

LIVED EXPERIENCES AND SELF-WORTH OF SELECTED FILIPINOS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the self worth that the people with disabilities have and also to describe the experiences they have encountered. Using purposive sampling, ten Filipinos with physical disabilities from Tabanang Walang Hagdanan are selected as participants. In the selection of the informants, two requirements surfaced: they must be wheelchair bound and all are in their adulthood stage. The researchers used a self- designed questionnaire that is associated with the people with disabilities. It was found in the study that people in general play important roles in society including the people with disabilities. Their disability became a bridge for them to appreciate their lives more. In conclusion, people with disabilities believed that they are more likely to be perceived by able-bodied individuals as pitiful and somehow useless in the society, this perception caused people with disabilities to strive more in achieving something with their lives despite their disability.

Keywords: *Self-worth, Physical disability, Self- esteem, Discrimination*

INTRODUCTION

Along with the growth of the world population, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of individuals with physical disabilities. Today, there are more than 500 million people in the world with functional and physical disabilities 10 to 12% of the entire population. (Oliveira, Milliner, and Page, 2004).

Physical disability is any impairment which limits the physical function of one or more limbs or fine or gross motor ability. In the Philippines, according to the 1995 NSO consensus, the total number of persons with disabilities is 919,292 In year 2000, 1.2% of the total population or 942, 098, almost 23,000 greater than the 1995 consensus (Yap, Reyes, Albert, Tabuga 2008). The National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) is responsible for the registration of persons with disabilities in association with local governments like the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and other organizations, though not all of the physically disabled are known (Country Profile Study on Persons with Disabilities, 2001). Studies showed that the occurrence of disabilities increases with age. In the America, adults with disabilities represent 31% of those in the middle adulthood stage aged 55-64 years and 52% of those aged 65 years and older (Thompson, Zack, Krahn, Andresen & Barile, 2012).

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) have different perceptions about life compared to other people who have complete body parts. These people survive because they have good or bad experiences. Though studies showed that children are adaptable and thus may be able to cope with differences posed by a disability. Adults have different realities. Studies shows that adults who acquired a disability suggests a negative effect on the individual's sense of self and perceived quality of life (Antle, 2004). According to Oliveira (2004) as the awareness of being disabled is internalized, these persons with physical disabilities often feel "different" from other people. Associated feelings of grief, anger, envy and shame are common to them, but sometimes PWDs may somehow feel a sense of pride, uniqueness or special power or privilege because of their condition. All of these factors play an important role in the person's adaptation, and some individuals may view their disability as rightful grounds for "exemption" from most of life's obligations and responsibilities. In addition, individuals having disabilities and unsatisfactory compensation do not actually compensate by excelling but instead they use their defects as an excuse. Their purpose was to preserve the fiction that they would have gained prestige had it not for the defect (Sperry, 2011).

The society thinks that PWDs are always left out and don't have significant importance in the community. This belief makes the PWDs strive harder to be accepted and be part of the community where they belong. Way back 1960's and early 1970's, a group began to give attention to the PWDs. Findings revealed that the individuals are discriminated in education and public access (Weinberg, 2001). According to the study of Tufan, (2008), there are indications that PWDs are excluded from society and these are found in almost every area from the physical environment to legal rights: A study in Sakarya a province of Germany with the population of people having physical disabilities, more than one-third of the PWDs could not benefit from basic educational opportunities. Approximately one fourth do not know how to read and write, and some others have learned how to read and write without attending any formal education (Karatas & Veli Duyan, 2004); Another study by Klerk and Ampousah (2003) found out that most PWD female adult experience major problems with finding or shopping clothes for themselves. Moreover, observations showed that it is probably very difficult for the PWDs to shop and to find comfortable, fashionable ready-to-wear clothes that fit their disabilities. The life of persons with disability depends on the response of the physiologically fit individuals towards the facilitation of pro-social behaviors to the PWDs (Tufan, 2008). This makes the PWDs feel uneasy, thinking that for most people, disability has always been a phenomenon which is perceived with prejudices. They think that most people believe that disability is like an illness, and can be completely eradicated, (Tufan, 2008). Another is job discrimination, little doubt remains today whether or not capable workers with some physical disabilities are treated differently. In America, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the national unemployment rate for PWDs is 14.5 percent, compared with only nine percent for people without disabilities. Many PWD job seekers find organizations hesitant to hire a disabled worker, because of fear of costly accommodations or future discrimination lawsuits (Cummings, 2010). The discriminations found in the situations of the studies conducted by these researchers have an effect on the PWDs. Which make them exert more effort to be recognized, accepted hence increasing their self worth.

John Wiley & Sons, in the Webster New World Dictionary (2010) said that self-worth is about one's worth as a person, as perceived by oneself. Self-worth is influenced by his/her physical and mental characteristics (Karatas & Veli duyan, 2004). For most people, whether physiologically fit individuals or PWDs think that physical appearance is a domain that is often considered to be very important to individuals' sense of self-worth (VanDellen, 2009). Having such disability affects the self-worth of an individual. Thus, this "Loss of capacities" equates to "loss of ego functions" and may destabilize adaptive functioning on multiple levels. In the initial phase, becoming consciously aware of one's disability can threaten their self-worth, one's sense of meaning and purpose, weaken one's sense of bodily integrity, and threaten even one's sense of cohesive personal identity (Oliveira 2004). PWD are considered to have inferiority feelings because they are aware that they are weak, unfulfilled, and incomplete (Linveh & Sherwood, 1991).

This study is anchored on the theory on individual psychology of Alfred Adler and meaning of life of individuals of Victor Frankl. The first theory focused on how humans strive for success as a means of compensation for the weakness or inferiority. Adler also described is the process of compensation in the said framework. It is said to be the PWDs' defense mechanism to overcome those inferiority feelings by strengthening one's ability (Linveh & Sherwood, 1991). Depending on the attitude taken by affected individuals, their compensation will be satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Sperry, 2011). Another concept of the theory of Adler is striving for superiority. He concluded that individuals are motivated by feelings of inferiority. These feelings allow them to strive for greater things and try to cope and improve their lifestyle.

Another theory that the researchers used is the theory of Victor Frankl on the meaning of life of individuals. Frankl (1995) signified that the meaning of life can be discovered in three different ways: carrying out an action; having a principle; and through suffering. Frankl also believed that living with meaning is essential to mental and physical well-being (Peña, Margarita, Hernandez, Nava & Muñoz, 2011).

The researchers have come up with this study because of the urge to know what the respondents emotionally feel, what the common experiences they have and how they absorb people's attitude in showing ignorance of their existence. Also, it was imperative to find how they live in this world and how they were able to interact to other people. Furthermore, this paper was intended to shed light on the PWDs and to make the readers understand them as well. PWDs most of the time are neglected and discriminated. This research hopefully provided realization that every individual has an equal chance to live a prosperous life. This study gives enlightenment to physiologically fit individuals that PWDs need more respect and understanding because they need it more than anyone else.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences and the self-worth of selected Filipinos with physical disabilities, both having inborn and acquired disabilities from Tahanang Walang Hagdanan. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to describe experiences of

selected Filipinos with physical disabilities, to identify the self-worth of selected Filipinos with Physical Disabilities, and to find out the connection of the self- worth in relation with their lived experiences.

METHOD

In order to gather the necessary data, the researchers utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis an inductive approach, 'bottom up' rather than 'top down'. This does not test hypotheses and avoids former assumptions (Isherwood, 2007). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has become well recognized as a qualitative methodology in psychology and increasingly in related disciplines (Smith, 2010). The aim of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is to see in detail the processes through which participants make sense of their own experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

The phenomenological inquiry is particularly appropriate to address meanings and perspectives of research participants. The major concern of phenomenological analysis is to understand "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" from the participants' perspective (Schwandt, 2000).

The qualitative method permits a flexible and iterative approach. The value of qualitative research can best be understood by examining its characteristics. Intuition, inspired moment and use of body senses are part of a good qualitative data analysis (West, 2011).

The study presented the lived experiences and self worth of selected Filipinos with physical disabilities from Tahanang Walang Hagdanan by studying ten (10) respondents.

Interview method was the research instrument used for the data gathering; analysis was conducted to support the study.

Population and Sampling Technique

The researchers utilized the purposive sampling technique for this study. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include high-quality knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research (Lund Research Ltd.2010). The researchers considered that the respondents should be in the institution of Tahanang Walang Hagdanan. They must be wheelchair bound and they should be at least in the adulthood stage.

Participants

Ten (10) Persons with physical disability were selected purposively from Tahanang Walang Hagdanan.

The first respondent is Bong, who is a 47 year old married man from Manila. The cause of his disability is polio. The second respondent is Joy, a single 31 years old woman from Pampanga who has polio. The third informant is Roderick, a 39 year old married male from Mindoro, who has polio. Another respondent Obet, 56 years old from Bicol, is single and had been disabled because of an accident in a logging company. The fifth respondent is Fredirick. He is a 22- year- old single and from Cagayan De Oro. He has an inborn disability. Another respondent Lorna, is 36 years old single, who has acquired her disability when she was in her third grade. She has polio. A 25- year- old Mark also has polio. He has acquired his disability when he was 4 years old, is single though he has a girl friend who happened to live outside the institution. One of the respondents is Marcelo, he is a 56- year- old married man, he is a taxi driver before and had acquired his disability because of a hold- up accident inside his taxi. He was shot several times, unfortunately after the incident he was diagnosed to have a spinal injury. The second to the last respondent is Geronimo, 55 years old, with an acquired disability, according to him, he has an extreme arthritis though he first felt the pain of his lower limbs when he was 15 years old. He is married to an able- bodied individual who happened to be a worker in the same institution, tahanang walang hagdanan. The last respondent is Jefferson, a 26- year- old single, with a girlfriend who does not have a disability and working outside the institution. Jefferson acquired his disability because of a motorcycle incident.

Research procedure

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used in the study. Initially, the recordings of the interview were carefully transcribed. The transcripts were read and re-read by the researchers in order to gain different main points in their lives. The transcripts were interpreted per line in order to come up with themes. The researchers' adviser who is a psychologist, validated the gathered data. The researchers went back to the institution for a follow up interview. In this data organization process the researchers continuously referred back to the transcripts to ensure that the themes were suited to the respondents' main point in life. Subthemes emerged and the researchers re-read again the transcripts to make definite data. The themes were validated by three experts who are all Psychology majors and candidates for doctoral degree in Psychology. The experts are also knowledgeable with qualitative research and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

FINDINGS

The following analysis explores the personal experiences of PWDs through the close examination of five themes. The first one is the Family Relationship which has two sub themes Dedication to family and Conflict to family. The second theme is The Self which also has two sub themes: striving to be Independent and establishing Self-Confidence. The third theme is Building

optimism. The fourth theme is Faith in God and the last theme is Interpersonal Relations. Each theme was discussed and supported by direct quotations from the transcripts of interviews.

Family relationship

The members of the family are the most important people in their lives; they are the ones who taught them most of the things they have to learn as they grow older. Their families are the ones who provide for their basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, support, care and most especially love. They also bring joy and happiness in their lives. They also give them the strength to be able to contribute to the lives of others. Their disability did not make them weak rather their disability made them stronger to face the challenging world. Their disability did not become a hindrance for them to support their family. They continued serving and supporting the family because this makes them happy.

Dedication to family

For some people they feel that supporting the family is somehow an obligation in a good way. The researchers became inspired with how the respondents showed their support to the family. They are still able to give support, by sharing their salary with them. They are proud and happy to serve and support the family regardless of their disability.

In the interview, the first respondent Fredirick talks about how he has shown his love for his family. Before his disability he was working as a contractual worker in a small factory of wheel chair. Because of his condition, the management did not allow him to renew his contract anymore. He is now in the institution of Tahanan Walang Hagdanan. Fredirick used to play basketball in their province. The coach of the basketball's National team for PWDs saw his potential in playing basketball so he helped him get a job at Tahanan Walang Hagdanan. Frederick is just a new worker in the institution, though he still has a constant communication with his family. He does not forget to help and give financial support to his family:

"Kinailangan ko ipadala yung allowance ko galing Kuwait nung lumaban ako sa Philippine Team, yung natira sakín ay two thousand na lang."

Fredirick seems willing to support his family even though he has limited money. For him it is his responsibility to help them and give them a better life in the province. He believes that it is a privilege to serve and does not seek anything in return:

"Kakapasok ko pa lang at kailangan ko talaga na magpundar.. Nagdadawalang isip nga din ako umuwi kasi dagdag lang ako doon na papakainin imbes na makatulong..."

Fredirick, is the youngest child and the only one with disability. His disability did not become a hindrance for him to serve and support the family. His greatest dream is to uplift his family's life.

Another respondent who has shown a strong dedication with her family is Lorna. Her mother and sister also have physical disabilities. Her father is the only one in the family without disability. Lorna is the type of person who cares a lot for her family, she did not want them to worry about her too much because she does not want to be a burden. She thinks more about the betterment of the lives of her family rather than thinking about her personal life:

"Kung di man ako makapag-asawa, at least natulungan ko yung pamilya ko".

Though Lorna tried her best to be able to help and support her family despite her condition, she was able to help with the household chores; she looked for a job at a very young age after graduating elementary. She applied as a helper to her aunt. Lorna is also selling underwear, yema and anything that would help her earn more money. She was the only one who helped her father financially:

"Kakatapos lang po na ipagawa yung babay namin, pinataasan kasi binababa, bale yung naipon ko sa loob ng limang taon, binangko ko, kumbaga pangako ko kasi yun sa mga magulang ko na ipapataas ko yung babay namin kaya nagbangko ako siguro nasa 70 thousand din yun."

Conflict to Family

There are times that people may experience misunderstandings with some members of the family. Sometimes it is inevitable to experience problems within the family. Having problems is normal, but sooner or later we have to learn to solve these for us to be happy again. Having a family is a blessing. Problems within the family are still a blessing for us people to learn more in life. For some of the respondents, their problems made them tougher and their condition made them stronger. Like what happened with some respondents in this study, the conflicts with their family made them independent enough to work and to live for themselves even without the help of their family. They have proven to others that their disability is not a barrier for them to achieve something.

Joy is now 31 years old and lives on her own. She has polio meningitis when she was a baby. She used to live in different institutions before and tried to live without the help of the family. She is now in Tahanang Walang Hagdanan. Being in an institution is not new to her. She had a conflict with her family because her parents were separated. She does not have any contact with her father anymore, according to her, the family of her father didn't accept her and she heard some bad things about her. Though she does not care with what their relatives are saying about her anymore because

she knew that she is not useless, that she is able to do anything a normal person can do, she can work on her own and she can live on her own:

“Wala na kami communication, as in wala, wala talaga. Hindi ako matanggap ng tatay ko pati ng pamilya nya... Yung mga nakapaligid sayo, minsan pagod na ako kasi bata pa lang ako ganito na sitwasyon...”

Joy somehow became irritated with his father. Even though it is like that it will never change the fact that her father will always be her father. Joy is somehow longing for a father whom she can lean on. A father who will treat her as his own, as an equal and a normal individual. Joy’s parents were separated when she was still young, though she can’t even remember what her father looked like. She even ran away from home when she was fourteen years old and returned home three years ago after she experienced the typhoon “Ondoy”:

“Ayoko ng umuwi samin, sa totoo lang ayoko magstay doon, alam mo kapag nandoon ako, parang ilang araw pa lang naiinitan na yung pwet ko, gusto ko ng umalis...”

Joy is not comfortable staying at home. But despite her problems with her father, she still continued to support her mother financially.

Another respondent who also experienced conflict in the family is Geronimo. He is the only one in his family with disability. According to him he had consulted an albularyo or a fake healer, he said “Nakulam daw po ako” he experienced pests and insects coming out of his leg. He consulted a doctor in the hospital who happened to be a student intern. According to him, he was diagnosed to have an extreme arthritis though he still needs some tests to verify the diagnosis, but he never came back to the hospital, so he never knew the reason behind his condition. At first, during his struggle way back in his teenage years, he experienced hopelessness and helplessness because of his disability. His experiences with his family didn’t work quite well for him. He felt unsupported and unloved for quite some time:

“Yung parang wala na lang sila pati yung mga kapatid ko pinabayaan nalang din ako, parang iniwan akong mag-isa, para nalang akong asong binibigyan ng pagkain. Siyempre masakit din sa damdamin, kapamilya mo tapos balewala ka na, nung ano eh aasahan ka tapos nagkasakit ka wala na di ka na aasikasuhin.”

At that moment the respondent felt quite cheerless, depressed, sad and disappointed with his family. His concept about his family was somehow broken. For him they were the only ones whom he depends on, the only people who will care for him. Unfortunately his family’s efforts were not enough for him; he felt so useless. He suddenly felt he was not able to do anything because of his condition so he thought of committing suicide.

The self

Striving to be Independent

Being independent is also prominent with the respondents. Most people are just relying on their families, from the help of other people in order to survive and to live. The respondents showed that even though they have certain disabilities' they are still able to work, to support their family, and to live. Their disability helped them to see life and to appreciate it more. Their experiences made them believe that they are still able to do extraordinary things. Their disability became the bridge for them to strive harder and reach their goals.

When Joy was fourteen years old, she ran away from home. She struggled with life and survived on her own. Her mother believed and she knew that Joy can live on her own. She knew that the institution may be a big help for her to continue her studies:

“Tumakas ako sa amin para mag-aral, napunta ako sa institusyon na may kapansanan din, ahm, mga katulad ko din ang kasama namin then natapos ako dun ng high school, elementary to high school nung lumabas ako kasi hanggang high school lang, doon paglumabas ka babala ka na sa buhay mo. Pumasok ako ng vocational diresto na. Isang institusyon din nag-aral ako ng one year ng computer software.”

Joy seems determined to continue her studies. She knew that what she did is for her own good without the help of her mother or anybody from her family. She motivated herself to have the urge to survive and to finish her studies. Even though she has a disability, it did not become a problem for her to reach her goals, a way for her to get what she wanted to achieve.

After college, she went from different jobs to another. She even worked as a call center agent in Makati, but she stopped working because she got sick and went back to manila after the tragedy of the typhoon Ondoy:

“Pero meron akong raket raket noon, paguwi ko nagtry din ako maghanap ng trabaho on my own kabiti anong trabaho kakayanin ko. Ako kasi yung tipong ayoko ng pabigat, bata pa lang ako hindi na nila ako obligasyon. Sa sarili ko ako na yung parang binububuhay ko na yung sarili ko.”

Joy does not find it difficult to earn money. She will find a way whenever she needed it. She makes a way for her to be able to live on her own. She is not afraid to try anything. It doesn't matter what kind of job it is or how difficult it may be, but what she thinks about is that she doesn't want to be a burden to anybody and that she knows and she can prove to anyone that she can manage to live on her own.

Establishing Self Confidence

People may find it difficult to gain confidence. Confidence is a feeling that makes a person think he/she is capable of doing something with ease or without having the feeling of being inferior

to others. It can also be a good thing for them to enjoy doing things and enjoy life more. People think that PWDs do not have confidence since they have certain disabilities. But for PWDs, they see themselves normal and that their disability is not a reason for them to feel inferior to others because they know for a fact that they are able to work, to live, and be independent. Having insecurities is normal, but for the respondents they know how to be contented with what they have and that they appreciate every single detail about their lives.

Especially with the case of Roderick who works at Tahanan Walang Hagdanan for almost seventeen years. He acquired polio when he was a baby and according to the doctor, it is incurable. He is now 39 years old and lives near Tahanang Walang Hagdanan with his wife and two children. He came from Mindoro, his father and siblings lived there. He just went to Manila because according to him, his uncle knew someone at Tahanang Walang Hagdanan that can help him earn money. He studied at Mindoro and reached college, but because of the lack of financial support, he decided not to finish his studies when he was in his second year. When he was studying, he was inspired with what athletes do in their school, he envied those athletes who were representatives of the school, somehow he wanted to know what it feels like being idolized and cherished by other people because of what they do. He is staying in the institution and currently a member of the Basketball's National Team for persons with disabilities.

"Hindi lang basketball, kabit anong laro, kasi alam ko din yung throwing."

Roderick achieved his dream to play basketball. He is confident on how he plays the game and he is able to participate in different sports. He also knows different jobs because sometimes he works as a welder, cutter, and sewer and also manages and supervises some people in his department:

"Yung naman mga trabaho na binibigay sa akin, araw araw iba't ibang trabaho binibigay sa akin, kung ano, kaya ko gampanan."

Even though Roderick has a disability it did not become an impediment for him to attain his goals. For him having a disability is not a curse, it is still a blessing and that he is still able to do things that normal and able bodied people can do.

Another is Jefferson, he had acquired his disability because of a motorcycle incident. He was drunk while driving the motorcycle, unfortunately he did not realize that his motorcycle is running so fast, so his vehicle clashed with a jeepney. He lost his right leg. He suffered 2 years from pain and shame. He was not able to go out of the house because he was afraid of what other people might think of him, or how they will look at him. He finds his situation difficult to accept because he had experienced the feeling of having complete body parts. Although after working with the institution, little by little, he learned to accept his condition, his disability. He has seen and realized that somehow he has adapted from his condition.

For him, even PWDs play a significant role in the institution, they are the workers in the institution, that they made the institution famous, he is certain and proud that they are important in the institution:

“Para sakin ba, eh kung wala din kaming manggagawa ditto hindi rin tatakebo ng maayos dito sa tabanan saka yung mga tulad naming may kapansanan hindi siguro tatayo ito kung hindi siguro nakita ng mga namamahala dito na kailangan talaga nilang magtayo ng isang organisasyong gaya dito.”

After the motorcycle incident, he worked in the institution as a welder. Then, he became a part of the national team for basketball. At some point he realized that there are also advantages of what happened to him, He became a member of the National team for persons with disabilities, and he was also given a chance to compete abroad. He was still thankful that he is still able to do extraordinary things or play basketball for instance. He is positive and happy that he has achieved something despite his condition.

“Ayun sinwerte napasama tayo sa Philippine team medyo maganda rin nakakarating tayo sa ibang bansa. Makikita mo sa pakiramdam mo magaling ka na kasi sa dami ng nagtry out napasama ka, iba yung pakiramdam, sa daming tao sa pilipinas swerte mo napasali ka sa ganun”.

Building optimism

Anyone may experience problems, stress, depressions, sufferings and many more. Even rich and powerful people have problems too. Being positive will make us see life a little lighter than usual. For PWDs, they believe that even though they have disabilities, they do not think that it is the end of the world. It is remarkable that PWDs do not see life as negative as it may be, rather they see life with hope and positivity.

Obet ran away from their place in Bicol when he was 19 years old, because he got bored at home and he did not want to study. He tried working in Mindanao with his uncle in a logging company. On his last day, one of the trunks of the trees fell unto his legs. He needed to go to Philippine Orthopedic to check his legs and it resulted that he needed to use a wheel chair because he could not walk anymore. Obet came back to Bicol with his family, and then his life changed. He became dependent to his parents due to his condition. Then Obet got married, they went to Manila. Unfortunately, obet became impotent because of the accident. Luckily, he got a job at Tahanan Walang Hagdanan. Then he asked his wife to continue her studies in the province but his wife had an affair with another man.

“Hindi ito sakin na parang sumpa o tragedy, hindi, para sa akin this is grace, biyaya. Maalala mo yung sakit pero dapat sa puso wala na yoon, dapat magpatawad ka totally.”

Though Obet experienced a difficult time because of his disability, he still looks on the brighter side of life and his disability appears to him as God's grace. Though Obet did not have a good relationship with his wife, he still forgave and did not forget what God wants him to learn in that chapter of his life.

"Kailangan naman sa buhay natin yung tyaga eh, kasi yung hirap kasama yan sa buhay natin 'di ba? Kung ayaw mo mahirapan magpakamatay ka, kasi habang nabubuhay ka, kabit mayaman ka mahirap yan."

Obet still thinks positive after all he has been through. He sees that the struggle in life is always present and how God tests people through problems. For Obet, the hardships in life are normal and it is up to us how to take it.

As for Mark, he had acquired his disability when he was still young, he has polio. He felt the numbness from his waist down when he was still in grade 1 and he continued his studies even though he has polio. When he was in High school he experienced vices like marijuana, alcoholic drinks, and cigarettes with some bystanders in their barangay in Mindoro. He regrets the moment he has wasted his time on doing vices, so he tried doing good things for himself and for his family. He became a scholar in college, he was only given 50 pesos every time he has a class, no class, no allowance, no food etc. He sacrificed everything just to continue his studies, but he wasn't able to finish his college. He works for the Tahanang walang hagdanan. For him being a member of the institution made him realize more about his worth and importance as a human being. He began to appreciate everything that happened to him especially being able to work in the institution. He believed that he is in good hands, in a better place, somehow he still finds himself lucky:

"Parang okay naman kasi parang nasa isang magandang lugar naman ako ngayon, maganda rin naman yung kumbaga kabit papano nakakakilos ako ng maayos dito, hindi naman ako makakapasok dtto kung kung hindi naman ako ganito, kumbaga nagkaroon din ako ng isang magandang trabaho"

He is aware that he has a disability, though he knows that he is not the only one who experiences the same condition. He accepted the fact about his condition and that he is still lucky. He still tries to think positively about his life and even about his disability:

"Di lang po ako yung ganito eh, mas marami pa, meron pang mas hihigit pa sa kapansanan ko eh"

Faith in God

Religion is not a hindrance to cherish and appreciate God. There are Catholics, Christians, Baptists, Buddhists etc, but they also believe in one God, in one creator. Some able bodied people may be religious, have strong faith in God, servants of the Lord and all but the question is how much do they appreciate their lives?

The researchers became inspired with how these people with disabilities proved their faith in God. Even though they have certain disabilities they still think positively. That God still give them a chance to live. They appreciate life more because of their condition, and their disability became a bridge for them to know God more.

Obet is now 56 years old and somehow he has a strong faith in God. His faith in God became stronger when he entered Tahanan Walang Hagdanan. He stayed at the institution for more than 20 years. He finds contentment in the institution. For him being a member of the institution is the greatest thing that has happened in his life. He acquired his disability when he was still working in a logging company. He did not give importance with his life before the incident. For him having the disability helped him see life better. The incident made him realize how important life is. He appreciated life more than he could ever imagine:

“By God’s grace, okay naman ako... Para sakin ito ay isang biyaya ng panginoon dahil kung hindi ako nagkaganito, hindi maitutuwid ang landas ko, hindi mawawala yung mga bisyo ko, kasi nung nakilala ko ang panginoon naging tuwid ang ano ko.. Dito ko na nakilala ang panginoon, sa mga catholic charismatic hanggang sa makaunawa ako ng tuluyan.”

Although Obet’s experience was unfortunate because he has acquired his disability and made him impotent, he still believes that God has his own purpose. He just relies on God. He finds his disability a blessing from God and that the incident became a way for him to know God more.

Obet believes that blaming God was not the answer. He tried embracing his condition, and he tried understanding God’s ways. God won’t give him a problem if he cannot adapt or survive. His condition made him stronger, and that God is also one of the reasons why:

“Kahit anong kapansanan mo, kahit anong katayuan mo sa buhay, parati mong isipin na yung gagawin mo maging karapat dapat sa paningin ng Panginoon, ganoon naman kasi yoon eh kapag nasa panig ka ng panginoon, sabi nga sa bible na nabasa ko if God is with you, nobody can be against you, kahit na may nagdidiscriminate sayo, kahit na ano..”

He sees God in everything he does, even in his tough condition.

Another story is about Lorna who has Polio and a cancer survivor. But her situation made her believe in God more than she expected. She never gave up believing in God. She believes that everything that is happening with her life is a blessing from God. That God has his own purpose, that God has plans for her. She is grateful that God let her live. Her condition, her disability everything she is experiencing right now gave her the strength to believe and to stand up for God:

“Nagpapasalamat ako kasi binigyan pa ako ng pangalawang buhaym ay siguro may purpose ang panginoon kung bakit binigay niya saakin ito , siguro mas lalo niyang pinatatag yung pananampalataya ko sakanya”

People who do not have such disability do not appreciate life compared to PWDs. They have struggled life more than anyone has ever known. They embraced everything about themselves. For them, having a disability is not considered a hindrance, but a way to appreciate life more and a condition for them to strengthen their faith in God:

“Thanks God at nakasurvive ako sa pagsubok. Diyos lang makakaalam sa mangyayari sa buhay ko eh.”

Lorna believes that everything that is happening to her and everything that happened to her is God’s will. She knows that God is with her. So, she leaves everything up to God.

Interpersonal Relations

We need other people in order to grow, to be mature enough to face the challenges in our lives and to learn how to relate with people to survive in the environment. PWDs may have some difficulties interacting with people without physical disabilities. There are some PWDs who find it difficult socializing with physiologically fit individuals simply because they think that they are different from them or maybe these physiologically fit individuals will think negatively about them. Though with the help of the institution, Tahanan walang hagdanan, these PWDs have accepted their condition. Their commonalities with each other in the institution made them feel comfortable about themselves. Each one of them is thankful and feels lucky to be able to do things. Each individual in the institution helped himself to cope with the situation. One is not alone and can still be a better person despite of the challenging condition.

The next is Bong who has an ex wife working in the same department in Tahanan Walang Hagdanan. Bong has a new wife who is also working in the same institution but in a different department. Bong experienced a difficult time when his ex wife complained at the barangay because of the lack of financial support to their child:

“Pagkasama siya, dadaanan daanan lang ako, syempre masakit pero kailangan tanggapin, sinusulsulan din kasi ng mga nakapaligid sakanya eh.”

Since Bong, his ex wife and his current wife are working in the same institution, he hears different opinions and he believes that his ex wife’s decision is influenced by their co-workers. Bong believed she was just brainwashed by other workers in the institution:

“Dedma lang, kasi yun naman yung gusto nila eh, wala naman tayo magagawa kung walang pera. Hinabayaan ko na lang.”

For Bong, it is normal that some people will say some things against you. It is up to you on how you will react and how you will accept their words. Though it is difficult to be in the situation, he still tries to be positive regarding the issue of his ex-wife.

Obet on the other hand, experienced discrimination especially when he needs to ride a jeepney and taxi. Some drivers say that he is not able to ride in the jeepney because of his condition. He is aware of the discrimination in the country, though he is knowledgeable with some laws applicable to them, he tries to fight for his right because he knows the law under Republic Act 344, the front seat in the jeepney is reserved for the disabled:

“Ako yung pinakaactive na nagrereklamo sa mga taxi, na nagdidiscriminate sa amin hindi lang sa jeep . Meron nga nakasakay na ko, pinapababa pa ko eh. More than 40 na siguro ang nareklamo ko sa DOTC. Nagsasakripisyo ako para ipaglaban lang yung karapatan namin.”

Even though Obet has work, he really finds time to attend sessions in court for complaining his rights.

With Lorna, she does not find it difficult to socialize with people in the institution, though she indicated that she knows how to mingle with different kinds of people. Because of the institution she learned how to cope and adjust to other people:

“Natuto ako ditto, natuto akong makisama, natuto akong makisalamuha kahit anung uri ng tao yun. Hindi naman kasi medyo ano naman yung mga tao ditto eh na minsan kapwa mo disable eh mayroong hindi ka nakakapagkaunawaan, hindi maganda ang ugali pero natututunan din pakisamahan”

DISCUSSION

People affected by physical disabilities (PD) go through significant changes in their lives. (De Castro, 2010). The use of idiographic approach depicts the different life experiences of the person with disability. Moreover, it shows how they value themselves and how they respond in the different personal, social, and spiritual challenges they encounter everyday.

All of us experience different discriminations and offensive opinions from the people around us, but PWDs experience more than what people expect. Interaction to different people can also affect our health. According to a study the capacity to interact in a wide variety of social situations with a variety of people is considered to signify psychological health, while difficulties interacting and connecting to others is linked with psychopathology and distress (Hardy, Terrence, Glidden, Hess, & Roling, 2010). Communication for people is important but sometimes we cannot erase the fact that some people will not treat us in a good way. Social problems, such as architectural railing, not benefiting from public transport services and employment chances, are ordinary (Uskun & Gundogar, 2010). Though we can see in different places like malls, restaurants, parking lots etc. that PWDs are prioritized, that they have their own lane and all, that there are laws for PWDs, for them, that is not enough. Persons with disability have their own ways, but based on the respondents' experiences, most of them complained of how people treat them. According to the respondents, people somehow think that they are not capable of doing things on their own, that they need help,

that they need sympathy etc. Some people may also see the PWDs having a hard time to do a task, but these PWDs are striving more to prove to physiologically fit individuals that they are still able to do things, even extra-ordinary things, normal things or tasks, that they are also normal like any others. The respondents have found their value and worth by being a part of the institution Tahanang Walang Hagdanan simply because they are surrounded by people they have similarities with and at the same time they earn money.

PWDs may experience social discrimination or inequality, and they even experience it at home. Some respondents' experienced that their parents or some members of the family could not accept their case. One of the studies showed that parents of person with disability experience some psychological problems in everyday life (Uskun & Gundogar, 2010). But for some PWDs, it is one of their greatest challenges in life; to strive more and prove to people that they can still live and have a normal life. Though some of the respondents showed conflict with their family, still there is a greater number of respondents who are accepted by their family. According to Rillotta (2012) when a family has a member with disability, all their attention is focused there. Families are the primary care givers especially for those PWDs (Miller, 2012). Parents are the first one who get affected in the situation of their children, and from the experiences of the respondents, they know that their parents gave them enough support.

Some people are raised in a stable family marked by love, healthy communication and acceptance. Other people experienced occurrence of parental infidelity, conflict, and constant suffering (Weigel, Benett & Reisch, 2003). For PWDs their families are the first who should accept their condition, the people who will love them dearly and truly even though they have certain disabilities. For PWDs their families are considered their strengths for them to adapt easily with the environment. When PWDs knows that their family supports and accepts their disability, somehow they find their condition easier to accept. The literature also suggests that having family gatherings may also have a positive impact to a person having a disability (Santos, Crespo, Silva, & Canayaro, 2012). It will help them boost self confidence, find belongingness in the family and somehow feel that they are not different.

In some way it became a puzzle on how PWDs coped with their condition but how do they really face this kind of life. All the respondents said that they have accepted their disability. According to Faull (2004) Disability gives a chance for change and growth of self, as one admits and identifies one's unique potential rather than focusing on loss of objective aspects of self. Furthermore one thing they have in common is that they have stronger faith in God, that everything that happened to them and will happen to them is all part of God's plan. Though they may experience different kinds of trials in life because of their condition made them strive harder, made them appreciate life better, and learn to know God. As one of the studies conducted by Baker (2007), it states that spirituality influence the meaning assigned to disability and how they will accept the disability. They thought that having the disability is a blessing from God, because they still have stable jobs and they can still live normal life.

In fact they are confident that they have jobs compared to some other people who do not have disabilities because these people do not have jobs like them. As they entered the institution they became closer to God. Also, the respondents learned how to accept their situation because they feel the belongingness in the institution.

Most of the respondents possess optimism; they believe that positive results or success will occur despite of their situation (Augusto-Landa, 2011). They are positive in everything and as they share different experiences, thoughts, and feelings; they also share the word of the Lord. For the people with disabilities, they use what are left to them, they do not want people to see them useless or doing nothing. In fact most of the respondents showed that they can do things on their own, like travelling, doing house hold chores and helping their family financially. They possess confidence that even though they are not physically complete, they share their talents and skills and they do not limit themselves by just sitting on their wheel chairs, rather they travel, work, explore and share what they have.

Persons without physical disabilities find it unbelievable and inspiring to know more about PWDs. For some people, they find these PWDs pitiful and unfortunate but in reality, PWDs can do things better than a person without physical disabilities. They see life beyond, they know how to appreciate every single bit of blessings they are getting from God, they value every breath they take and that they are grateful for the life given to them.

In the theory of Frankl, one of the three ways to find meaning is through suffering. The researchers can see that despite all the pain, sufferings and problems they encounter, they still find meaning with their lives. Though they are not physically complete, but their families, friends and the institution helped them cope, helped them to stand up on their own.

Life may be difficult. But this will make us tougher in life. The more problems we solve the stronger we become. A person who does not have disabilities also experience difficulties, stress, depression and all, some people are also committing suicide for whatever reason they have. But these PWDs may be tougher than normal individuals. Their situation made them realize the importance of their existence. Their condition made them appreciate their life more; they have accepted their situation though for them having such a disability is not and will not be a reason for them to give up in life.

CONCLUSION

Each person with disability is inspiring. That despite their condition they still see their lives lighter than other people that even though they have certain disabilities they still look for a brighter tomorrow. It is clear that somehow these PWDs have accepted their conditions. The respondents find meaning with their lives. They have a positive outlook in life about their condition and that they think that everything that is happening to them is all according to God's plan. PWDs also experience

problems but they see their lives the other way around. People think that people with disabilities are pitiful and hopeless but in fact, PWDs are more hopeful and that they find themselves useful. It is also clear that physical disability has an influence on the PWDs' experiences with other people. Social comparison and social feedback are somehow the major influences on the development and experience of persons with disability.

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