



**Surviving the Present,
Imagining the Future:
Narratives of Children Left Behind
by the Philippine ‘War on Drugs’**

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Abstract

In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte initiated a ‘war on drugs’ (*tokhang*) in 2016 to address the country’s drug problem. Widely criticized as a violation of human rights and as a war against the poor, *tokhang* led to thousands of violent drug-related killings, leaving behind orphaned children and families with intense psychological trauma, deepening poverty and social stigma. This research aims to understand how orphaned adolescents living in urban poor communities in Metro Manila make sense of their experiences of *tokhang*, their current life situation, and their imagined futures. As a feminist action research, it utilized memory work as a framework and method and games and critical arts inquiry as a form of intervention. This paper argues that that the ‘war on drugs’ has placed thousands of children and youth in poor communities in Metro Manila into a vulnerable state of being and deep insecurity. Orphaned youth’s memories of *tokhang* are characterized by loss and injustice and their narratives of the present reveal continuing sadness and insecurity; and the future, a sense of hope, healing and a desire to claim justice. Their lives, across time, could be seen as embedded in the home: in the past, a home destroyed in darkness; at the present, a home buried in hardship and sorrow, and the future, a hope for a new home rising above the pain and injustice. This research recommends human security as framework in fulfilling orphaned children and their families’ physical, emotional and educational well being and their fundamental freedoms from want, indignity and harm.

Key words: War on drugs, *tokhang*, orphaned youth, state violence, Philippines

Introduction

“Then a gun was pointed at my father. Because I was so angry, I cursed at them. I said, ‘You animal! You have no heart! Why are you like that? Why do you kill other people? Don’t you have a family? For 5,000 [pesos], you will do that to other people?’ That’s what I said to him. And then he said I should keep quiet. And then he pointed the gun at my forehead. He said I should shut up or else I will be killed too.” (Female, 13)

In the Philippines, the government has initiated a campaign to eliminate drugs in the country known as the ‘war on drugs’ since 2016.¹ Pronounced by President Duterte upon his election in 2016, he began fulfilling his campaign promise to eliminate drugs in the country, saying: “You drug pushers, holdup men, and do-nothings, you better get out because I’ll kill you” (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

¹ ‘War on Drugs’ is used alternatively with *tokhang* in the entire paper.

President Duterte won by 16 million out of 60 million voters in a field of six presidential hopefuls. His popularity ratings have remained high ever since. Even if in past months his ratings dipped, the recent Social Weather Station (SWS) survey released on December 28, 2018 showed that 74% of Filipino adults surveyed were satisfied with the President's performance. Currently, he is the most trusted government official (Viray, 2018). The President has proclaimed drugs as number one issue affecting the country. Early in his term, he proclaimed 4 million drug users but his numbers change; he currently uses the much lower number of 2.3%, or an estimated 1.8 million users (Nation Wide Survey on the Nature and Extent of Drug Abuse in the Philippines, 2015).

The campaign against drugs coined 'Operation Double-Barrel' calls for the arrest of suspected drug users and dealers but it has turned into endorsed killings by the Philippine National Police (PNP) from the President (Human Rights Watch, 2017). According to Amnesty International, it comes from a purported two-pronged strategy: one, known as Project HVT (High Value Target), which focuses on drug syndicates and traffickers; and the other, known as Project or *Oplan Tokbang*, which focuses on low-level sellers and people who use drugs.² According to the PNP, 4,075 drug-linked individuals have been killed. However, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights claims that 16,355 homicide cases, which may or may not be drug-related, are still under investigation (Quintos, 2018).

The policemen are reported to have quotas on those they kill and arrest, and there are reports that policemen are rewarded with cash incentives to carry out the killings. For those who fall behind in their quotas, they are reprimanded. The government has refuted these claims, but in a special report by Reuter News, two senior officers anonymously spoke to a journalist on this issue and stated that the 'killings are in fact orchestrated by the police, including most of those carried out by vigilantes' (Mogato, 2017). Not all killings are by the police in uniform. Masked men are reported as carrying out the killings riding-in-tandem on motorcycles. They arrive at the suspect's home in pairs, shoot the suspected drug user or dealer and get away quickly. Many in the communities believe that these are operatives of the police or policemen themselves serving as hit men. Investigations into these killings are few, if at all. The operation is reported to have 'assets' in the community who serve as the eyes and ears of the police to identify drug users and those that are speaking out against the police and the administration. Some of these allegations cannot be proven as there is no documentation but the stories

² *Oplan* stands for 'operation plan' and *Tokbang* fuses two words that translate as 'knock and plead'—as the strategy involves door-to-door visitations by the police to request that people involved in drugs 'voluntarily' surrender to the authorities and cease their drug activities (Amnesty International, 2017). The youth themselves does not refer to this government initiative as a 'war' but uses the local word for it, *tokbang*. The children in the communities call it *tokbang* because a knock on the door is followed by a 'bang-bang' (shooting).

of the youth and women living in the communities attest to some of these practices (Amnesty International, 2017).

The war on drugs has left about 15,000 dead, based on the estimates of the Department of Social Welfare and Development in early 2018. While stories of these children and their families have been featured in the local and international media, very few researches have been conducted to document the psychological trauma experienced by these children in witnessing the brutal murder of one or both parents, or the pain of losing their loved ones and the stability of their homes. There is a need to document and highlight the impacts of this brutal war on these teens, as well as to engage them in identifying their human rights and to work towards more peaceful communities.

This study on *Surviving the Present, Imagining the Future: Narratives of Children Left Behind by the 'War on Drugs'* aims to document how the youth affected by state-initiated violence in the 'war on drugs' understands what has happened to them and how these teens collectively construct an image of a safe and caring environment for themselves, their families, and their communities. Our research began in April 2018 with data collection in selected areas of Metro Manila, where faith-based institutions (Catholic groups) work with widows and orphans. The names of the communities will not be identified to protect the families and their children, the youth of the study, and the communities themselves from further harassment from perpetrators of violence and injustice. A total of 62 youth participated in this study.

Research on the impact of violence and conflict on youth has remained scarce. It is a population that gets overlooked when studying the impact of violence (Barber, 2009). Media and literature usually focus on violence committed by youth but the impact that political or state-sanctioned violence has on youth is not as prevalent. This feminist action research study hopes to contribute to the pool of knowledge that looks at youth in situations of political violence. Studies from around the world show that political violence is always complex and because of this, there is caution to making simplistic conclusions, but with proper care, research on state-initiated violence and its impacts has the potential to produce informative and valuably nuanced views on the functioning of youth in the context of this type of violence (Barber, 2009).

Looking at youth and their rights is made more critical given the developmental stage of the youth. No longer children and not yet adults, youth are in the transition stage of finding their place in society. They are looking at education, thinking about the future, planning their lives as adults and seeking belongingness (Erickson, 1968). At the same time, looking at the rights of youth is recognition that they too have rights (Beasley et al, 2009).

Using memory work as framework and methodology, and games and critical arts inquiry as a form of intervention, this paper shows evidence that the ‘war on drugs’ has placed thousands of children and youth in poor communities in Metro Manila in a vulnerable state of being and deep insecurity. In this article, we present the orphaned youth’s memories of *‘tokhang’* as they experienced in the past, and their narratives of the present and their imagined future. Their memory of loss is characterized by pain and injustice and their narratives of the present reveal continuing sadness and insecurity; and the future, a sense of hope, healing and a desire to claim justice. Their lives, across time, could be seen as embedded in the home: in the past, a home destroyed in darkness; at the present, a home buried in hardship and sorrow; and the future, a hope for a new home rising above the pain and injustice. In conclusion, we propose a human security as a framework in fulfilling orphaned children and their families’ physical, emotional and educational well being and their fundamental freedoms from want, indignity and harm. In the next section, we describe the memory work process we used in this research.

Memory work as framework and methodology

Memory work was developed by German Marxist feminist scholar Frigga Haug and her colleagues to examine the dialectical process by which social structure impinges on how we become gendered while acknowledging individual agency in the process of becoming (Haug, 1987). Memory work begins with subjective experience as the problem to be explained in research and seeks for the answer not in the experience itself and not in individual accounts of experience, but in how the group or collective analyzes these experiences (Stephenson and Kippax, 2008). This process of social construction is based on memories or constructions of events. Crawford et. al. (1992) explain it as follows: “The underlying theory is that subjectively significant events, events that are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important role in the social construction of the self” (Crawford et al., 1992, p. 37). Looking at how individuals construct or make sense of an event, as opposed to the event itself, offers a glimpse into the process of appropriation or assimilation of the social. In this study, we look at how Filipino adolescents left behind by the killing of one or both parents or guardian construct their subjectivities from their memories of the war on drugs.

Feminist researchers have found memory work both challenging and liberating as it offers an interdisciplinary and integrated method of inquiry, one that transcends traditional boundaries between psychology and sociology, theory and method, subject and object (Crawford et al., 1992; Stephenson, Kippax and Crawford, 1996). Memory work looks at both the individual and the social; merges subjective experience and theory; and abandons the distinction between knower and known as the collective of researchers study themselves through their own memories (Gillies, Harden, Johnson,

Reavey, Strange, and Willig, 2004). Ultimately, as we understand how we actively participate in society's construction of our identities, memory work allows us to discover how to intervene in the process (Johnston, 2003). As such, memory work as a feminist methodology takes the form of consciousness-raising and looks at the possibilities for social change and transformation (Markula and Friend, 2005; Willig, 2001). Memory work is best carried out on events that are significant (Haug, 1987; Willig, 2001). Using memories of male and female adolescents' experience of the war on drugs, we look at how the children, particularly teens ages 11-17 left behind by drug related killings construct the war on drugs and how they negotiate agency within the discourses surrounding the war on drugs.

Method

Memory work involves three phases: (1) generating memories, (2) collective analysis of the memories, and (3) integration and theory-building (Willig, 2001). Phase 1 involves the creation of a memory work group, the selection of a trigger, and the individual writing of memories. Phase 2 involves textual analysis of the individual memories and cross-sectional analysis of the memories together. Phase 3 is a process of critically examining the memories and the analyses to eventually lead to the writing of memory work.³ For this study, we identified three key objectives for the memory work: (a) provide the participants a safe space to share or tell their stories; (b) allow them to go in a process of collective sense-making and re-imagining of their shared experiences; and (c) give voice to adolescents orphaned by the 'war on drugs'.

Participants

In phases 1 and 2, the researchers identified areas in Metro Manila where large numbers of families have been affected by the 'War on Drugs'. The research team worked with local parishes in the identified communities to select the youth based on the criteria that they range from 11 to 17 years of age and are part of a family who had lost one or both parents to drug-related killings.⁴ They must also be deemed by caretakers, particularly community social workers and volunteers, as fit to join. A total of 62 youth participated in the study. However, only 56 of the youth met all the requirements for participation and whose data were included in the data analysis. Of the 56 participants, 52% were females and 48% were males.

Period covered

3 See Crawford et al., 1992; Stephenson and Kippax, 2008; and Willig, 2001, for a detailed account of memory work as a qualitative research method.

4 Our initial definition of youth was 12 to 17 years of age but like other researchers looking at youth in situations of violence and conflict (Daiute et al, 2006), the definition of youth could not adhere strictly to the chronological age because of the responsibilities and experiences thrust upon them which have forced them to mature faster than their chronological age. These children had insights and narratives that needed to be heard. Thereby, we extended the definition of youth from 11 to 17 years of age.

The timeline of the killing was from the time President Duterte announced the ‘war on drugs’ in July 2016 until March 2018, when the study was conducted. The data-gathering period was in April and May 2018, during the school summer break.

Research team

Academe-based social workers and psychologists together with community-based volunteers were convened to form the research team. The team collaborated in conceptualizing the research framework and designing the research methodology. The team also partnered with community liaisons from church-based organizations that have programs for families affected by the ‘war on drugs’ to help organize the data collection process for each of the targeted areas in Metro Manila. The community liaisons identified community volunteers from their church-based organizations who could serve as memory work facilitators. This group of community volunteers underwent training in facilitating memory work, games, and expressive arts for the data collection process. From this group, eight church-based volunteers were selected as memory work facilitators. The community liaisons also identified the orphaned children in their communities that met the criteria for participation. The liaisons also ensured that the facilitators were able to talk to the parents/guardians of the children and to get written consent for their participation in the project. In addition, all logistics were worked out between the liaisons and the facilitators as to the venue for the memory work, meal preparation, transport arrangements for the teens, and developing community profiles.

Ethical procedures

Clear ethical procedures were formulated prior to the study, taking into account the potential long and short-term effects of the research project to the youth participants, the team, the partners, and the communities. Ethical concerns identified include: (a) the possibility of exposing the research participants to safety and security risks considering the political sensitivity of the research topic; (b) the possibility of re-traumatization of participants during phase 1 of memory work (generating memories); and, (c) the observation that when research is done in the community, it often becomes an ‘extractive’ process rather than a mutually beneficial knowledge-generating practice, in which both the researchers and the participants benefit from the research project.

The research team drafted an ethics protocol based on the guidelines set forth by the Philippine Social Science Council Ethics Review Board. The protocol subscribes to principles of integrity, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, informed consent, beneficence (do good, do no harm principle), social justice, cultural and gender sensitivity, and protection of vulnerable populations. Written assent and consent were secured from the participants, who are below 18 years old, and their parents/guardians prior to the data collection activities. The consent forms were translated to Filipino and were explained in detail

to the participants and their parents/guardians. The research team provided the participants with free transportation, meals, and tokens of appreciation for their participation. The research team worked closely with the partner communities and church-based organizations to guarantee the safety and security of the orphaned children and adolescents and to ensure that they benefit from the action research process. At the end of each day, the research team, facilitators, and liaisons met to debrief and to ensure that any issue with any of the participants was addressed immediately. To safeguard the safety and security of the youth participants and their families, a decision was made to not identify the communities in this report. In addition, the research team has done several presentations of the preliminary research findings and recommendations to different stakeholders to raise awareness on the plight of these orphaned youth and to generate community and public feedback and support for these youth and their families.

Action research design

The research team developed a research design that combined memory work as a framework and methodology, and critical arts inquiry as action or intervention. Following the principles of feminist action research and memory work, the data collection process was designed to create a safe space for the youth to come together, bond with each other, and create a sense of solidarity or community as youth with a collective experience of being orphaned by *tokbang*. This process of group-bonding and community-building was facilitated through games and expressive arts following the tenets of critical arts inquiry.⁵ The entire research methodology was operationalized in a 31-page Facilitator's Manual. Memory work facilitators attended a two-day training program. The training included the use of memory work, games, expressive arts, and group facilitation skills in working with children and adolescents. Training on ethical procedures was also carried out. Research team members, including the community facilitators, were required to comply with the ethics protocol as stipulated in their individual terms of reference (TOR). For the training, a sociologist who specializes in games and social imagination was asked to train both the facilitators and the research team in the use of games to create an age- and process-appropriate safe space for the youth. A psychologist, who is part of the research team, along with the game expert led the facilitator's training. After the two-day facilitator's training, the research team assessed which of the facilitators were most fit to lead the memory work process with the youth. To ensure consistency of facilitation between groups, facilitators followed the facilitator's manual for the three-day research design. The facilitator's manual contained the step-by-step guide for each activity and each session.

⁵ The games, community building and expressive arts activities played a very critical in the entire data collection process, which enabled the research team and the memory work facilitators to gain the trust of the participants allowing for a freer and richer sharing of stories, memories and experiences in a safe and nurturing environment.

Memory work process

Six memory work groups were created: three groups of boys or male adolescents and three groups of girls or female adolescents. The youth in each group were gathered together based on their geographic location. Those who lived in nearby communities came together to form one memory work group. Each group had an average of 10 participants each; with the total number of participants per group at six, eight, nine, 10, 11, and 12. A total of 62 youth participants took part in the three-day memory work program; 56 of the 62 participants were included in the data analysis.

Phase 1: Generating memories

Day 1 of the data gathering process was designed to ensure that the orphaned youth were provided with a safe space to share their memories. The ethical guidelines were discussed at the start of each data gathering session and the research team members served as process observers who were ready to assist participants who may demonstrate psychological distress. A series of games and group-bonding activities were conducted to build trust and rapport among the participants. An atmosphere of openness, non-judgment, and acceptance was created by the facilitators to create a safe space for individual sharing and collective sense-making among the youth. The memory work group participants were given instructions on how to write the memories. Memory work calls for choosing a trigger or phrase that is expected to generate memories that are relevant to the research phenomenon. The research team chose the local term *tokhang* which is used by the community to talk about the 'war on drugs'. Using a third person perspective, the teens were given the instructions to write their personal experience of *tokhang* as if they were watching a movie or film about their life. They were asked to write their story of *tokhang* in third person, with as much detail as possible but without interpretation, explanation, or justification (Crawford et al., 1992; Stephenson et al., 1996; Willig, 2001). Third-person narratives were specified because these allow participants to create personal distance from their experience as well as to view their memories from the outside (Haug, 1987).

After writing their memories individually, the teens were asked to share their memories to the group. In the spirit of building trust, respect, and a sense of solidarity, the group was asked to say, "Your story is my story. Thank you for your story". This ritual was repeated after the narration of each individual memory and after each sharing session thereafter. The group atmosphere during the sharing of memories was emotional and painful, with some participants tearing up or crying. Sufficient time and space was given to each participant to stay with what they were feeling, and once they were ready, they could tune their attention back to the group. Participants could choose to not share their story or to stay quiet and simply sit with the group. A series of games and activities were conducted after the individual sharing of memories to release heavy emotions and to continue building trust and solidarity.

At the end of the day, the notebooks documenting memories were placed in a sealed ‘treasure box’ through a collective ritual of safekeeping each other’s stories.

Phase 2: Collective analysis of memories

The collective analysis of memories took place during Day 2. After a series of games and group-bonding activities, the group was asked to engage in a collective process of meaning-making as they reflected on the meaning of each individual narrative as linked to wider cultural narratives or discourses surrounding their shared experience of *tokbang*. Each group processed the collective meaning of their narratives as part of their community, reflecting on the wider social structures that impinge upon their lives and their capacity to exercise agency vis-à-vis these structures.

After collectively analyzing their past experience of *tokbang*, the teens were asked to write their narratives of the present. After being given time and space to write their individual narratives, they were once again asked to share these narratives to the group. The group engaged in a similar process of analyzing their narratives of the present and making sense of their shared experiences. They were then asked to imagine their future by writing their hopes and dreams on paper pieces of stars which they wove together to create a sky of stars. This sky of stars comprised their collective hopes and dreams for the future. The group atmosphere at this time was light and festive as the group closed with a ritual of thanksgiving and solidarity.

Phase 3: Rewriting the memories

By Day 3, the group had bonded. After a series of games and activities, the teens processed their hopes and dreams for the future and proceeded to envision their collective hopes for the future. The teens were the asked to engage in a collective process of rewriting their memories towards imagining a future for themselves, their families, and their communities. In this collective process, the teens were asked to (re)write their past, present, and future together as one group or community. The rewriting process was done through expressive arts, with participants doing drama or theater role-play, visual arts, and/or a song or dance performance. The group performance was the culmination of the three days of memory work. After the collective rewriting and performance of narratives of the past, present, and future, the participants were asked to reflect on the three days, their collective story, and their inner strength. In the spirit of solidifying the group and building a collective spirit of hope and resilience, the day ended with group-bonding activities and a closing ritual. The research team, together with the community facilitators and other community partners, gave a token of appreciation to each youth participant in a

thanksgiving ritual for the three days of coming together. The group atmosphere at this time was filled with hope and gratitude.

All the memory work sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts, along with the notebooks, artworks, and other materials used as data, were filed and securely stored. The transcripts and written memories were used in the data analysis.

Narratives of orphaned teens due to the war on drugs

The shared narratives are organized around shared patterns of meaning during the height of police brutality and/or hired killers, the aftermath of living with the pain and loss of loved ones, and the re-envisioning of family life in the future. In this section, we provide the narratives of the orphaned youth as they try to navigate their life-worlds as they recount the psychosocial horrors rooted in memories of *tokhang* in the past, the responses and to make sense of the challenges living in the present, and forging possible futures to move forward.

While the participants were directed to write from a third person, we found that most of the teens narrated their stories from the first person and it began with memories of the day of the killing of their loved ones under the *tokhang* operation. From the recent past, the adolescents narrated their stories of where they are at present and where they hope to be in the future. In sharing their stories, we see their lives across time as embedded in the home. It is in the reality and metaphor of the home that we propose to anchor their stories of the past, present, and future – a home destroyed in darkness in *tokhang*, a home buried in hardship and sorrow in the present, and the hope for a new home that will rise above the pain and injustice in the future. We present their stories in chronology beginning with their memories of *tokhang*, narratives of the present, and ending with their narratives of the future. All the statements used in this article are translations from Tagalog to English, hence the authenticity of expressed thoughts and sentiments may have been slightly compromised.

Memories of *tokhang*: Loss and injustice

The narratives recount their traumatic experience of witnessing or hearing of their parents or family members' violent death through *tokhang*. In their stories of bloodshed in the home, they recount the forced entry of men into their homes, the repeated sound of gunshots, and the merciless killing of their loved ones. They narrated their experience of shock, horror, and disbelief at the “nightmare” of seeing the dead body of their loved ones and the piercing pain of sorrow. Their memories of the past were

filled with the deep pain of loss and the raging anger at the injustice and helplessness of seeing and hearing their loved ones dying a brutal death, being accused of fighting and killed with no mercy.

The orphaned youth accounts of their memories of *tokbang* evoked lucid images and sounds of local police authorities invading their homes that led to the killing of their loved ones, or the images of masked men riding up in motorcycles or private vehicles storming in and shooting their parent/s. The imagery of bloodshed in the home is forever etched in the house that became the scene of a violent death. Accessing these memories depict a life world of excruciating pain and senseless loss. For some of these teens, the salient themes involved feelings of being threatened and in panic upon witnessing loved ones getting killed, or being shocked and in tears upon hearing the death of loved ones. Using vivid accounts, we further describe these themes as they unfold in the narration of the participants.

Merciless killings of loved ones

Those teens who directly witnessed how their loved ones were killed narrated in detail how police authorities and/or hired killers forcibly entered their homes, how they heard repeated gunshots, and how they witnessed the merciless killing of their parent/s /guardian.

“Policemen entered our home, a lot of them, and forcibly destroyed our door which was locked. After they forced their way in, they went upstairs. They opened the door of each room. My room was the first one they opened.”

(Male, 18)

“When my father went out of the room, they kicked him. We were about to enter the house when suddenly we heard four gunshots. We suddenly got scared because the gunshots came from inside my father’s room. Then I saw my stepmother, who was crying, she said, “Your father is dead.” (Female, 13)

“I saw that my father was still alive, so I asked the police for help. I said if he can still be brought to the hospital. Then the police went back for my father and shot him in the head. (silence) After that, the police brought us to the police station along with one of my older brothers. We didn’t have any news about my older brother. They made us go home around 9. They put us in jail first, then they released us at 9 in the morning. When we got out we learned that they gave my older brother a hard time. He was already dead, too.” (Male, 18)

Those who did not directly witness the brutal death of their loved ones recalled the moment they heard the news of their loved ones’ death, hearing how they died, how their parent or guardian allegedly retaliated and seeing the dead body of their parent/s.

“I went to our house. There I saw my cousin who told me the story. She said, “You know what, girl, your father was so pitiful, they went inside your house and your father was begging them not to shoot him. We heard several gunshots and then they dragged your father out. They threw him inside a sidecar, threw him like a pig. They even beat him up inside the sidecar, they even spun him around.” I kept crying and crying at that time, I did not know what to do. I miss my father so much.” (Female, 15)

“My mother heard what was happening, my father heard that the police were asking my uncle and stepfather to insert something. They were asking them to insert a gun and some meth (shabu). “Get this and insert this in your pocket.” Once they put the gun and inserted the meth (shabu) in their pockets, the police immediately said, “Fire a shot with the gun against the wall. My uncle fired a shot out of so much fear. My uncle had no choice but to obey the police. Once he fired the gun, they started shooting at him in the head, the chest, and the brain and made it appear as if he fought back because he had a gun too.” (Female, 14)

“I saw you lying there looking like you were just asleep. I could again feel my heart slowly being torn apart with what I was seeing and what happened to you. I pitied you. You had huge bruises on your eyes, your right arm was broken, and your head was riddled with bullets.” (Female, 17)

Nightmare of agonizing sorrow

The experience of witnessing or hearing of the violent death of their loved ones tore the children and adolescents apart as they fell into a state of unbearable agony and sorrow. While still in a state of shock and disbelief, these children and adolescents described the experience of being engulfed by a nightmare they could not wake up from. *“It was midnight. The night my heart was destroyed. The night filled with so much sorrow, fear, and anger. The night I will never forget for as long as I live. I don’t want to return to it anymore but I can still slowly remember the pain in my chest and my eyes at seeing you bent, lifeless by the road gutter. I could not see the gunshot wounds on your head so I just thought it was all just a nightmare and I wanted to wake up but I couldn’t.”* (Female, 17)

Excruciating pain of loss

The adolescents described the excruciating pain of losing a parent or family member through violence. They could only recount their sense of helplessness as they cried. *“Anger and sorrow is what I was feeling then. I want to take revenge on the people who did that to you but I do not have the means to. I could not do anything but cry in a corner just so I can let out all the pain that I am feeling.”* (Female, 17)

Anger at injustice and helplessness.

Alongside the excruciating pain of loss was the anger and rage towards the people responsible for the merciless killing of their family members. While the adolescents expressed their anger, they stood helpless at the threat of their own death.

“Then a gun was pointed at my father. Because I was so angry, I said, I cursed at them. I said, ‘You animal! You have no heart! Why are you like that? Why do you kill other people? Don’t you have a family? For 5,000 [pesos], you will do that to other people?’ That’s what I said to him. And then he said, I should keep quiet. And then he pointed the gun at my forehead. He said I should shut up or else I will be killed too.” (Female, 13)

Narratives of the present: Continuing sadness and insecurity

From their memories of the painful past, the orphaned teens shared the continuing emotional heaviness of the present. They described the present as “living a nightmare” of overwhelming and unending sadness at the loss of their loved ones. As the orphaned youth continue with school and everyday life, they strongly yearn for justice for their parents and family members lost to *tokhang*. Marked by the stigma of *tokhang*, they live in fear and insecurity that their lives too remain endangered as the ‘war on drugs’ rages on. They live fearing the police and that their friends will be used by the police as “assets” (who will point at them as the next target). Thus, fear and mistrust of people in the community now envelope them. They no longer feel safe. Even the home is no longer a safe place. The home is now a warzone marked by blood and death and the families are now scarred by this war. Their life journey is now a search for healing and justice alongside the search for their survival and livelihood as there are no government programs to address the needs of the families left behind.

The consequences of *tokhang* on the teens go beyond the experience of emotional pain and social injustice. Their own lives and those of their families have also changed at the loss of a parent/guardian who was often the breadwinner or a source of the family’s income. Many of the killed are men who may have young families. The youth narrated how the lives of their families are made more difficult as the remaining parent, usually a mother struggles to put food on the table. Several of the teens and younger ones are forced to find work in order to stay in school and to help provide for the family. Others have dropped out of school to work or to care for younger siblings in order for the family to survive. Alongside the experience of economic hardship, their families are stigmatized as *natokhang* or ‘killed in the war on drugs’. Many reported being teased and isolated in school for being children of drug pushers and drug addicts. *Tokhang* also forced some families to live separately as siblings who were completely orphaned have been parceled with different relatives to survive. This living arrangement has added additional stress to families, especially because the extended families are also poor. But despite

the enduring pain and hardship of poverty that has befallen them, they hold on to hope to live on with life, through faith in God and the kindness of others. It is in others that they find hope in themselves, that as long as there are those who believe in them, they can believe in themselves.

Living a nightmare of unending sadness

The aftermath of a tragedy has forced orphaned teens and their families to face the challenges of re-establishing normalcy in everyday life amidst the resurging painful emotions of losing their loved ones and the struggle to survive, the lived nightmare of a tragic death continues as the children and adolescents shared how emotionally difficult life has become in the present.

“Losing my father has been so hard, like a huge nightmare in our lives, where the thing that my father did not want to happen did happen.” (Female, 17)

Continuing sadness and sorrow

The orphaned teens described the present as a slow and heavy sadness that ebbs and flows in the everyday: *“It’s like how you think it’s okay already, that we have forgotten already, but every time you remember it still pains you so much.”* (Male, 16) As they struggle to establish a sense of normalcy, the memory of *tokhang* returns to them along with the memory of pain and suffering. And while some present a brave front as if they had moved on with their lives, inside they remain immobilized and frozen by sadness.

“I just laugh it off so that people will not know that I am actually sad. The truth is, when the past is brought up, I just try not to mind it. In short, I just ignore everything so that people will not notice that I am sad. The thing I hate the most is going back to the past, because the word ‘past’ means that we should not go back to it or talk about it anymore.” (Female, 14)

Fear and insecurity amidst seeking justice

While sadness continues to heavily press upon them, the sense of injustice propels these adolescents to stand for justice.

“I want my uncle to have justice so that he can finally be at rest and he can be happy in heaven.” (Female, 14)

Their lives now take a new trajectory as they share narratives of seeking justice for the rest of their lives.

“My desire is to give justice to the death of my family and for the killings to stop. I will never ever stop until we receive justice for the deaths of my mother and father. I will keep fighting, even until death, to attain justice for my parents.” (Female, 13)

But as they carry the fight for justice in their lives, they continue to live in a state of insecurity as their homes and communities no longer feel safe. Having associated the trauma of the past with fearful images of police and/or *barangay* (local government officials) authorities, they live in fear of the police.⁶

“What I feel is fear. And I wish that the police would stop roaming our area. And I also wish that there will be no more people wrongfully killed in this. That’s it for the present. The present is done.” (Male, 15)

Doubt and suspicion pervade the community as the affected families are now filled with mistrust.

“Sometimes it’s scary because you don’t know if the person in front of you is being real.” (Female, 18)

They are afraid that their friends may be used as “assets” who will tag them to the police for a fee.

“It is hard to trust friends. You don’t really know that the person you grew up with can do that... will just be paid off. Just for the money.” (Male, 16)

Falling into poverty

Shaped by a shared struggle of transcending a devastated past, a new struggle besets the teens and their families. The struggle for survival becomes their priority as their families fall deeper into poverty at the loss of a family member who had often been the primary breadwinner of the family. For a family that could barely survive, losing a parent who was the primary economic resource cripples the family and diminishes greatly their quality of life.

“Things have changed now, my mother is having such a hard time now. Sometimes she has no money but she will find a way to feed us. When there’s really no money, our meal is tuyo (cheap dried fish) with cooking oil on our rice. It’s okay with us because we are not picky. If my father was alive, we will not be experiencing hardship.” (Female, 13)

As the remaining parent or guardian struggles to put food on the table, eating to survive has become a struggle.

⁶ This sense of fear and insecurity also hinders orphaned families from seeking help from the government and to be suspicious of those offering to help, which was experienced by the research team. Despite being aware of some government services like burial or financial assistance, victims of *tokhang* live in constant fear as the drug war continues. A related study on orphaned families in Metro Manila also revealed that families who avail of financial assistance from some local government units in Metro Manila were denied assistance, when the cause of death indicated was drug-related (Espenido, 2018).

“Ever since my father died, my mother has been having difficulties sending us to school and feeding us. At present, three of us go to school. Sometimes my mother does not have money but she finds a way to feed us. When there’s really no money then we just have 1 peso (0.019\$) junk food with our rice as our meal.” (Female, 14)

This loss of income also affects their schooling as they worry about not having enough to continue attending school.

“No more money for school. There’s no more money for our schooling, no more money for school.” (Male, 13)

The teens shared how they make their own sacrifices to continue pursuing an education.

“Sometimes when I go to school, I don’t have money for food anymore. I just ask my mother for some money for my fare and then I just try to get free food from my classmates. If only father were alive, then my mother would not have such a hard time trying to send us to school and feed us because father had work using his motorcycle.” (Female, 14)

Keeping the family alive

Narratives included how siblings or they themselves had to drop out of school and find work in order to keep the family alive.

“When my father died, life became very hard for us. My brother who really, really wanted to continue studying was forced to work. Even my mother tears up because of my father who died.” (Male, 15)

The stigma of drug-related death

One of the unique struggles faced by the orphaned youth is the stigma the war on drugs and its killings has brought on to their lives. Some shared being teased by their peers in their school that their fathers were drug pushers or drug addicts, creating further distress out of tragedy.

“It’s hard because other people find it hard when they lose someone they love. We’ve already lost a loved one and then we get teased. ‘So your father is a drug addict!’ And so it feels like we’re losing hope already because some of our classmates avoid us, they don’t want to see us, because they say that our father is a drug pusher; that our father fought back. It just sucks because we already lost our loved one then that sort of thing has to happen to us.” (Male, 16)

Keeping the family together

Some of the surviving children and adolescents have been separated from each other in order to survive. This is more apparent for those families where both parents were killed at the same time. Others who had lost one parent could not be supported by the remaining parent, with the separation adding to their emotional distress.

“Ever since my father passed away, we siblings were separated and my siblings had to live in different houses. After a few months, we returned to our house, so now we’re happy because we’re together again.” (Female, 17)

Children forced to become adults

The orphaned children and adolescents now live lives disrupted by death and violence. Alongside carrying the emotional burden and the search for justice, these children and adolescents are forced to take on adult responsibilities for their families to survive.

“I work at a catering...so that my siblings can have something to eat.” (Female, 16)

Our young participants shared the necessity of working and studying at the same time. They shared stories of over-extending themselves to feed their younger siblings as roles in the family are reconfigured and each member of the family finds means to keep the family afloat.

“I applied as... crew. I worked and studied at the same time. I would always be late and sleepy but I worked hard. My mind and how tired I was would constantly fight. If only I could sleep forever so that I won’t have to feel the pain, the sadness in the every day, and the physical exhaustion.” (Female, 17)

Holding on to hope through faith in God and the kindness of others

Despite the compounded emotional difficulties and economic hardship of the present, the children and adolescents hold on to hope that they will overcome their tragic past and find justice and redemption. They draw strength from their experience of kindness from others.⁷

“Right now we’re being helped by such kind-hearted people. It makes me feel that justice will soon come.” (Male, 14)

They remain strong in their faith that God will give them the courage to live on.

⁷ Faith based institutions, most prominently under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church, some non-government organizations with human rights advocacy, socio-civic associations and charitable individuals have provided psychosocial interventions and the provision of immediate needs such as food, educational support for children and daily living allowance for mothers. However, resources of these organizations are limited and the provision of services is sporadic, fragmented and short term. The need for funding of programs and for skilled and experienced personnel to manage cases extends beyond their capacities. Except for existing social services for the poor, there remains no intervention from the Philippine Government designed for the specific needs of families and their children affected by the war on drugs.

“I’m grateful to God our Father because He gave me the strength inside to face all the challenges He throws my way. It may be hard but I will carry on for my siblings and for myself.” (Male, 16)

Narratives of hope, healing, and claiming justice

The orphaned teens did not find it easy to think about the future when asked to share their dreams and hopes. Many were so overwhelmed with surviving that the future seemed remote. However once they began to share their hopes for the future, they talked about rising above the pain and injustice – the hope that someday their sadness will fade away, the hope that someday they will achieve justice for the death of their loved ones too. Their life journey of searching for healing and justice continues into the future. While the adolescents shared the dream of rising above poverty, finishing school, finding work, supporting their siblings, surviving parent, and families, they shared their wish for a life without *tokhang*. In wishing for the killings to stop, they search for justice and peace beyond themselves and their families. They wish for a good government (that will stop the ‘war on drugs’). They wish for good police (that will not kill). They even dream to become policemen and women to demonstrate how a good police person should behave and what it means to be good. In their search of justice, they wish for Duterte to be killed to avenge the death of their parent/s. Shaped by their experience of *tokhang*, their dreams for themselves and their families are now embedded in their wish for the nation – a country where there is peace, where there are no killings, where there is justice. In the end, they wish to give back to their parents and their families. But more than that, they wish to give back to the people who have shown them kindness in the present. They ask not to be forgotten.

Hoping to be able to rise again

Having lived through the merciless killing of a parent through *tokhang* and now living in the present still enveloped by sadness and sorrow, the orphaned youth can only hope to someday rise from the pain of such a traumatic loss.

Hoping for sadness to fade away

The orphaned children and adolescents hope for healing and justice.

“If only I can just forget what happened. Because whenever I remember it, I just miss our father more. Even if it’s been a year already, it still hurts whenever I remember it.” (Female, 17)

Wishing for the pain to go away

To heal is to recover from the pain and for the past to no longer haunt them.

“I have to fix the pain I feel... until it goes away. I must forgive for this to happen.” (Male, 16)

Hoping to achieve justice

Alongside healing is the hope of one day claiming justice for the violent death of their loved ones.

“But of course we have not lost hope that he will have justice and the right time for that will come. (Female, 15)

There is anger and the desire to avenge the death, to wish for karmic justice.

“In the future, I hope that their murder case remains alive. I also hope his killers find happiness in what they do because the day will come that they will feel all the pain we are feeling now.” (Female, 11)

But for most there is a desperate holding on to hope that justice will come in the end.

“My dream is to attain justice.” (Female, 13)

In reimagining a life unshackled by the memories of *tokhang*, the orphaned adolescents shared their goals, wishes, and aspirations not only for their families but for their communities and society-at-large. The stories of how our young participants gather the pieces to create meaning from their tragic loss depict a life world of forging possible futures of togetherness and social transformation. As they are asked to imagine their future, they see a future not for themselves but for a nation in search of an end to *tokhang*. While the dreams of the self are embedded in the family, the dreams for the self and the family are embedded in the country as a whole.

Wishing for the family to rise above poverty

The teens shared their wish of someday rising above poverty. They shared the typical life narrative of children from poor families – to finish school, to find work, and provide for their families.

“When I grow up, I will find work so that my family can eat.” (Male, 13)

Their dreams are simple – to put food on the table, to put their siblings through school, to have a home to live in.

“I will study hard so we can have a better life. We will build a house.” (Male, 11)

“I’ll be a cruise ship driver in the future so we can rise above poverty and I can put my siblings through school, especially since I’m the one my family is depending on.” (Female, 12)

Wishing for the family to be back together

Separated from each other by *tokhang*, siblings shared their wish to live in the same house once more.

“I hope one day my family and my siblings will be together and we’ll all celebrate and play together.” (Male, 15)

They wish to simply play together, eat together, and not be separated again.

“For my siblings and I to be together in one house... I will be the one to provide for my family so we can live in one house.” (Male, 16)

“We are in one house. Eating together.” (Male, 14)

“I hope that we’ll never be separated again.” (Male, 13)

Wishing for the killings to stop

Beyond themselves and their families, they shared a commonality – a wish for the killings to stop in the country.

“I want them to stop killing people. They have destroyed so many dreams and so many families. I wish that they will just stop because so many children have been orphaned by their loved ones.” (Female, 15)

The future they imagine is a future without *tokhang*.

“What I want is for the shootings to stop.” (Male, 14)

“Stop tokhang so that no one will die.” (Female, 13)

Wishing to kill Duterte

In search of justice, the orphaned adolescents wish to kill Duterte.

“Kill Duterte!” (Male, 16)

They attribute the death of their parents to the rise and policies of Duterte.

“It wasn’t just one life that was lost when Duterte came into power, millions.... Saying sorry cannot pay for their lives... we should also make him die from tokhang.” (Male, 16).

They wish for his death to avenge their parents’ death.

"My parents died because of Duterte." (Male, 17)

"He too must die." (Male, 11)

Wishing to have/ be good police

Having experienced injustice at the hands of the police, the children and adolescents wish for a changed police force. For many the death of their parents is because of the police directly or they believe the police paid hired killers. Therefore, they wish for good police who will not kill.

"I want to be a good police officer, unlike the police now who kill here and kill there. Everything can be resolved by talking." (Female, 17)

Some even wish to become policemen so that they themselves can give justice to their parents deaths and others who also died from *tokhang*.

"I want to finish school and become a police officer so I can give justice to the death of my father and the other innocent people who died from tokhang." (Female, 12)

Wishing to have a good government

As they attributed *tokhang* to Duterte, the orphaned teens wish for a change in government – one that will not kill people.

"Replace Duterte." (Male, 16)

"What Duterte did—instead of having the drug users surrender and have them change their ways, it's like, it's like he just made it worse. The more he ordered people killed." (Female, 14)

"I want our government to change." (Female, 16)

"No more crimes... a government that rules responsibly." (Male, 16)

Wishing to finish school and find work to give back to parents, family, and others

There is hope to finish school, find work, and give back to their parents. They wish they could still make their parents proud - even if they had passed away - by giving back to others.

"I want to finish my studies so I can repay all the difficulty, sweat, and hardship of my parents." (Female, 14)

"I want to be a doctor... so that even if we no longer have parents, I will continue living my life. That's it. So that even though we don't have parents anymore, there will still be people who will be proud of me." (Female, 14)

Dreams for the self are dreams for the nation

In their imagined future, they wish to rebuild what they currently see as broken in their lives; their homes, their remaining families and their communities. The dreams they narrate are for their surviving family, to lift themselves out of this extreme poverty. In this imagined future, they also imagine rebuilding a nation – a nation where there are no more *tokhang*-related killings, where there is no rich or poor, where everyone has work, and where everyone is kind and happy.

Peace for all. *“The lives in our whole country will be peaceful. No more killings (tokhang)”* (Male, 16) *“What I want to happen in the future is for us to live happy lives and for all people to change for the better, for all to be kind, and there will be no fighting. This is what I want to happen in the future.”* (Male, 15)

Social and economic justice for all. *“What I want to happen now ma’am is for those who lost their loved ones to be given justice. And then I want all those without work to have work. And I want all people to be equal, no one will be poor, no one will be rich.”* (Female, 14)

Hope for the self, family, community, and country. *“I want justice for my father and for other victims. I also want my siblings to finish school. And I also want, that even if we don’t become rich, for as long as my family can eat on time. I also want our neighborhood to be peaceful regardless of who wins in the elections. I also want to thank everyone who are helping us attain the justice we are yearning for. I also want to finish school. I want to join the Philippine National Police Academy to fix the disorder in our country. I want to have a good family. That is all.”* (Male, 16)

While this future utopia of peace and social and economic justice may be wishful thinking, it is in their capacity to dream and imagine and to find reason to live on. In a dream of a just and peaceful community, they find hope to heal.

Table 1. Summary of narrative themes

	<i>KWENTO</i>	<i>NG KWENTO</i>	<i>NG KWENTO</i>	<i>NG</i>
	<i>TOKHANG</i>	<i>KASALUKUYAN</i>	<i>HINAHARAP</i>	
	<i>MEMORIES OF TOKHANG</i>	<i>NARRATIVES OF THE PRESENT</i>	<i>OF NARRATIVES OF THE FUTURE</i>	<i>NG</i>
THE NARRATIVES	<i>Kwento ng Pighati at Kawalan ng Hustisya</i>	<i>Kwento ng Patuloy na Lungkot at Pangamba</i>	<i>na Kwento ng Pag-asa, Pagbilom, at Pagkamit ng Hustisya</i>	
	Narratives of Loss and Injustice	Narratives Continuing Sadness and	of Narratives of Hope, Healing, and Justice	

Insecurity

THE HOME	<i>Ang Tabanang Gumuho sa Karimlan</i>	<i>Ang Tabanang Nabaon sa Hirap at Pighati</i>	<i>Pangarap na Pagbangon sa Bagong Tabanan</i>
The Home Destroyed in Darkness	The Home Buried in Hardship and Sorrow	Hope of Rising in a New Home	
A VIOLENT DEATH	<i>Walang Pagpatay sa Mahal sa Pagdanak ng Dugo sa Tabanan</i>	<i>Awang Patuloy na Nabubuhay sa Bangungot ng Walang Humpay na Kalungkutan</i>	<i>Umaasa na Makakabangon Pang Muli</i>
Bloodshed in the Home	Merciless Killing of Loved Ones	Living A Nightmare of Unending Sadness	Hoping to be Able to Rise Again
Nightmare of Agonizing Sorrow			
FROM PAIN TO HEALING	<i>Labis-Labis na Pighati</i>	<i>Patuloy na Lungkot at Pighati</i>	<i>Umaasa na Maglalabo ang Lungkot</i>
FROM INJUSTICE TO JUSTICE	Excruciating Pain of Loss	Continuing Sadness and Sorrow	Hoping for Sadness to Fade Away
Anger at Injustice and Helplessness	<i>Galit sa Kawalan ng Hustisya at Kakayanan</i>	<i>Takot at Pangamba sa Gitna ng Paghabanap ng Hustisya</i>	<i>Umaasa na Makamit ang Hustisya</i>
THE SELF EMBEDDED IN THE FAMILY / THE SELF AND FAMILY EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY	Anger at Injustice and Helplessness	Fear and Insecurity Amidst Seeking Justice	Hoping to Achieve Justice
THE SELF EMBEDDED IN THE FAMILY / THE SELF AND FAMILY EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY	Falling into Poverty	Wishing for the Family to Keep the Family Alive	Rise Above Poverty
THE SELF EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY	<i>Pagkalugmok sa Kabirapan</i>	<i>Pagnanais na Makaabon ang Pamilya sa Kabirapan</i>	<i>Pagnanais na Magkasama-sama ang Pamilya</i>
THE SELF EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY	Wishing for the Family to Rise Above Poverty	Wishing for the Family to Be Back Together	<i>Pagnanais na Matigil na ang Patayan</i>
THE SELF EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY	<i>Ang Marka ng Pagkamatay sa Droga</i>	The Stigma of Drug-Related Death	<i>Pagnanais na Matigil na ang Patayan</i>

<i>Pamilya</i>	Wishing for the Killings to Stop
Keeping the Family Together	<i>Pagnanais na Mapatay si Duterte</i>
<i>Mga Batang Tinulak sa</i>	Wishing to Kill Duterte
<i>Responsibilidad</i>	<i>Pagnanais na Magkaroon/Maging</i>
Children Forced To Become Adults	<i>Mabuting Pulis</i>
<i>Kumakapit sa Pag-asa mula</i>	Wishing to Have/to Be Good Police
<i>sa Pananalig sa Diyos at sa</i>	<i>Pagnanais na Magkaroon ng</i>
<i>Kabutihan ng Iba</i>	<i>Mabuting Gobyerno</i>
Holding on to Hope through Faith in God and the Kindness of Others	Wishing to Have a Good Government
	<i>Pagnanais na Magtapos at</i>
	<i>Magkatrabaho para Masuklian ang</i>
	<i>Magulang, Pamilya, at Ibang Tao</i>
	Wishing to Finish School and Find Work to Give Back to Parents, Family, and Others
	<i>Pangarap Para sa Sarili ay</i>
	<i>Pangarap Para sa Bayan</i>
	Dreams for the Self are Dreams for the Nation

Conclusion

This research on the memories and narratives of orphaned youth affected by the Philippine war on drugs aims to document the experiences and highlight the voices of a vulnerable sector who were forced into a situation of deep human insecurity, characterized by deepening poverty, intense fear for their safety and the shame and stigma associated with being related to a family member who was killed in a drug war operations. As a feminist action research, it utilized memory work as a framework and method, and games and critical arts inquiry as a form of intervention. This study provides evidence on the tragic impact of the ‘war on drugs’ on children and youth in poor communities in Metro Manila. Orphaned youth’s memories of *‘tokbang’* are characterized by loss and injustice and their narratives of the present reveal continuing sadness and insecurity; and the future, a sense of hope, healing and a desire to claim justice. These narratives of the youth collected in this study highlight the disregard for

international human rights agreements that are put in place to uphold human security. Instead, what can be heard from the narratives echoes of high insecurity and tension that puts the affected youths and their communities in a constant state of fear. The government, which has been entrusted the role of duty-bearers to protect the population against serious threats, are at the frontline and assume the role of the perpetrators. The stigma of being children of the alleged drug pushers/users allows for regular humiliation and indignity in their everyday lives where they are bullied by others and are stigmatized to the point that their lives are affected as not belonging in their own communities and schools. These insecurities are greatly compounded by the level of poverty which they are living in after losing one or both of their parents. In response to this, the government has failed to provide basic services, basic education and a minimum standard of living for a life of dignity for these children. In conclusion, the orphaned youth of the war on drugs are living in a state of human insecurity.

The underlying framework for sustainable interventions in complex situations or conditions must be that of human security, which espouses the protection of the vital core of all human lives in a way that enhances fundamental human freedoms and human fulfillment – freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation or indignity (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the Asian Development Bank Seminar, 27 April 1998). Therefore, the recommendations of this research are framed within the human security framework.

Micro-level: Freedom to heal and be whole again

The healing needs to start with the individual. Each of the members of families affected by the ‘war on drugs’ need to have:

- ♦ *Access to basic services* – Orphaned youth and their families need feeding programs and food purchasing abilities that allow children and youth in the extreme poverty categories to have nutritional meals that they can depend on. These need to be part of the school and community environment.
- ♦ *Housing/Home* – They need a place where they can feel safe and become a family again. This means allowing the affected youth and their families the opportunity and economic freedom to move to another house in order to heal from the images of violence and brutality that inhabit the home where their loved ones were killed.
- ♦ *Access to psychosocial interventions* – They need a place where they are able to address the pain of a lost parent/guardian and guidance in trying to make sense of what has happened to them. The incomprehensibility of the government’s violent campaign can lead to the youth’s ongoing negative response so making sense of it is a critical element for youth (Elbedover, Bensel and Maryanne, 1993). With psychosocial support, this can be an opportunity for psycho-social transformation after a crisis.
- ♦ *Educational support* – With the understanding that access to basic education is enshrined in the Philippine Constitution and the Philippines as a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

as well as to follow national law (P.D. 603), the state must ensure that the children and youth affected by the government's anti-drug campaign are not prevented from pursuing their education up to the tertiary level. This should include private-public scholarships targeting the affected youth in order to provide them the opportunity to pursue their educational goals.

- ♦ *Opportunity to be youth again* – Adolescence is a stage of human development where teens need to feel safe and find a satisfactory sense of belonging (Erickson, 1968). Local government units, private and public schools, and religious-based organizations need to create a safe space where youth can engage in age-appropriate play, participate in sports of their own gender, and be part of mixed teams. There is also a need to provide outlets for their creativity in arts, music, dance, and theater.

- ♦ *Ability to have income* – The study showed how important it was for these teens to contribute to the survival of the family and how some must abandon their studies in order to do so. Studies in other countries have shown that an important strategy for re-integration into the community and a way for youth to claim their value in the community and contribute to the family can be through allowing the affected youth to be productive citizens by working on community projects that help the community and where they are able to earn an income (Silberman, 2005).

Meso-level: Freedom to heal and to be whole again

The orphaned youth needs an opportunity to reclaim their lives. The 'war on drugs' has not only taken the lives of their loved ones but it also has deprived the orphaned youth of their own. This is a point in their developmental lives where youth are preoccupied with consolidating their social roles and developing a defined personality with a social reality that they can understand (Erickson, 1968). Youth is also a time where they have allegiances to family, school, and community; upon such allegiances, a notion of citizenship may arise (Sherrod, 2005). In the study, we share how the orphaned youth had ideas about how government, the police, and the community can and should behave towards members of their communities. These positive allegiances provide an opportunity for pro-social ways of connecting with others. They have ideas on good governance and how social justice modalities can be instituted in communities they know very well. They see themselves as stakeholders in the community and this provides an opportunity for Local Government Units (LGUs), national government institutions, and faith-based institutions to channel these perceptions into what Barber (2009) calls "Dynamic Identity" where the value of youth involvement in social issues and affairs can result in cultural consolidation, character development, and efficacy.

Meso-level: freedom to give and receive kindness

The present study showed how the orphaned youth are able to see and accept kindness from others and that they want to reciprocate that kindness to their surviving parent and to those who have shown care and respect for them and their families. The brutality of the killings, the handling of the dead by

the police, and the ostracizing from the community due to fear and stigma has contributed to an inability to grieve the dead in culturally appropriate ways. This lack of kindness and respect from the police calls for a need for the police and government institutions to follow a respectful protocol in handling the dead. Despite the brutality they have experienced, we saw deep compassion amongst the orphaned youth in the study. They held religious beliefs closely, not blaming God for what has happened but looking at God and those who are kind to help make their lives better. As youth, they are starting out their adult lives and they are looking for a better world (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera 2006). This is an opportunity for local churches, non-government institutions, and government agencies to allow for healthy ways of grieving and to work towards healing rituals of the affected families and the communities. This is an opportunity to work with the aggrieved youth in creating the better world they are looking for.

Macro-level: Freedom to hope

The study showed that the affected youth have hope for a better future. This hope is very much connected to how adults in their lives will respond and react to them. Currently they are seen as collateral damage to a one-sided 'war', a war that consists of attacks on poor communities, poor men, poor women, and poor children. A critical solution would be to stop the killings. But based on the government's pronouncements to continue this 'war', there is a need to buffer the impacts of the police and hired killers. Children and adolescents must be protected. Policies must be implemented to protect the human rights of the youth, rights which are enshrined in progressive national laws and in international conventions that protect the rights of youth. There is a need to train the Philippine National Police (PNP) on the rights of children and youth, and to establish a national private-public body that monitors these rights.

This is an opportunity for the academe to engage society as a whole to look at how youth are faring in the country and to engage the public in solutions. There is a danger in maintaining the current thinking that parents are solely responsible for their children's outcomes (O'Neil, 2016), especially when the children are left orphaned with very little support. This can serve as an opportunity to look at how schools, the media, and society as a whole look at youth where development is a competitive race to be more successful than their peers. There is a need for understanding to what creates disparities in achievement and in how to create alternative ways of thinking that will protect those needing protection and to prevent a cycle of violence where the vulnerable youth lose hope and get sucked into a cycle of poverty and accepted violence.

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