just at home 24/7, stuck in a cycle of doing unlimited household chores from morning until evening. With the 4Ps, the Program gave her the experience of attending various meetings at the community level not only as a beneficiary but likewise as a parent leader. The community participation provided her opportunities to explore more knowledge to better her role not only as a wife or as a mother but also as a citizen of this country. As a result of her regular attendance to Family Development Sessions, her family has maintained to go to church every Sunday, afterward, they would eat at a restaurant or watch a movie together at home as their form of family bonding. These activities were not usually experienced by the family members of Ruth. Now, they give much importance not only to rest physically but also to deepen their connections and improve family relationships. Ruth learned these experiences from the shared knowledge during the FDS with other program beneficiaries.

Aileen (pseudonym), on the other hand, experienced community involvement through FDS and other various civic community activities such as the Women's Month celebration. For her, it is a significant activity where women of her community reflect on their extraordinary roles as agents of change in society. Aileen also included clean-up drives, tree planting, and communal gardening as part of other civic activities she participated in her local community. Additionally, Leonila also participated during the town's founding anniversary where she and a group of 4Ps beneficiaries install booth and partake in group presentations or contests. Poverty has many faces, changing across time and space, and has been described in many forms. As mentioned in the earlier part of this study, poverty is no longer just economic in aspect but also now covers other dimensions such as lack of education, lack of health, lack of awareness, lack of capabilities, lack of social inclusion, etc. (Ardoin, Bowers and Gaillard, 2022) recognized civic engagement as a critical process to address societal issues. (Cooper, Vincent & Crayton 2022) further describe that people with heightened civic participation have a greater sense of community, better leadership, lower incidence of crime, and healthier and happier citizens.

1.3 Being Compliant Is Important

As members of the PantawidPamilya program, 4Ps beneficiaries must faithfully follow certain conditions to be eligible for a cash grant every two months. This mechanism also emphasizes that 4Ps is not a dole-out program since the transfer of cash grants is conditional to ensure the achievement of the desired program outcome. In other words, the Program applies a participatory approach among its beneficiaries to effect change and development. (Kim and Yoo, 2015) stated that the underlying reasons the implementation of CCT in the Philippines gained majority support from policymakers are the conditions and responsibilities in education, health, and family development imposed by the Program.

Ruth (pseudonym) recalled the conditions under which she abides carefully in compliance with the Program, including attendance to FDS, children 0-5 years old having monthly check-ups, and school-aged children are enrolled and must attend classes. She further cited an example that if she fails to attend FDS for two months, it would mean forfeiture of the grant allotted for FDS attendance in the following payout schedule. In addition, she stated that if her child fails to complete 85% of monthly school attendance, the teachers would mark her child non-compliant and, therefore, will not receive the maximum grant intended. The long-term impact on compliance with education, as stated by (Chico et al., 2020), allows CCT children to get to preschool at younger ages compared to when CCT first began, reduces early grade repetition, and helps children to have an easier transition to the next stage of education.

Marissa (pseudonym), with a smile on her face, reminisces her experiences as a 4Ps beneficiary every time she attends FDS. According to her, she was like a student because she would bring a pen and notebook to take notes of their discussions. Their municipal link serves as their teacher. Their municipal link sometimes invites another resource person considered an expert on the subject matter, such as a midwife, fireman, police, nurse, etc. Some topics discussed were personal hygiene, early childhood development, and drug abuse prevention, etc. Often, they would do role-playing or drill to enact various situations. The COVID-19 pandemic did not even stop Berlina (pseudonym) from continuing her learning through the modular conduct of FDS. Even without face-to-face FDS, she ensured to comply with the program conditions on FDS by reading the module, answering the questions at home, and submitting to the assigned parent leader who is in charge of consolidating their notebooks. According to (Aanisa and Yulindrasari, 2021, as cited in Aquino et al. 2013, p.57), the 4Ps and the implementation of FDS in the Philippines caused the beneficiaries to experience a significant change in their behavior towards a positive direction. This experience is further elaborated by (Suradi, Irmayani, and Habibullah, 2020), saying that through FDS activities, beneficiaries obtain knowledge, skills, and improved attitudes and behaviors relating to childcare and education, health and nutrition, financial management, etc. towards breaking the chain of poverty and soon enter graduation phase. When people do not have equal access to opportunities, or when they are not given proper education, and when there are high incidences of illnesses, there is an adverse effect in our society, and we all pay the price. In other words, this is a situation people want to avoid – whether rich or poor. So this means a call to action – a call to change so that all may have access to health and education, have increased skills and capabilities, and have a voice in their communities.

2. Changes in the lives of the beneficiaries

2.1 Improved Economic Capacity

Improved Economic capacity has emerged as one of the major themes of the changes in the participant's lives. Relatively, social assistance is the first objective of 4Ps through the cash grants paid to beneficiaries every two months as its short-term goal in mitigating household expenditures. This additional income is expected to ease the spending of poor households, such as food and other basic needs, thus incentivizing the households to comply with the conditionalities of the Program and encourage them to invest in the education and health of their children. This shows that the cash grants received do not encourage dependency among its program beneficiaries but rather aid them towards improved economic capacity.

This experience is similar in the case of Jocelyn (pseudonym), who shared how she managed to improve their household's economic condition she learned during the Family Development Session. According to Jocelyn, she did not have in mind saving money before since their income was not even enough to sustain the needs of her children. With the 4Ps, the Program enabled Jocelyn to provide the immediate needs of her family. Through the financial literacy topic during FDS, Jocelyn learned the importance of savings. Whenever she has extra money, she saves 200-500php and puts it into a savings box. After a year, her savings reached 15,000php, which she used as capital for a sari-sari store. The lessons learned by beneficiaries from constant participation in sessions or community activities allowed them to be equipped with a positive mindset focused on improving their household condition.

Benita (pseudonym) also recalled the hard days of always cooking instant noodles as their meal because it was cheap and affordable. With the 4Ps, they cook noodles only if they want to. In line with the study of (Saldivar-Frausto et al. 2022), through the monetary incentives of the conditional cash transfer program, household beneficiaries increase their buying power on food expenditure. In a broader sense, the nutrition education that 4Ps beneficiaries received through the course of program membership also conditioned the preferences and attitudes of households that have an impact on health and nutrition outcomes as desired by the CCT program.

Marissa (pseudonym) also reminisces how the 4Ps influenced her to be economical and save, particularly on their food consumption. According to her, the 4Ps taught her how to initiate to improve economically, such as doing backyard gardening with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture's free seeds or seedlings. Through the harvested vegetables from the comfort of her backyard, her family consumes free fresh and organic food which is a huge help to save expenses, especially now that goods are getting more expensive. She also added that even though she is no longer part of the 4Ps, she continued having her backyard garden as it not only helps minimize expenses but also serves as the best source of nutritious and chemical-free food. Marissa also sold extra produce to her neighborhood, which serves as additional income. This experience is consistent with the study of (Guenat et al., 2022) that gardening can reduce the amount of money for food expenses, while over-production of vegetables contributes to income generation by selling for extra income. This learned behavior of Marissa is a manifestation that her family did not depend on cash grant for her household expenses but rather 4Ps taught them the initiative to better their household condition. Some people do not understand why the government spends big fund on the Program, yet the poverty rate has not reduced much. It can be inferred from the experiences of participants, that cash grants only help reduce the poverty gap but not high enough to lift them over the line.

2.2 Improved Psychosocial Relations

The program beneficiaries showed improved psychosocial relations, as revealed in their responses during the focus group discussion. A study on cash transfers by (Mc Guire et al., 2020) indicated that among the Program recipients in low and middle-income countries, the program has a positive effect on their mental health and well-being. Additionally, psychosocial factors, as stated by (K Thomas et al., 2020), play a role in a person's health and behavior change.

In the case of Benita (pseudonym), she narrated how her regular moments attending FDS as a member of 4Ps would one day make her a local community leader. Benita was once just an ordinary member of the 4Ps, when after two years, due to her potential skills to lead a group, Benita was recommended to be a parent leader. Later, with her growing concern for her community, she accepted an additional role as a barangay health worker, attending to the health and nutrition needs of vulnerable members of her community, especially the sickly children, pregnant women, and newborn babies. Despite increasing functions, these did not stop her from responding to a more challenging role to participate in community work where she served as volunteer chairman of the Kalahi CIDDs program in the implementation of infrastructure projects of the DSWD in her locality. Benita's love to serve her community through volunteerism is translated by (Güntert et al., 2022), stating that volunteering leads to social connectedness, brings a sense of meaningfulness, increased happiness, and higher satisfaction with marriage and family life. According to her, her role as a leader was tedious and challenging. Still, these did not hamper her increased desire to serve her community best, even in doing functions simultaneously.

A similar view was shared by Jennifer (pseudonym) on how 4Ps influenced and changed her life through community engagements and participation. For her, 4Ps participation increased her self-confidence. She also learned to value family time and bonding, an activity that she said they did not usually have before 4Ps membership. Aileen (pseudonym), at the same time, expressed how 4Ps increased her parenting capacity after being immersed actively in the community. As a result, Aileen also encouraged her children to participate and perform better in school. With this, not only did Aileen experience improved behavior, but her children also mirrored the positive practices they perceived from their parents. (Lyengar, 2021) emphasized the case of Jennifer and Aileen that parents are co-facilitators in the learning process of their children. (Ressler, 2020) also stressed that investment into the community has spillover effects that help to connect families to other institutions such as schools.

2.3 Strengthened Self-esteem and Career Capacity

Another theme that emerged under changes in the lives of these former beneficiaries is strengthened self-esteem and career capacity. Looking at the presented experience of Leonila (pseudonym), a mother with seven children, she conveyed that life without the 4Ps before felt hopeless, a period of distress, and lacked motivation. She felt like she was stuck in the same cycle of difficulty as each day passed, and she had no confidence to improve their situation. She further explained that one of her biggest regrets was when she gave one of her children to stay with her sister out of poverty. For her, there was a feeling of shame and guilt when she realized it was an act of irresponsibility being a parent. When Leonila became part of the 4Ps, she learned the value of caring for her family as she reflected on her past choice about one of her children. Not soon after, she managed to get her child back, and their family became complete. With this, Leonila gained more confidence and a sense of ownership of her parental responsibility was established. This is reinforced in a study by (Orge et al., 2020) that self-worth and a sense of pride among CCT households, who belong to the lower class of the social system, are boosted.

The Youth Development Session, in the case of Jennifer's (pseudonym) son, who used to be disinterested in school, also provided direction to her son. According to her, her son used to skip school due to peer pressure, which resulted in non-compliance with education conditions. The situation prompted Jennifer to monitor her son closely with the intervention provided by the municipal links through the conduct of YDS. (Naite, 2021) described that parents' active involvement in their children's education, has a positive impact on their behavioral development, including academic performance. Jennifer's son eventually restored his confidence and interest in school. He became more proactive, resulting in education compliance and increased grades.

Berlina (pseudonym) highlighted that the lessons she learned from the 4Ps were beneficial. She passed them on to her children for application. She also defended the Program from critics who claim that the 4Ps encourage dependency among its household beneficiaries, citing that the grants supported the education and health obligations of her children. Through the 4Ps' skills referral intervention, her husband got the opportunity for the TESDA's skills training on welding. The opportunity motivated them to strive better for the welfare of their family. After a year, her husband got employed in a construction company. Three years later, using the skills acquired from TESDA and the experience in a construction company, he went overseas and worked as a welder. Slowly by slowly, they were able to improve their house. Berlina and her husband provided a more comfortable life for their children. It can be understood from the changes in the lives of these participants that 4Ps aim to address the multidimensional nature of poverty among its beneficiaries for them to have a more decent life, to live with dignity, and to attain self-sufficiency for an eventual graduation or exit from the program.

3. Insights and Realizations

3.1 Poverty is not a hindrance to success

As revealed during the interview, when participants were asked about their insights on being former members of the 4Ps, they generally shared that being poor is not a hindrance to improvement. Regardless of economic background, they consider that poor people can still be successful and that their condition does not necessarily prevent them from reaching greater heights. They then mentioned that there is a government that spends a massive amount of budget allocation for the health and education needs of poor children to mitigate their expenses and fill in the gaps against extreme poverty. Participants agreed that it is then, now more than ever, possible to achieve improved well-being.

Leonora (pseudonym) disclosed her challenging but inspirational experience of walking for around 30 minutes to the venue to attend FDS. According to her, it was a challenging situation but a worthwhile experience because she learned new lessons that she reflected on and gave her new perspectives. For her, the long walk and hungry stomach are worthwhile experiences as the difficulty was always part of the process. Now that she lives a better life, she can look back on the past with a grateful heart.

As for Benita (pseudonym), she also considered faith and hard work as a factor that sustained her in raising her children. According to her, it was not easy to rear children, primarily when one could barely provide food. Still, she rested in God her worries and trusted him completely. When things feel so bad, Benita takes comfort from God in the form of prayer. As Filipinos, it is a common practice to rest our burdens on God. She believes every difficulty is just temporary and a test the Creator gives. With faith and hard work, Benita stressed that it is possible to overcome fears and challenges. The government's aid through the 4Ps gave her more strength and opportunity to address her difficult situation. Marilyn (pseudonym), on the other hand, testified her family crossed from poverty to improved well-being. She cited her children, who finished already school, as empirical evidence. She also stressed that although they were members of the 4Ps, they also worked hard to reach their family's endeavor through farming and putting up a sari-sari store. Now, both Benita and Marilyn felt amazed because each of their family members was finally living the kind of life they had only once prayed and hoped for. As a living testimony of how the 4Ps shaped their family's condition, Benita and Marilyn hope that more families will benefit from the Program.

3.2 Achieved Women Empowerment

The participants of the study saw the empowerment of women as one of their realizations after years of being part of the Program. As one of the most discussed and advocated subjects over the years, people have gained more understanding of gender equality, but it still undeniably remains one of the significant social issues. (Völker and Doneys, 2020), asserted that women's empowerment is pivotal to development. Thus, the government, including local or international organizations from various sectors, continuously promotes this cause to achieve the desired outcomes for women. The PantawidPamilya has served this purpose as a mechanism to address the contentious issue of the gender gap among poor communities, which can be seen through women's active involvement in its implementation.

As in the case of Jocelyn (pseudonym), she revealed that limited capacity to manage their finances in the house sometimes results in conflict, mentioning her husband works for household income, but she has no control of his salary. She further emphasized that her husband would give her enough money or too little for the needs of the household while he keeps some of his income for his personal use. (Zhidkova, 2020) mentioned that financial disengagement is one of the most destructive conflicts in a family relationship. Through the 4Ps as an empowerment platform, most mothers are appointed as head beneficiaries or grantees of the household. If we look at the pockets of poverty in the community, we can seldom see mothers have the ability to own their atm. As grantees of the 4Ps, the ATM card is named after them, which gives them power in the decision-making, including how to take control of the subsidy.

The study of (Talimio and Salagubang, 2022), revealed that mothers are more hands-on and more knowledgeable about the needs of their children since they spend more time in the household than the time spent by their husbands. Through cash grants, which go directly to female grantees, they have more sense of financial independence from their husbands, feel ownership on their role, and are empowered because they have their share in developing their family's condition.

3.3 Strengthened family relations

Based on the general responses of the participants in this study, most of them shared that their family relations improved with the 4Ps. Reasons for strengthened family relations, as revealed in their responses, are due to lessons learned from attending FDS, enhanced confidence of children attending school, and less financial difficulty.

Aileen (pseudonym) shared that by attending FDS, the lessons she learned enhanced her awareness of most of life's aspects physically, mentally, financially, and even spiritually. According to her, there are many things to learn from FDS, such as how to manage situations during times of catastrophe. She expounds that awareness of disaster preparedness is vital for Filipinos, especially since we are frequently hit with various

calamities. Moreover, Aileen stressed that FDS also increased her self-discipline, especially in financial management. With improved capacity in managing their finances, she became more understanding with her spouse and developed healthier relations with one another. Their children also receive the best of support, such as in education responsibilities, which results in increased attendance and improved school performance. This is a clear response to the recommendation of (Gobena, 2018) that the government should sensitize families on the importance of supporting their children's education. Considering how imperative adequate education is to the success of children as nation-builders in the future, it is essential to invest by giving them the best resources to reach their highest potential (Normandin, 2022)

Another participant also shared that through lectures shared by 4Ps, she became more aware of her rights as a woman and children's rights. (Li, et al., 2020) cited that implementing social support programs helps raise awareness to avoid the effects of low socioeconomic status. Attendance to FDS by members within the same range of social class in the community serves as the most suitable venue where various ideas coming from diverse experiences of parents are presented and thus foster wisdom on improved family situations. Leonila (pseudonym) also looked back and compared the way they celebrate special occasions such as birthdays. According to her, they could now celebrate birthdays and other special events outdoors with a cake, unlike the usual days when they only let the days pass like ordinary days. This particular experience entails that enhanced socioeconomic conditions could also result in a strengthened family relations. With all these being presented, it is evident that the 4Ps greatly help shape the family conditions of poor households with their integrated and holistic services toward a happy and healthier society.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the results of the study, I can say that the graduated 4Ps beneficiaries have improved their condition through the help of the 4Ps. This result is substantiated by Thomas and Gupta (2021) Social Capital Theory, which depicts the ability of individuals to secure benefits by membership in a social network – the community and the government. It also upheld the assertion of Creswell (2013) that the qualitative research method is better at bringing to the surface the experiences of graduated and exited beneficiaries.

From the study findings, we have seen how the experiences of exited beneficiaries from the Program impacted their lives to improve their household condition from being poor to self-sufficiency. We can also derive from the study, as revealed by the participants, that not only their economic condition has improved, but also a manifestation of changed behavior because of their engagement in community activities, which foster personality development and awareness as part of the 4Ps objectives. This is parallel with the characterization of poverty that it is not just about limited financial capacity but also lack of awareness, capabilities, and social inclusion. As a result of the 4Ps, findings revealed that apart from improved economic conditions, significant advantages were also achieved, such as improved responsible parenting, increased community involvement, promoted women empowerment, strengthened self-esteem and career capacity, and improved family relations.

Based on the findings of the study, I can claim that the Program is serious in meeting its goals to uplift the condition of the poor and marginalized sector of our society. It is also evident that the Program plays a vital role in eradicating extreme poverty at the grassroots level so that no one is left behind.

The contributions of this study lie in the availability of the graduated 4Ps beneficiaries' views and insights on the experiences of exited 4Ps beneficiaries and the concepts derived from the results. Moreover, it brings the fore the advantage of using the qualitative approach in understanding specific experiences. It also opens opportunities for future research in other areas of experiences of graduated 4Ps beneficiaries that have not been explored yet.

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