

ASSESSMENT ON THE FELT NEEDS OF INFORMAL SETTLER FAMILIES: A CALL FOR SUPPORT

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**Abstract:** The study was intended to broadly explore the felt needs as experienced emotionally and expressed by informal Filipino- Muslim families which needed to be addressed and relieved as quickly as possible. These group of people were displaced due to a five-month long siege of Marawi City by ISIS- inspired militants in May to October 2017. The province has consistently been one of the Philippines poorest. Because of extreme poverty combined with land dispossession, social exclusion and constrained access to basic social services, they moved out from their place of origin and transferred to an overcrowded neighborhood located in the urban area of Sta, Cruz, Laguna with no security of tenure since they do not own the land property.

Informal settler families have been facing challenges amid their poor living conditions due to poverty and adverse health concerns which they identified as felt needs and were deemed essential to solve the varied problems they perceived in the community.

Quality housing condition was one of the essential basic requirements that should be met by the families. However, because of financial constraints, the houses were small and weak and made up of flimsy plywood, salvaged woods and corrugated tins which were not really appropriate to reside in.

Diseases related to lack of potable water, poor environmental sanitation and inadequate nutrition formed the majority of reported illness by the mothers.

The neighborhood had limited and unreliable livelihood opportunities with majority of the residents relied on petty businesses and casual skilled jobs as means of generating income.

Felt needs are defined as needs and challenges” perceived by individuals experiencing challenges, maybe equated with want and are phenomenological in character “(Cox, Erlich, Rothman, Tropman, 1984, 1984 p. 9). Felt needs were strongly experienced especially during times of natural calamities such as typhoons and floods when families were unable to take opportunities to go out of the house to find other sources of income. It was also during this time that flooded community would place them at risk for vulnerability of contacting communicable diseases and pose threats for accidents and injuries.

The research study employed purposive and purposeful sampling. There were eight participants who were involved during the face -to -face and in-depth interviews to obtain a general background information about the topic of interest and on the meanings of participants’ experiences.

Thematic analysis was adapted from Braun and Clark (2008) wherein the data were familiarized, initial codes were generated, categories were created, searched, reviewed, defined and named themes and eventually produced the report.

From the participants’ felt needs which enveloped their attitudes, their values, their hopes, their aspirations and their fears which were deemed necessary to correct the deficiencies they have been experiencing, four themes emerged from the thematic analysis which include “lack of source of income”, “inadequate nutrition”, poor environmental sanitation”, poor housing condition”.

**Keywords:** Felt-needs, informal settler families, Marawi City by ISIS-inspired militants, 4Ps beneficiaries, lack of source of income, Poor environmental sanitation, poor housing condition, Filipino-Muslim families, Constrained access to basic social services, unreliable livelihood opportunities

## INTRODUCTION

*“Although no one can go back and make a brand-new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand-new ending”* Carl Band

Informal settler families who live in poverty due to limited financial resources related to lack of source of income are likely to have limited daily intake of food both in quality and quantity, reside in overcrowded community with poor physical qualities of housing and poor environmental sanitation which could be contributed to improper drainage system.

Moreover, they suffer the consequences of the spread of communicable diseases and development of chronic illnesses. Their living conditions pose threat for accidents and injuries. These factors are interrelated and reflect the socio-economic conditions of the community. Health problems are not isolated from other existing economic, political, and social problems of the society, the challenge to correct this should be in the society.

The social development sector of the local government shall focus on the prevailing felt needs of the informal settlers and to ensure that they will be relocated to sites where they can earn income enough at least to satisfy their basic needs like food, shelter and clothing, to have access to livelihood opportunities, avail of quality health services through education and training and social protection to promote and maintain health, to prevent diseases and to improve the quality of life through families’ empowerment, established relationships, cooperation and teamwork.

The use of felt needs in community development involves the process of identifying needs, ranking their importance and building programs based on ranking. (Jelly L. Wade, 2009). Thus, the phenomenological study led to the emergence of four themes. From the participants’ point of view, “lack of source of income”, “inadequate nutrition”, “poor environmental sanitation and” poor housing conditions”.

The study happened in August 2019 to January 2020.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to explore and analyze how the informal settler families have been coping with their identified felt needs, how do community agencies provide range of services and immediate attention to the felt needs which pose as the major challenges faced by the families in their everyday lives making them more vulnerable and how do stakeholders work collectively to attain community development.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following topics were asked to stimulate discussions regarding felt needs.

1. How do you describe your felt needs?
2. How are the members of the family cope with the felt needs?
3. In what way do you receive assistance from the government agencies
4. What should be the tasks and roles of the people and the government to attain a productive community?

The first two questions were general questions to stimulate discussions and to establish rapport with the participants so that trust will be built leading to a purposeful communication and therapeutic relationship.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is the “system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform your research “(Maxwell, 2008, p.33). It is a “blue print “or guide for research (Grant & Osanloo,2014). It is a framework based on existing theory in a field of inquiry.

The study is based from the Felt Needs Community Development Theory (Hamdawayi Sheriff, 2010) which conclude that “felt needs” is an idea about a change that is considered necessary to rectify a community problem. These are needs emotionally experienced by the people and are needed to be addressed to resolve the problems. Underlying this theory is the idea that alleviation of sufferings is the primary objective of community development, a swift action that will allow a favorable comparison between today’s condition and reality at some point in the future.

### REVIEW of RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review is organized around the study question/s and should present what is already known and how the new study proposes to add to the existing knowledge (Menard, 1995).

For an effective literature review “the researcher literally situates his or her findings in the previous literature, pointing out the exact nature of the contribution” (Merriam, 2009, p. 73).

Felt needs is a basic concept in community development. These needs are changes deemed necessary to correct the deficiencies they perceive in their community.

The use of felt needs in community development practice involves the process of identifying pressing needs according to priorities and programs are built according to what is primarily needed.

A more application of concept is the methodology of needs assessment as a way to obtain data for program designs. Felt needs are products of a past to present orientation (Jelly L. Wade, 2009)

According to Simon Hertnon (2016) A theory of Universal Human Needs is based on the basic requirements of physical health and personal independence. There are two types of need namely survival and betterment. Whenever the survival needs like physical well-being, mental well-being, a safe and healthy environment, reproduction and limiting reproduction, humans attempt to satisfy betterment such as respect from others, more self-esteem, appreciation of “life” and doing good deeds.

Research and development plays a crucial role in giving information on varied issues that will enhance the quality of services on which the health and well-being of the general public depends. Health authorities should assess the health needs of the community drawing on the knowledge of other organizations (DOH, 1997 c).

Braun & Clarke (2006) provide a six-phase guide which is very useful framework for conducting thematic analysis. Become familiar with the data, generate initial code, search for themes, review themes, define themes, write-up. Start to organize in a systematic way. Lots of data can be reduced into small chunks of meaning by coding. Each segment of data is coded to arise curiosity and interest about the research questions. There are no hard or fast rules about what make a theme. It is characterized by its significance.

### RESEARCH SETTING

The research study was conducted in an overcrowded neighborhood in Brgy. Santisima Cruz, Sta. Cruz, Laguna. There were more or less 100 residents residing in 100 square meters land owned by a Muslim family. It is a residential area consisting of weak packed housing units and inhabited by informal settler families. The houses are commonly made of wood and corrugated tins, lack of windows with leaking walls and roofs which place the people at risk for sickness and accidents.

### METHODOLOGY

The method used is a qualitative, phenomenological study, focusing on understanding human behavior or experience and requires that the person interprets the action for the researcher, the researcher must then interpret the explanation provided by the person (Boyd, 2001a).

In phenomenological study, the person is viewed as integrated with the environment. Phenomena occur only when the person experiences them. It describes experiences as they are lived- in phenomenological terms, to capture the “lived experiences “of study participants. To describe it the researcher must experience the phenomenon in naïve way ( Kvigne et al., 2002; Sadala & Adorno,2002)

The study used purposive and purposeful sampling which involve the conscious selection of the study participants by the researchers and obtaining information-rich cases for study in depth respectively. The information are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton 2002, p. 230).

The participants from which the sample was drawn consisted of eight study participants. Five were males and three were females. All of them were the heads of the family. To get needed data for this study, the researchers used an approach to community needs assessment involving key informant who had the position to know the community’s needs and utilization process. Based from his knowledge and experiences, he provided information on the needs of the people. Data were also gathered from neighborhood meetings, community gatherings and other similar events for community needs assessment.

The study utilized observation, face to face and in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants. Face to face interview involves gathering a general background information about the topic of interest while in-depth interviews focus on the meanings of the communication conveyed to the researcher.

The researchers made an introduction, began with an explanation of the purpose of the study. Unstructured interviews were conducted on issues related to needs and problems. The researchers believed that this type of interviews were most appropriate as it is customary for the participants to begin discussions with small talk which lasted a half an hour to an hour or more.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The following steps were undertaken using thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2008).

The researchers generated initial codes, created categories, searched for themes, reviewed, named them and then produced the report.

Access to qualitative data analysis software can make the process of coding much quicker and easier but it is not essential ( Braun & Clarke ( 2006). The data associated with each team is colour- coded. Themes should be coherent and they should be distinct from each other.

Level 1 coding examined the data and codes were taken from the words or language of the participants.

Level 2 coding consisted of data compared with other data. Categories were created which seemed to cluster together resulting from condensing of level 1 code.

Level 3 coding came from the created categories which were then formulated into themes.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis led to the formulation of four themes which came from the reliable source of information, the participants, who answered the questions during interviews. These were the following: “lack of source of income”, “inadequate nutrition”, “poor environmental sanitation” and “poor housing conditions”.

Level 1-coding	Level 2- categories	Level 3-themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Lack of jobs for less educated informal settlers</li> <li>b. There is no permanent income</li> <li>c. Few alternative livelihood projects</li> <li>d. Financial constraints</li> </ul>	Lack of alternative income opportunities	Lack of source of income
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Diet is not well balanced</li> <li>b. Poor meal planning</li> <li>c. Foods rich in essential nutrients are not available</li> <li>d. Getting fewer calories than the body needs</li> <li>e. Lack of clean water source</li> </ul>	Inadequate food intake both in quality & quantity	Inadequate nutrition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Litters are visible around the place</li> <li>b. Waste dumped into the ground</li> <li>c. Garbage around the area are not picked up</li> <li>d. Improper disposal of animal waste</li> <li>e. Presence of open canals as breeding places for mosquitos</li> </ul>	People do not dispose their refuse properly	Poor environmental sanitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Too small for big families</li> <li>b. No sound structure</li> <li>c. Poor ventilation</li> <li>d. Poor lighting</li> <li>e. Poor maintenance of comfort rooms</li> </ul>	Potential for housing -related hazards, accidents & development of diseases	Poor housing conditions

“Lack of source of income”

One of the felt needs identified by the participants which they considered challenging was on how they could generate income. They perceived this problem as the root of all the sufferings that they were experiencing. If they would be given opportunities to earn money for a living, then it would be easier for them to meet the basic physiologic needs of their families and to be able to meet both ends.

One participant stated:

*“Ang hirap ng bubay dito kasi wala kaming permanenting kinikita, minsan may trabaho, pero kalimitan wala kasi wala naman kaming masyadong pinag- aralan .yung aking anak nagtatrabaho sa palengke bilang kargador para makatulong sa pang araw araw na gastusin. Paano kami mabubuhay ng maayos. Sana magbigay sila ng programang makakatulong sa amin tulad ng pagkakakitaan dati kasi may ipinatupad na dito sa programa yung paggawa ng supot kanila yung mga gamit tapos kami ang gagawa at ibebenta naming sa palengke kaso hindi lang inaksyonan ng president namin ((Life is so hard in this community because of limited source of income, there were times, we were hired to work on casual basis but frequently we could not find job because of lack education. One of my children was working as a porter in the market to help me cover our day -to-day expenses. We are still hoping that the government will give us livelihood projects to generate income. Previously a livelihood program was conducted about paper bag making, they provided the raw materials, we sold the finished*

products to the market. Unfortunately, the leader of the community did not take actions to push the projects continuously. Some of us here are 4Ps beneficiaries. How can we enhance our lives if this is our situation?)

Abraham Maslow considered physiological needs to be the most essential of all our needs. If someone is lacking in more than one need, they're likely to try to meet those physiological needs first. For example, if someone is extremely hungry, it's hard to focus on anything else beside food (Elizabeth Hopper, 2020).

Lack of source of income can have devastating effects on the families. Families often face challenges just to meet their physiological needs like food, shelter and clothing in order to survive in this world. Financial constraints could create disadvantages in the physical and mental health and overall quality of life. Lots of problems arise when there is no money to buy foods to satisfy one's hunger, to pay debts and varied bills. It means that a person would not have the capacity to support himself/herself and members of the family especially in times of crisis. The identified limited financial resources was a felt need that must be given immediate attention by the community agencies.

### *Inadequate nutrition*

The participants felt that inadequate nutrition could pose health threat because it contributes to stress, tiredness and the incapacity to work. Most of the people in their neighborhood skipped breakfast which is supposed to be the most important meal in a day. They ate only during lunch and dinner time. Lack of food was cited as one of the pressing issues affecting the health of children and would place the people at risk for developing diseases and other health conditions.

One participant stated:

*"Hindi na kami kumakain sa tamang oras. Gumigising kami sa umaga ng tanghali na para hindi na kami makakain ng umagahan at ilaan ang pagkain sa tanghalian at hapunan. Ang pagkain namin ay kulang sa sustansya, noodles lang at pag may konting pera, bumibili kami ng tuyo sa tindahan. Kung minsan ay kanin lamang at tubig. Kung may regular na trabaho sana, hindi namin dinadanas ito.*

( We do not eat on the right time. We woke up late in the morning just to skip breakfast and reserve the foods for lunch or dinner. The foods that we were taking lack adequate nutrition. If we have a little budget, we bought noodles and dried fish just to satisfy our hunger. There were times only rice and water were served on the table. If there would be a regular job for us, maybe we would not experience this problem).

Almost all of the processes from meager to vital, have strong dependence on the diet. Nutrition both in terms of amount and kind, serves to act as the cornerstone of optimum health and the cutting edge of disease prevention (Tim H. Tanaka,2017).

It is important that people especially children should eat a well- balanced diet to promote and maintain health and to prevent disease. However, these goals could not be achieved because foods rich with essential nutrients were not available.

Furthermore, mothers knew the adverse consequences of inadequate nutrition especially to the physical growth and development of children. Good nutrition plays an important role in providing energy for a child to be strong and healthy in all aspects. Mothers were trying their best to give their children proper nutrition but "life is not easy when one lives in poverty".

### *"Poor environmental sanitation"*

Improper refuse disposal has also an impact to the health of people. Based from different data sources, piles of refuse were found around the place, in pathways and along the canals. Mosquitoes and rodents flourish in the garbage which would definitely lead to the spread of communicable diseases creating health problems.

One female participant said: *"Walang pakialam yung ibang mga tao dito sa lugar namin tungkol sa kalinisan. Tapon ng tapon ng basura kung saan kasi hindi alam ang problemang idudulot nito. Maaaring magdulot ito ng seryosong problema sa kalusugan lalo na kapag nagkaroon ng komplikasyon at maaaring magdulot ng kamatayan".*

(Some of our neighbors do not care about cleanliness. They just throw their garbage everywhere without knowing the repercussions brought by their inappropriate attitudes. Improper refuse disposal could lead to serious health problems and when accompanied by complications may have fatal outcomes.)

An associated problem to garbage disposal is the poor drainage. The uncollected garbage blocks the drainage that causes flood during rainy season. Contaminated water from the flood is hazardous to the health and safety of the people and the flooded area becomes breeding place for insects. If this is not attended to, majority of the residents will get sick.

Some community members talked to the barangay captain regarding the problem and proposed the following measures: a scheduled collection of garbage weekly, provision of garbage collection bins to each household, community education and clean-ups with the supervision of the barangay captain and active participation of the community members.

Knowledge alone is very much inadequate to do a task responsibly towards the environment, while some knowledge on the environment and its regulation could prompt them to have a good attitude which could translate to good intention to act. Others are being influenced by the action of some to act rightly despite actions of others towards the environment (Akintunde,2017)

*“Poor housing conditions”*

Through the use of unstructured interviews that started with a small talk, the participants described that they are living in a house made up of scavaged woods, flimsy plywoods and corrugated tins. They are aware that poor housing could place them at risk for fire and accidents. Furthermore, the house is too small for a big family which is associated with problem of overcrowding. Lack of privacy, potential spread of respiratory infections, sleep deprivation are evident when many people share the same room. Because the size of the house is not appropriate for the number of persons residing in it, poor ventilation, poor lighting are also the problems they are facing. One participant said:

*“Ang hirap talaga ng bubay namin. Ang bahay namin ay maliit, ang init sa loob, walang “privacy”, ang daming gumagamit ng “CR” kaya hindi na masyadong nalilinis. Hindi na ligtas tirahan ang bahay namin, baka magiba na at baka magdulot ng sunog kasi yari sa sira- sirang kaboy. Pero kakayanin naming harapin ang mga problemang ito sa tulong ng bawat isa sa amin at ng aming mga pamilya at ng ibang tao at gobyerno”.*

(“Life is too hard. Our house is too small for the members of my family. Poor ventilation, lack of privacy because of overcrowding are the problems we encountered. The toilet is shared by many. Our house is made up of weak woods and it is not safe to live in because of the risk of accidents and house fire. However, we would be able to face all these problems through concerted efforts and support from stakeholders).

*2.1 Poor housing conditions are associated with pressing health issues including injuries and accidents. Due to this health-related problem, potential medical conditions may arise. Overcrowding, poor ventilation, may lead to the development of illnesses such as activation of tuberculosis and other respiratory infections. Shared washing facilities, water leaks, broken taps may result to injuries and accidents. Houses which are made up of weak woods are vulnerable to damage, fire, decay and termites.*

## CONCLUSION

Poverty is the main root for all the identified felt needs of informal settler families. It contributes to physical weakness through lack of food and inadequate nutrition leading to low immune response to infections.

Lack of source of income is one of the problems faced by the community which may lead to inability to reach or pay health services, to isolation because of inability to pay the debt owed and to powerlessness because lack of wealth goes with low status.

Poor housing conditions and poor environmental sanitation are interrelated. Features of substandard housing including ineffective waste disposal and overcrowding are identified as contributing to the spread of communicable diseases.

Inadequate nutrition, poor environmental sanitation, poor housing conditions all lead to weakened resistance making them vulnerable to develop chronic health problems.

Participants are willing to work collectively if trust is built, presence of an avenue to discuss issues and potential outcomes and stakeholders' efforts satisfy their expectations.

It is essential that there is a need for building trust and hope among the informal settlers amidst the challenges that they are facing. Community development is a process where people exert time and effort to collectively work on what's important to them. It is rooted in the belief that health, well-being, justice and opportunity are available and accessible to all. The strengths of the participants emphasized on relationships with families and neighbors, common shared values and collective interest in improving quality of life, willingness to confront challenges. For them, in every cloud there is silver lining, there is something hope in every bad situation.

### RECOMMENDATION

The felt needs identified by the participants focused on health and safety of the community. They were positive that the problems would be solved with the support of the local government units, community leaders and the active participation and involvement of people to the programs of the government. Thus, the researchers recommended several measures to alleviate the sufferings of informal settler families.

1. Access to financial resources should be guaranteed to all regardless of the status in life and ethnicity.
2. Access to adequate health care must be provided to the people on the basis of need and not on the capacity to pay.
3. Mobilize the people's strength towards demanding the delivery of basic social services from appropriate government agencies.
4. Development of community health care program which seeks to address the immediate health programs through formulation of community health campaigns, and the access of other relevant and appropriate health services.
5. Involve the people in community clean-up. Propose the following measures which include scheduled collection of garbage weekly, provision of garbage collection bins to each household and community education
6. Educate and train the people to be self-reliant. Local government should develop low-cost housing projects in a location where jobs are accessible and available.
7. Collaboration of the participants stakeholders are needed to build sustainable livelihood and resilient communities.

People affected by problems must be actively involved in community organizing process, needs identification, utilization, other decisive actions to solve the problems and evaluation. They should also participate in decision making process especially in projects or programs which are designed to address their problems.

### REFLEXIVITY

"As a researcher of a qualitative study, I knew that when doing face-to-face and in-depth interviews, I had to try and remain neutral, setting aside my own feelings and reactions and to listen from the perspective of a researcher. It was however difficult for me to stay objective as possible and to set aside my personal experiences".

My knowledge, skills and attitudes as a frontliner, considering myself as a community health nurse, influenced my interest in pursuing my research topic.

As a community health nurse, I need to deliver health services to people from all walks of life. However, there were frequent times that I did not want to go to places where poor environmental sanitation was a problem. I could not



stand the foul smelling odors of uncollected garbage. I felt sick and was annoyed by the irresponsible actions of people regarding cleanliness. I felt sad and sympathize to marginalized, less-fortunate people with poor housing conditions placing them at risk for injuries and sickness and doing everything to the extent of involving themselves in illegal jobs just to meet both ends. But I was not interested in communicating with them maybe because of my perspectives that most of them do not observe respect and politeness to others.

But during interviews with my study participants, I had to listen attentively, to interpret their explanations and to observe their stressful situations which they expressed as identified felt needs. This time, I empathized with them. I knew for myself I had to do something to help them by promotion of wellness, prevention of illness through education and health teachings and emphasis on curative, rehabilitative interventions through efficient and individualized care involving the whole family and the community.

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