



OPLAN TOKHANG: THE SENTIMENTS OF BEREAVED FAMILIES IN TARLAC CITY

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Abstract: The thesis tackles about the sentiments of bereaved families or emotions of the families slayed in the controversial war on drugs also to unveil the experiences, the motivation to change their lives and to understand the plight of the bereaved families through sentiments caused by the government's intensified anti-drug campaign through Oplan Tokhang. Also looked at participants' positive and negative experiences, acceptance, faith and hope in their drug problem stories and sentiments. Oplan Tokhang is a program ordered by Former President Rodrigo ROA Duterte in his fights against illegal drugs and other forms of criminality in the Philippines. Using sentiment analysis based from the narratives of 30 bereaved families in Tarlac City. The methodology includes purposive sampling, key informant interviews, and document analysis anchored on ethical considerations and accompanied by a psychologist during the fieldwork. Majority of the bereaved families are traumatized by the way their loved ones were killed in the Oplan Tokhang. National Government Agencies and Local Government Unit may also create a Center for Grief and Bereavement to provide a wide range of programs and services to support individuals, bereaved families, and communities in dealing with grief and loss caused by the death in using illegal drugs or implementing anti-illegal drugs campaign of the government.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2021 study of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) reported that around 275 million people used illegal drugs around the world, only in the last two years. Over 36 million people suffered from drug disorders according to the same 2021 World Drug Report. The heavily cited Report further noted that in the last 24 years, cannabis potency had increased as much as four times in different parts of the world, in spite of imminent pieces of evidence that cannabis use is harmful to health, especially among regular long term users. Insights and involvement in the proposed study can contribute valuable perspectives and recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of the resettlement efforts for the displaced IPs in San Jose, Tarlac. Although, based from the statistics produced by ACLED, the drug war violence was recorded high in Metro Manila in the beginning of 2016. Metro Manila, as the seat power, was made the first centerpiece of the Duterte government's WOD. It accounted for 45% of the national total at its peak in late 2016. But when Oplan Tokhang was diffused nationwide, Central Luzon experienced more drug war violence in 2018, notably in the province of Bulacan and later in province of Nueva Ecija. The lack of WOD statistics in the province of Tarlac is an affirmation that it is not an epicentre of the drug war unlike in Bulacan and Nueva Ecija as epicentres of the bloody WOD.

While this study deals also on the 'sentiments of the bereaved families' or emotions of the families of the victims slayed in the controversial WOD in Tarlac City alone using the sentiment analysis (SA). The Sentiment Analysis (Pang and Lee, 2008) will help in the process of the study by analyzing interviews and texts of the bereaved families including law enforcers to better understand the whole picture of the consequences of the Oplan Tokhang in Tarlac City.

In fact, Oplan Tokhang was conceived under the joint efforts of the regulations of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Philippine National Police (PNP), and the Office of the President (OP) which allowed the local government as front liners in the bloody drug war. As per the legal basis of the prime drug policy, Oplan Tokhang emerged from the provisions of Section 16 of Republic Act (R.A.) No. 7160, otherwise known as, “The Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991”. This emanated from the R.A. No. 6975 or the “Department of Interior and Local Government Act of 1990”. Framers of the LGC argued that local government units (LGUs) shall exercise both explicit and implied powers to promote general welfare, including the improvement of ‘public morals’ such as drug-free communities. Hence, R.A. 6975 and R.A. 7160 provide the foundation for the relationships among the DILG, PNP, and LGUs with respect to illegal drugs (Lischin, 2018). Through the researcher’s advocacy for policy change or procedural improvement, the study would help prevent similar tragedies in the future. Ultimately, the goal would be to help the bereaved families to find both closure and a sense of justice.

STATEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to analyze the sentiments of Oplan Tokhang among bereaved families in Tarlac City. By analyzing the sentiments of Oplan Tokhang based from the government’s stringent anti-drug war, the study used triangulation research to address the statement of objectives.

Specifically, it addressed to answer the following objectives:

1. To narrate the sentiments of the bereaved families in Tarlac City caused by the government’s anti-drug campaign.
2. To identify the government assistance programs provided to the bereaved families in Tarlac City.
3. To propose measures to comfort the coping mechanisms of the bereaved families of the respondents in Tarlac City.
4. To determine the implications of the study to Public Administration.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

The scope of the study covered the sentiments of bereaved families in Tarlac City through the implementation of the Oplan Tokhang in 2016-2022. The assessment focused on the thirty (30) barangays in Tarlac City. The research was limited to Sentiment Analysis using Key Informant Interviews (KII) with bereaved families in Tarlac City and Document Analysis related to legal implications and law enforcement pertaining to the enactment of the comprehensive drug use. It utilized case studies on bereaved families of the Oplan Tokhang.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study analyzed the sentiments of the bereaved families in Tarlac City caused by the stringent implementation of the Oplan Tokhang in the Philippines during the Duterte administration. The concepts and insights taken from the different literature greatly contributed to the formulation of the conceptual framework of the study. A conceptual framework is a diagrammatic representation of the theorized relationship between the study variables.

The Sentiments of the bereaved families were important in this study as presented in the conceptual framework. This was the core of the study as it documented and analyzed the patterns of the sentiments of the bereaved families to confirm if the government assistance programs and government interventions were effective. The sentiments of the respondents or bereaved families were found in Chapter Three as case studies. The narratives and stories were thoroughly analyzed to capture the sentiments of the bereaved families in Tarlac City.

As found in the related literature, there were examples of government assistance programs and government interventions that were already initiated. But this study which was enhanced during the course of the fieldwork through interviews and document analysis were expanded to expound the importance of effective measures in addressing the drug problem in the country.

Although law enforcement arm of the national government policies were effective in enforcing the policy on Oplan Tokhang, as this were manifested in the implementation of laws and memoranda in the barangays of city and municipal governments; however, despite the seriousness of the problems confronted, the police forces were still on the go and were strongly motivated to do their job of protecting the community from drug users and pushers to ensure their safety and maintain peace and order around the Philippines.

For the monitoring variables, the sustainability on law enforcement of the Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Councils (BADACs) through the full-scale implementation of the R.A. No. 9165 or the Comprehensive

Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 became effective with the good local governance by addressing the needs of the bereaved families based from their valid sentiments.

In the R.A. No. 9165, it asserted that, "it is the policy of the State to safeguard the integrity of its territory and the well-being of its citizenry particularly the youth, from the harmful effects of dangerous drugs on their physical and mental well-being, and to defend the same against acts or omissions detrimental to their development and preservation."

For the interest of the study, it analyzed the sentiments of bereaved families in Tarlac City in the Province of Tarlac based from how the Oplan Tokhang was implemented. First it narrated the Oplan Tokhang in Tarlac City. Then, it identified the government assistance programs provided to the bereaved families, and lastly, the implications of the study to public administration and public policy through the recommendations. The participants of the study were composed of thirty (30) bereaved families in Tarlac City. This study was undertaken in the year 2023.

The study was supported by a psychologist during the course of the fieldwork to ensure that respondents who were bereaved families of Oplan Tokhang in Tarlac City were properly taken care of emotionally and morally. It also allowed to researcher and stakeholders to be sensitive in this delicate topic to be more objective and scientific in this important research.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a qualitative case study to achieve the main goal of the study. According to Christopher Dubois (2016), he stressed that "a qualitative case study is a research method which enables a complex phenomenon to be explored through the identification of different factors interacting with each other. The case observed is a real situation."

One interesting example of a qualitative case study on drugs was a study conducted by Huang et al. (2010) where they looked at young adults' experiences with the party drug, 4-methyl methcathinone (mephedrone) in the United Kingdom. Here, the study used semi-structured interviews with 20 participants who had used the drug. The study aimed to explore the reasons for and the context of mephedrone use and the effects of the drug on users. The study revealed that users felt a sense of euphoria, increased confidence, and sociability when using the drug. But it got also negative effects such as anxiety, paranoia, and aggression. Mephedrone use was influenced by social and cultural factors but it has potential long-term health effects of the drug among users.

Aspers and Corte (2019) argued that qualitative research was an iterative process in which an improved understanding of the academic and scientific communities was achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied. This formulation was developed as a tool to help improve research designs while stressing that a qualitative dimension was also present in quantitative work. More so, it facilitated communication between researchers to diminish the gap between qualitative and quantitative methods and helped address the critiques of qualitative methods that can be used for a standard of evaluation of qualitative research.

Likewise, for the qualitative case study, interviews with key informants from bereaved families in Tarlac City were done. The researcher used some consolidated documents and reports for document analysis from PNP Tarlac City to carefully analyze the data gathered to be cross-checked with the findings and results for better assessment. The researcher provided questionnaires for the interviews that included his observations in the study.

LOCALE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in Tarlac City in the Province of Tarlac. The researcher identified thirty (30) barangays that have existing bereaved families caused by the Oplan Tokhang based on the documents presented by the PNP Tarlac City. Tarlac City is a component city with a population of 398,905 based on the 2020 population census. It is the most populous city in Tarlac province occupying a total land area of 274.66 square kilometers located in Central Luzon. While Central Luzon became an epicenter for the War on Drugs during the Duterte administration, Tarlac City and the entire province of Tarlac were not included, but only the provinces of Bulacan and Nueva Ecija that suffered extreme law enforcement from this burden of criminality. The bustling urban center of the City of Tarlac is accessible by land transportation from major cities in Central Luzon and Metro Manila. It has mix of modern buildings and historical landmarks that is

situated along the MacArthur Highway and also has a domestic airport—the Dr. Juan C. Angara Airport, which serves commercial flights to and from Manila and other parts of the country.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

As a means of collecting information, the researcher employed two distinct tools and instruments: (1) interviews and (2) an observation guide, as part of his overall research strategy.

Interview Guide. In the research process, the researcher aimed to actively involve the participants by delving into their personal experiences within the resettlement sites in San Jose Tarlac. The researcher created and employed a series of interview questions to collect relevant data and information that will contribute to the study.

Observation Guide. The researcher also used an observation guide to help the researcher to systematically observe and record information about a specific phenomenon or situation of the displaced IPs among the resettlement sites in San Jose, Tarlac. It provided a structured framework for collecting data through direct observation.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE

The first step in the data gathering procedure was the researcher delivered a consent and request letter to the authorized people to obtain the necessary documents needed in this study. Also, the researcher started with documentation analysis of resettlement documents such as the LARP document of NIA (Land Acquisition and Resettlement Plan), the MOA on the compensation package and benefits to be received by the displaced Indigenous Peoples. After the letters had been settled, the researcher began to conduct interviews among the participants.

On the other hand, after the researcher had successfully gathered data from the participants, the next crucial step in the research process involves conducting on-site observations of the resettlement sites in San Jose, Tarlac. This additional phase aimed to provide valuable support to the results and findings of the study.

By physically visiting the resettlement sites, the researcher gained firsthand insights into the living conditions, infrastructure, and overall environment experienced by the individuals who have been relocated. This observational approach adds a layer of depth and authenticity to the research, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the participants' experiences and perceptions.

Data Analysis

The researcher collated, tallied, and arranged all of the data and information they had gathered into figures and tables so that they could properly communicate the results of their study. As an outcome of this, statistical approaches were used in order to conduct the assessment.

F = Frequency. In statistics, the frequency of a data value refers to the number of times that a predefined difficulty or revealing assessment has been successfully met by the participants (Britannica, 2023).

N = Population. Total number of participants (Bhandari, 2020).

% = Percentage. Calculated by taking the frequency, F, and dividing it by the entire population, N, then multiplying the result by 100 to get the percentage, % (Korb, 2013). The main solution would be $F/N \times 100 = \%$

R = Ranking. It is used by the researcher in order to put the data points in descending or ascending order, depending on the context, and assigning an ordinal number to each data point (Study.com, 2022).

Sentiment Analysis. A technique known as natural language processing (NLP) is applied in order to distinguish between the positive, neutral, and negative responses provided by the participants.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Majority of the bereaved families have one (1) family member who died from the Oplan Tokhang. Almost all of them came from poor families in Tarlac City.
2. All of the drug users and pushers who died in the case study were male from 18 years old as the youngest to aged 40s as the oldest.
3. Many of those who died in the Oplan Tokhang did not finish high school and college education. They worked as tricycle drivers, baggers in groceries, and mostly are unemployed.
4. Based from the stories of bereaved families, their loved ones who were killed in the Oplan Tokhang were drugs users. Very few of them admitted that their loved ones were clean or innocent and wrongly identified or pressured by friends to use the illegal drugs.
5. Almost all of those who died during the police operation were killed by law enforcers.

6. Very few of those killed in the Oplan Tokhang were innocent and their families could not forgive the government / police authorities of what happened to their sons.
7. Majority of those killed in the Oplan Tokhang are breadwinners leaving their families very poor and vulnerable in the community.
8. Majority of the bereaved families have not received financial, medical, and moral support from the government. There is a strong stigma to the victims caused by the drug war and to their families.
9. Majority of the bereaved families are traumatized by the way their loved ones were killed in the Oplan Tokhang. They were crying during the interview as they remember the death of their loved ones.
10. Majority of them could not tell more of the details about stories of their lives due to the privacy of the information and the pain that they are still dealing with in their respective lives.

IV. INTERVENTION MEASURES

The study may be used for policy reference in converging leverage resources of the national government with the local government units. The converging effort of different government agencies in addressing social and criminal issues may suggest the best framework for delivering social services to their constituents. All government efforts including the basic unit of the government, the barangays must be aligned and integrated to achieve sustainable development and drug-free communities and cities.

4.1 Whole-of-nation Approach on the “War on Drugs”

National Government Leaders must support allocation of funds in resolving socio-economic problems in the country at the same time resolving the centuries-old drug problem in the Philippines. The success of the Oplan Tokhang lies from effective mechanisms to rehabilitate drug users. This is a medical and social problem more than criminal action where illegal drug users are killed without due process.

4.2 Local Anti-Drug Programs

The framework of anti-illegal drugs is a good example of a concerted and integrated government response to certain social problems. The study seeks the need for best practice templates in sentiment analysis for Local Government Units (LGUs) to aid complete economic and social packages in resolving illicit drugs that are endemic in the Philippines.

4.3 Effective Law Enforcement

The findings and output based from sentiments of bereaved families must serve as guide references for the success of addressing the social needs and morale of bereaved families caused by Oplan Tokhang in Tarlac City by law enforcers. The analysis of the case studies have provided law enforcers the evaluative and thematic measure and feedback mechanisms that would process the alignment of the holistic goals to end the war on drugs in Tarlac City.

4.4 Community Support

The case study should be used for programming community support systems in maintaining government’s social services. Local communities are believed to be the direct beneficiaries of anti-drug campaigns and programs of the government to stop unlawful deaths and extrajudicial killings. The case study done in Tarlac City should be used as a basis for future studies in the government’s efforts of integrating government services in addressing different kinds of social problems, particularly in ending illegal drugs in Tarlac City and the Philippines in general by achieving a drug-free Philippines to lessen crimes in the country.

4.5 Accessible Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Just like in many western countries in the United States, Canada, Australia and the Netherlands—the Philippines should have accessible health centers and infirmaries on drug-related issues that should be funded and supported by the Department of Health (DOH) for substance abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery service. It should also include medical expansion in several provinces that would allow medical coverage for drug treatment facilities and services, including detoxification, residential rehabilitation, and community-based treatment services. There should be a Center for Grief and Bereavement to provide a wide range of programs and services to support individuals, families, and communities in dealing with grief and loss caused by the death in using illegal drugs or implementing anti-illegal drugs campaign of the government.

4.6 Establishment of Drug Courts

More so, there should be drug courts supported by the Department of Justice (DOJ) as visibly seen in Southeast Asian countries like in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia aimed to divert individuals with substance use disorder into treatment programs rather than incarceration, imprisonment, or death penalty. There should also be Bereavement Support Payment in the form of financial scheme under the community drug courts government to help bereaved families cope with the financial impact of losing a loved one from death due to illicit drugs.

4.7 Implement Drug Education and Protection Programs

Drug education is a preventive measure for both the drug dependence and law enforcers to learn best practices locally and benchmark abroad to decrease drug addiction in the country. It will propel lawmakers and policy makers to think of innovative programs for anti-drug campaigns to put Oplan Tokhang in a better light that would recognize due process and human rights. Through drug education, improved medical facilities, financial assistance from the government, and holistic programs and projects will be implemented locally and nationally for lessen the centuries old drug menace in the country.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. The national government using the concept of “whole-of-nation” approach may include all stakeholder efforts from public, private, and civil society to fight the war on drugs. The national and local government units must allocate funding in resolving this socio-economic and medical problem on illegal drugs in the country. Since this should be a concerted or integrated government work there should be comprehensive economic and social packages to resolve these centuries-old illicit drugs that have been plaguing the country, especially the youth of today. All of the basic unit of the government, especially the barangays must be aligned and integrated, to achieve sustainable development and drug-free communities and cities.
2. Strong and effective law enforcement means that the police may also come clean in the drug war. There should be evaluative and thematic measure and feedback mechanisms that would process the alignment of the holistic goals to end the war on drugs in Tarlac City and the Philippines as a whole. This study should also be used for programming community support systems in maintaining government’s social services. Local communities are believed to be the direct beneficiaries of anti-drug campaigns and programs of the government to stop unlawful deaths and extrajudicial killings.
3. The National Government Agency (NGA) and Local Government Unit (LGU) may allot health-initiated support for the establishment of accessible health centers and infirmaries on drug-related issues for substance abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery service. It should also include medical coverage for drug treatment facilities and services, including detoxification, residential rehabilitation, and community-based treatment services.
4. National Government Agency (NGA) and Local Government Unit (LGU) may also create a Center for Grief and Bereavement to provide a wide range of programs and services to support individuals, bereaved families, and communities in dealing with grief and loss caused by the death in using illegal drugs or implementing anti-illegal drugs campaign of the government.
5. National Government Agency (NGA) and Local Government Unit (LGU) may establish drug courts to divert individuals with substance use disorder into treatment programs rather than incarceration, imprisonment, or death penalty.
6. The police enforcement on drug operations may also employ psychologists during the operations since these are traumatic experiences.
7. The police force responsible for anti-illegal drugs may continuously undergo trainings and seminars and should be exposed to community policing.
8. The comprehensive drugs law may be reviewed to include other narcotics and illegal drugs that are not covered under the law.
9. Law enforcement agencies may continue with the Oplan Tokhang as long as it lawfully done and there is a holistic approach in preventing anti-illegal drugs in communities.
10. There may be a holistic community support to lessen drug use and abuse. The government may offer drug education in schools and communities.

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