IN CONSTANT SEARCH FOR AFFECTION: UNTOLD NARRATIVES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS OR "SUKARAP" IN DAVAO REGION

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ABSTRACT

"Sukarap," derived from "stagger," reflects uncontrolled movements while walking. This qualitative-phenomenological study focuses on the challenges faced by Sukarap members in the Davao Region. Examining their involvement, reasons, challenges, and coping mechanisms, the research engaged 14 Sukarap members through interviews and discussions. Participants revealed experiences of painful initiation, exposure to vices, street riots, and life-threatening situations. Coping strategies included diversion, peer support, and ignoring challenges. Insights from Sukarap members highlighted belongingness, learning, and opportunities for change. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of education and affection in nurturing the optimal development of delinquent juveniles seeking attention and affection outside their families.

Keywords: gang, gangsterism, plight, Sukarap, stories to tell

INTRODUCTION

This study is mainly derived from the general fact that the presence of gangs pervaded the global, national, and local scenes. In the United States, there is a strong connection between gang membership and serious, violent, and chronic offenses of juveniles (Adamson, 2000). Whereas in Davao City, police records show that youths involved in gangs are responsible for gang wars and serious related crimes (Union of Catholic Asian News, 2001). On the other hand, particularly in the Davao Region, a group of delinquent youngsters called Sukarap have been amassing attention from authorities because of the increasing notoriety of their unlawful behaviors in the community.

Sukarap was derived from the word stagger, which means a person's manner of walking or walk as if unable to control one's movements. Formerly, it was just a dance that became famous after the "Budots" dance craze. Eventually, it was used as a tag name for the youth group in Davao City, Philippines which refers to the youth who usually exist in night or dawn. The term "Budots" is a slang for "tambay" which means people with no jobs or permanent jobs. The dance was branded "Budots" because the folks who started it are "tambays" in Barangay Camus, Davao City. "Budots" is a combination of a tribal dance and a Pinoy's imagination that gave the first its modern twist. It was based on the Badjao dance accompanied with Badjao drum beat mixed with techno music (Mongaya, 2019).

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There are many studies about members of different gangs and description of their life. However, certain studies which focus on Sukarap members in Davao Region are yet to be formulated. This compelled us to write this research regarding this so as to generate new knowledge and hope to provide solutions to the growing dilemma.

Anchored to the Social Control Theory (Gottfredson, 2006), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Anomie-Strain Theory (Merton, 1957) which jointly agreed that gangsterism is a behavior that is observed, learned, and adopted from delinquent peer groups, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to capture the challenges handled by the Sukarap members in Davao Region. It aimed to discover the processes of how they get involved in the group, why they are engaged within this group, and the challenges they had experienced and how they coped these challenges.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To realize the study's purpose, it attempted to answer the following objectives: (1) to determine the experiences of the Sukarap members; (2) to retell how the Sukarap members cope with the challenges they have experienced; and (3) to shed light on the insights of Sukarap members that can be shared to their peers and parents.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design in a phenomenological approach. Since it attempts to make sense of or interpret events in terms of the meanings people bring to them, we as researchers utilized a qualitative research format, which is the study of objects in their natural surroundings. A key phenomenon can be explored and understood using a qualitative research approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The qualitative frame was developed via phenomenological research. The youth participants' actual experiences are used to create a data-rich environment that supports discovery and learning. Through the situational knowledge of the subjects being studied, a phenomenology aims to investigate contextual meaning (Creswell, 1998). Our study sparked attention from researchers in a previously unexplored area of study. In the process, we asked *Sukarap* participants to relate their experiences and explain how they overcame difficulties while participating in the group. Since there is a dearth of research highlighting the difficulties faced by *Sukarap* members, our study aims to fill this gap by using the participants' experiences to foster understanding and pave the way for future research. Where there is a gap in the literature because there isn't enough research, a phenomenological approach can fill it and give it meaning.

The key participants of this study were the Sukarap members identified within the Davao Region. Specifically, 14 members of the group were selected based on prescribed pre-inclusion criteria: all boys within the research locale aged 12-15 who had undergone challenges in the involvement of the youth gang. The researchers intentionally preferred males because they are in the same group that underwent emotional distress, have higher levels of negative effect and depression, and have more intense experiences of emotions and expressiveness. All of these were done to ensure the quality of the conduct as well as the findings of the study.

This research study employed the triangulation technique, in which various data sources, perspectives or theories, and/or different methods are utilized to cross-check the data. Interviews were utilized among Sukarap members from different places within the region to ensure the attainment of the triangulation procedure. These interviews were transcribed manually, followed by the data reduction procedures and data analysis technique called thematic analysis. Throughout the data collection process, trustworthiness and ethical considerations were highly adhered to as outlined in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work, which emphasized the tenets of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure trustworthiness as well as in Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) work that primarily focuses on respect for persons, beneficence,

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justice, and confidentiality to establish ethical considerations.

Through thematic analysis, we looked at the participants' responses. A technique for examining and reporting patterns or themes in data is thematic analysis (Roulston, 2001). Thematic analysis is a versatile and effective research tool that can likely provide a big, complicated, and comprehensive account of data, making its application in this study very beneficial. To analyze the data, we took the following actions: acquaint ourselves with the data, create initial codes, look for themes, examine the themes, define and label themes, and create the report.

Data reduction is also used to analyze the data. This means that the study makes use of removing irrelevant data and modifying that data into valuable stuff. This serves to make the information understandable for the readers (Suter, 2012). With this approach, we sought the assistance of a professional data analyst to more easily combine, organize, sort, and categorize data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Experiences of Sukarap Members

Table 1
Themes and Supporting Statements on the Experiences of the Sukarap Members

Emerging Themes	Supporting Statements
Going Through Painful Initiation	• *"It is hard…being hit with a paddle, beaten up, and sold…sold to other groups to be beaten up." (IDI1)* • *"I was hit, then beaten up thoroughly, then, slapped." (IDI2)* • *"I was hit, then beaten up, then there is more." (IDI3)* • *"Burned my forehead with a cigarette."(FGD7)*
Being Exposed to Vices	• *"Using rugby. Like having fun, waiting for riot, tripping…throwing, anything that can be thrown away, as long as it can be thrown." (IDI1)* • *"Using rugby, drinking liquors, then looking for troubles."(IDI2)* • *"Like this, using rugby, inhaling vulcaseal, drinking liquor, smoking cigarettes that is all."(IDI3)*
Involved in Street Riots	• *"It is like this, getting hit with a rock, then captured, beaten up by adversaries." (IDI1)* • *"Pick rocks then throw it, captured by a peacekeeper, then beaten up." IDI2)* • *"It is like when you get hit with rocks, captured during curfew, beaten up…" (IDI3)*
Being Exposed in Life-threatening Situations	• *"I do not like to stay in our house, not even agree with errands, just dedicate everything to my group, even my time."(IDI2)* • *"I am so delinquent, I do not listen anymore to my parents, I only face my peers."(IDI3)* • *"I cannot study well, there is always someone blocking my way to school."(IDI5)*

One of the experiences of Sukarap members is going through a painful initiation. It means that new members are subjected to punching, beating, and paddling as part of entrance ceremony (Woolfe, 2014). Another theme is **being exposed**

to vices, which underscores that being a Sukarap means getting exposed to certain kinds of vices like drinking, inhaling solvents, and smoking cigarettes (Steinberg, 2004). Also, Sukarap members are frequently involved in street riots, which are social occasions wherein collective brutality is directed toward people, property, or authority (Moran & Waddington, 2016). In addition, Sukarap members are being exposed to life-threatening situations as they fight back against those they consider a threat (Delzo, 2017).

2. How Did the Sukarap Members Cope with their Experiences?

Amidst the difficulties they experience, they still manage to survive through coping through diversion**.** They divert themselves from the things and people that make them stressed (Traeger, 2013). Another coping mechanism they have is drawing strength from peers. This means that they deal with life's failures and hardships by drawing strength from people around them who also happen to be Sukarap members (Seifert, 2013). Moreover, they ignore people who judge them as minding them will only stress them (Sherman, 2017).

Table 2
Themes and Supporting Statements on How the Sukarap Members Coped with Their Experiences

Emerging Themes	Supporting Statements
Coping through Diversion	• *"Just think that I can."* • *"Nothing, I just only ignored it…ignored those things."* • *"I just stroll it out."* • *"I just have fun with my peers, like this gathering."(IDI6)*
Drawing Strength from Peers	• *"Just go along, then they will share their problems to us so for us to go along with them." (IDI1)* • *"When we have enemies at school we lie in wait for them, then if they have opponents at school, we lie in wait for them, then beat them." (IDI3)* • *"When they do not have anything to buy rice, I gave them twenty pesos for them to buy corn grits." (FGD2)*
Ignoring	• *"Nothing, I just let it through my ears so that there will be no more noise, so for me not to…it is because it fells tiring to always listen when you are always scolded, then that is all." (IDI1)* • *"I just let them be, but if there is a time when they get too much, ahh…vengeance, just like stealing." (IDI2)* • *"I just let it through my ears, then if it is unmanageable, fight back, like blocking there way, throwing on them, or throwing stones on their houses." (IDI6)*

3. Insights of Sukarap Members that can be shared with their Peers and Parents

As to the insights of the Sukarap members, one of their realizations is that they find sense of belongingness from their peers. Through them, they find social connections and people who can

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understand them, which genuinely makes them happy (McConnell, 2013). They also learned from their experiences, as even the worst elements of society can redeem and change themselves for the better (Carter, 2014). Lastly, Sukarap members are also open for any opportunity to change as they are still eager to reform themselves, like any people who have gone through the dark chapters of their lives (Farber, 2012).

Table 3
Themes and Supporting Statements on Insights of Sukarap Members that can be shared to their Peers and Parents

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Finding Belongingness from Peers	• *"There is so much fun, then at night, you have someone you can approach, go to, like that."(IDI3)* • *"Nice to be with, plus they are kind."(IDI4)* • *"In lovers, there is no forever, in peers there is."(FGD4)*
Learning from Experiences	• *"Never join, so that the things that happened to me will not happen to you."(IDI1)* • *"Never enter things like this, because it is not easy to be a member of Sukarap, because it can ruin your future."(IDI2)* • *"The happiness is all here, but it is too dangerous, you cannot easily hang out in other areas because you have lots of enemies."(FGD6)*
An Opportunity for a change	• *"Ma, I am so sorry because I am a member of Sukarap, it was just like that, just let it be, because it will change soon."(IDI2)* • *"I will not do it again, I will not roam around and go home late, I will go home early because I have to go to school tomorrow."(IDI5)* • *"I ask for apology from them, because what I am now, it is who I am, because it is where I am happy."(IDI6)*

CONCLUSIONS

This opportunity cultivates to deepen the awareness of children who might join gangs, thus giving us a way to open up our minds to the stories behind those acts that we need to understand. We are hoping that this study will bring awareness and attention to Sukarap members so as to other children and to understand their reasons for joining the group, as well as the unfavorable experiences that they experienced that are detrimental for their age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of the qualitative research and the analyses of its findings revealed concrete evidence that Sukarap members are prone to delinquent acts and exposed to life-threatening situations, as well as the different vices that are detrimental for their age. As such, it is suggested that parents, teachers, school administrators, and authorities are encouraged to do their part in solving this problem. Parents should provide a loving home environment for their children so that they will not

find affection from others, especially from the Sukarap members. For the teachers, constant monitoring must be imposed on school premises for gangs not to flourish. The school administrators and authorities concerned should strengthen their campaign against gangsterism so as not to make it proliferate further, as well as provide fun-filled activities so that children will be satisfied and discouraged from joining any harmful peer groups. Lastly, this study implies that nothing beats parental affection and education. Hence, everyone should nurture the heart and mind of a child to mold him into a morally upright individual in the future.

Finding out the difference in how experiences of these Sukarap members and those Sukarap members, particularly girls, would yield more insights for the other researchers who will manifest interest in studying this social dilemma. It is also beneficial to find out how Sukarap members are treated in the community to find out whether this affects their involvement and experiences.

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