

Perspectives of Filipino Youth on Poverty

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ABSTRACT

The study sought a descriptive understanding of the perspective of Filipino youth on the issue of poverty in terms of the weight of the issue, causes of poverty, ways to reduce poverty and consideration if they are living in poverty. The study used a quantitative research approach to learn about the issue of poverty, its causes, and ways to reduce it from the perspective of Filipino youth. Primary data was collected through the use of self-administered survey of 401 Filipino youth, comprised of college level students. Moreover, descriptive method was utilized in the research design of the study to give a quantitative description of the general perspective of the Filipino Youth on poverty. The Filipino Youth viewed poverty as a serious social issue and believed that this is caused by the top ten causes of poverty in the Philippines. Also, these causes are not independent of each other because several items in the ranking can be linked to one another just like corruption and poor governance, low-wage rates and poor quality of education, and poor welfare system and rapid population growth to name a few. Filipino Youth are well aware of the current events most especially what is happening in their government which are somehow related or resulted to other causes of poverty. With everyday challenges the youth faces from doing schoolwork and participating in recreational activities to making significant plans for the future, it is important to note that, even though most of the respondents came from the lower social classes or the proletariat class of the society, they do not consider themselves poor or living in poverty. The respondents strongly suggest that to reduce poverty there should be free quality education for all, more job opportunities and stop in corruption in government, among others.

Key Words: filipino youth, poor people, perception, poverty reduction, causes of poverty

INTRODUCTION

The concept of youth is complex. It can be defined in different ways: demographic, transitional phase, and/or as a potential agent for change. Demographically speaking, youth is determined by using age brackets such

as 15-24 (United Nations), 15-35 (African Youth Charter), 13-25 (Swedish Government) and 15-30 years old (National Youth Commission). It is further divided into four sub-categories namely: In-School Youth, Out-of-School Youth, Working Youth, and Youth with Special Needs (National Youth Commission). In terms of the transitional phase, youth can be defined as the stage of transition to childhood and adulthood or a period when a person moves from a time of dependence to independence (United Nations). Also, youth is recognized as agents that can bring about positive or negative change to the society. As Dr. Jose Rizal said, "the youth is the fair hope of the fatherland." The future will depend on today's youth on how they manage their current affairs, the life-changing decisions they make now and will continue to make and the level of support society provides in this trying period of their lives as they're the ones who will steer the wheel in the future (Puyat, 2013).

Today, even though there are present initiatives/programs that promote youth participation in the Philippines like the *Sangguniang Kabataan* and the National Youth Commission (NYC), it seems that Youth, in general, are seldom recognized as a resource in decision-making processes and, as a result, their perspectives are often absent in policy-making (United Nations). According to the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations (2009), young people have the right to participate, influence and have power over issues that affect our lives.

It is widely acknowledged that the youth perspective is one of the critical inputs into government's decision or policy making, and yet it seems that youth participation is not well recognized in the Philippines.

Youth participation allows young people to have a role within an organization's structure where their opinions are valued. In youth participation, young people can express what is important to them, can increase their self-confidence and skills, can empower them, and help protect them by promoting resilience (AICAFMHA, 2008).

Several issues in society confront the youth that can affect their life views and decisions, one of which is poverty. Poverty is simply defined as the state of one who lacks a socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions (SAYLOR, 2012) which has complex effects that branch out to malnutrition, unemployment, crime, disinterest in education, and substance abuse to name a few.

According to the research conducted by the National Youth Commission (2010), most Filipino families, particularly low-income groups, do not receive proper nutrition and the most affected are the children and the youth. Their health and academic performances are affected, causing them to have low grades and eventually become disinterested in finishing their education.

Moreover, 26% of the 15-17 years old bracket up to 48% of the 25-30 years old and 39-48% of age groups 18-24 and 25-30 Filipino youth had to drop out of school due to financial hardship (NYC, 2010).

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The study sought to gain descriptive understanding of the perspective of Filipino youth on the issue of poverty in terms of the weight of the problem, causes of poverty, ways to reduce poverty and consideration if they are living in poverty. The findings obtained in the study would primarily help government to refine services to the youth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Filipino Youth of Today

In the Philippines, the youth occupies a prominent part in the total population. Of the 92.3 million Filipinos in 2010, about thirty-three percent (30 million) are individuals belonging to the 30 years and below age group (NYC, 2010). Fortunately, more than half of this population can read and write. The literacy rate of youth in Philippines was reported at 98 in 2013 (NSO, 2013). The literacy rate of young Filipinos has improved over the last 30 years, from 92% in 1980 to 98% in 2008.

Today's youth has become literate not only because of school or formal education; they are now taught by their experiences outside the walls of the school—their real life experiences. Literacy rate has also increased because of the developments and innovations in the ways of learning especially in school. That is the reason why youth nowadays are vigilant

and concerned about what is happening around them. Because they know now how these emerging predicaments can affect their decisions, they now have the voice on these issues (Asian Development Bank, 2010).

At a growth rate of 2.11% per year, the youth population is expected to double in about 33 years (NSO, 2010). This trend is something to think about considering the country's current economic performance and the fact that this proportion of the population are of reproductive age. The country's economic performance has always been wanting. Not enough quality jobs are being produced which will enable an ordinary family of four or five to live decently. Based on data gathered in 2000, around 28 percent of the households in the country are estimated to be living below the poverty line. This translates to about 4.3 million families or 26.5 million Filipinos living below the poverty threshold (NSCB, 2003).

Moreover, a total of 5,825,425 children and youth are at risk, composed of 3,000,000 children with disabilities, 246,011 street children, 64,000 victims of armed conflict, 2,400,000 who are exposed to hazardous working conditions, 4,097 sexually abused, 11,317 children in conflict with the law, 3,694 abandoned and neglected and 100,000 commercially sexually exploited. Latest statistics of street and working children, for example, show that there are approximately four million street and working children and youth in the country which accounted for 20 percent of the total number of employed persons. Out of this, 2.2 million children and youth who are working in hazardous conditions are forced to stop schooling. These children are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. About 37 percent of the children work 5-8 hours a day while approximately nine percent worked for more than eight hours and about one-fourth worked even in the evenings (ADB, 2010).

Characteristics of Filipino Youth

Factors classifying youth affect their contribution to the community or society they belong. They can be vulnerable to making their decisions toward themselves and their environment. Different struggles encountered by the youth while passing through this stage can be difficult and complicated.

A discussion on the challenges the young people are currently facing would not be complete without a presentation of their strengths and inner resources. Young people are not just passive players constantly at the mercy of outside influences.

High self-esteem, an important determinant of subjective well-being, counts among the many adaptive characteristics of the Filipino youth. About 7 in 10 Filipino young people are quite satisfied with themselves or feel they are capable of doing many good things or take a positive attitude towards the self (Raymundo, 2003). This appears to be a candid assessment of their general competencies and is probably different from mere bragging of their abilities. Young people who feel good about themselves tend to be less vulnerable to pressures from various sources to engage in high-risk behaviors. Achievement in school further elevates this general sense of self-worth, underscoring the importance of schooling in itself and a school environment that is conducive to the experience of success (Puyat, 2003; Miralao, 2003).

The Filipino youth nowadays also tend to be comfortable at construing themselves as individuals with unique characteristics, personal wishes and goals and also as individuals who value others' expectations and intentions (Puyat, 2003; Miralao, 2003). Most of them do not find that collectivistic goals are necessarily the antithesis of individualistic goals and vice versa. This is a definite advantage in contemporary societies where elements of collectivism and individualism are becoming equally popular. Likewise, the Filipino youth of today can continually fuse diverse and distinct roles and expectations into a coherent whole that defines who they are in their everyday interaction (Peña, 1998). A typical Filipino youth today tends to have a well-rounded personality and is able to seamlessly shift from one role to another (i.e. brother/sister, son/daughter, friend, student, leader, athlete, musician) depending on the demands of the situation.

A good sense of control over what is happening around them also characterizes the contemporary Filipino youth. Around 70 to 80% of the youth have a healthy sense that they can adequately control many outcomes in their lives (Puyat, 2003). Past studies have shown that low levels of perceived control are linked to apathy, depression and learned helplessness (Heckhausen & Schultz, 1995; Taylor, 1983; Seligman, 1975).

Even in the face of insurmountable difficulties where the apparent logical consequence is the development of apathy and helplessness, some youth are able to demonstrate robustness. A study, for example, which looks at the phenomenon of abuse in the eyes of the child, reveals that those who are as young as 8 years old are able to transcend the hurt and pain they are experiencing, allowing them to make sense of what is happening to them at a more complex level one would not generally expect from very young people (De la Cruz et al., 2001). In another study on exploited and physically, emotionally and sexually abused children, it was clearly shown that children are not always passive, helpless actors in extremely difficult circumstances. Some of them are capable of mustering enough inner courage, strength and capacity for restoration that can keep them from breaking down (Bautista et al., 2001). Such resilience, however, is not universal and not inexhaustible.

Another source of strength among the youth today is their latent spirituality. Although the majority of the Filipino youth today would rather go to the malls than be in church halls to be nourished by the spiritual talk of their priests and ministers, almost all of them (99.6%) profess belief in God or the Supreme Being. Though many of them are less familiar with the teachings of their church compared to their parents, most of them still believe that how they conduct their lives today would have a bearing on what would happen to them in the hereafter—in heaven or in hell (Raymundo, 2003). This belief in something higher than one's self is adaptive particularly among Asian countries. It may offer the youth some form of protection and comfort especially when they feel that things are not turning out exactly how they want them to be. Being able to change one's reaction to situations beyond one's power to control is just as important as the belief that one is still in control (Chang et al., 1997; Weisz et al., 1984).

Family matters affect most of the Filipino youth too. This is probably because many (83.2%) of them were raised by both parents living together (Raymundo, 2003). Their family relationships appear to be smooth. Most of them believe they have parents and siblings who get along well and that their parents are both warm and affectionate (Raymundo, 2003). Even in families that have only the mother or the father (due to economic reasons)

to supervise the household, adverse effects on the youth's socialization have not been reliably established. In many cases, the reason for a parent's absence and not the absence itself is more determinative of whatever behavioral problem the youth may develop (PSSC, 2003).

Nevertheless, these strong family ties seldom get utilized to their full advantage by the young people in some problem areas such as in discussions about sex and sexuality. Only 15.6% or less than two out of ten among the contemporary youth discuss sex at home (Raymundo, 2003). Even though parents are reported to be viewed as authoritative sources of information pertaining to sex and sexuality, the Filipino youth are uncomfortable talking about it with their parents and siblings. Their reluctance to ask is most likely rooted in their fear of being accused of already engaging in sex or of being overly interested in the subject. Others feel they just do not know how to begin asking questions about the topic to their parents (Gastardo-Conaco et al., 2003).

Because interest in sex and sexuality cannot just simply be quelled, the youth's incessant wanderings usually lead them to turn to pornographic videos and materials for answers. More than 55% of Filipino youth have watched triple-X rated video and about 38% have read pornographic materials at some point in their lives (Raymundo, 2003). The sale of explicitly pornographic videos and materials, by the way, are prohibited in the Philippines but somehow the youth can access and use them in somebody else's house.

Next to their family as a valuable source of affirmation and support is the youth's peer group or *barkada* which refers to a small informal group of people that usually spend time together doing all sorts of activities. It usually functions as a theatrical stage where various roles are acted out and modeled. Peer groups or *barkadas* are also an important source of information and misinformation for the young (Gastardo-Conaco et al., 2003). Majority (97.5%) of the youth mentioned having had a *barkada* (Raymundo, 2003). What they frequently cannot and do not discuss with their parents or siblings, for whatever reason, they usually bring to their *barkada's* attention.

All in all, it appears that the majority of contemporary Filipino youth have at their disposal a number of strengths and resources they can utilize to weather many storms. However, some youth experience many more storms and stronger ones than others.

Poverty as a Serious Issue

Poverty and inequality have been recurrent challenges in the Philippines and have again come to the fore in the wake of the current global financial crisis and rising cost of food, fuel, and commodity prices experienced in 2010 (ADB, 2010). Poverty incidence among households increased from 2006-2010 including the poor families in average of 2% annually (ADB, 2010). Thus, the increase in poverty incidence and its magnitude, in general, is a serious problem.

Table 1
Poverty as Social Issue

Weight of Social Issue	Frequency	Percentage
Serious Social Issue	306	76
Moderate Social Issue	67	17
Minor Social Issue	23	6
Not an Issue at All	5	1
TOTAL	401	100

Looking at the youth's view of poverty as a social issue, it shows that a huge majority of the Filipino youth (306 or 76%) consider poverty as a serious problem. They are followed by 67 (17%) who consider poverty as a moderate social issue, 23 respondents (6%) consider it as a minor social issue and 5 (1%) consider poverty as not an issue at all.

This supports that Filipino youth view poverty as indeed one of the most pressing issues in the country. Considering that Philippines is categorized as a developing and lower-middle income country by the UN (WESP, 2012) the result of the study was not surprising.

Moreover, the NCSB (2012) also stated that the youth is the fourth sector experiencing poverty in terms of magnitude that comprises poverty

incidence with 21.8% which consists of 5,367,308 youth. It is even greater than the migrant and formal sector with 16.7%, senior citizens with 15.8% and individuals residing in urban areas with 12.8%. With this, Filipino youth can perceive poverty as a serious social issue.

According to Curtain (2004), identifying young people as one group experiencing poverty is important to address the diminishing opportunity for youth in their future endeavors caused by poverty. So it is also important to know from Filipino Youth per se experiencing or not experiencing poverty if they perceive such issue as a serious one or not an issue at all.

The National Statistical Coordinating Board (2012) computes official poverty statistics for 9 of the 14 disadvantaged sectors of the Philippine society namely women, youth, children, senior citizens, individuals residing in urban areas, migrant and informal sector workers, self-employed and unpaid family workers, farmers and fishermen.

Surprisingly, youth ranked fourth as one of the sectors that comprise poverty incidence with 21.8% which consists of 5,367,308 youth. It is even greater than the migrant and informal sector with 16.7%, senior citizens with 15.8% and individuals residing in urban areas with 12.8% (NSCB, 2012).

The official records attest to countless longstanding impediments in the Philippine's quest for poverty reduction. More than two decades have elapsed since the Philippine government began amassing poverty-linked data, yet today the myriad facets of Philippine poverty, its causes, the extent of its effects, its solution, remain widespread and hotly-contested issues ever.

Causes of Poverty in PH

Poverty incidence has been gradually declining over the last 25 years; existing levels remain high. Poverty in the Philippines has persisted for almost three decades even as Malaysia and Thailand, which had similar economies to the Philippines in the 1960s, have nearly eradicated it (ADB, 2010).

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA, 2013) enumerated the causes of poverty in the country: low to moderate economic growth for the past 40 years, low growth elasticity of poverty reduction, weakness in employment generation and the quality of jobs generated, failure to fully develop the agricultural sector, high inflation during crisis periods, high levels of population growth, and high and persistent levels of inequality (income and assets) which dampen the positive impacts of economic expansion and recurrent shocks and exposure to risks such as economic crisis, conflicts, natural disasters, and environmental poverty.

In addition to the aforementioned causes of poverty in the Philippines which were highly technical for a youth, there are also the following: Corruption, Love of Money, Inequality of the Ruling Elite and “Imperial Manila”, Indolence and Ignorance, Modernization, Government Inefficiency, Too Much Politics, Dysfunctional Political System, Economic Woes, Lack of Education, Unemployment, Booming Population, Poor Economy, Colonial Mentality, OFW Culture, Misplaced Priorities, and Debilitating Mindset of the Filipinos (philStar.com, 2011)

The study asked the Filipino youth to rank 1-10 (1 is the major and 10 is the least cause) the causes of poverty in the Philippines based on their perspective.

Table 2
Causes of Poverty in the Philippines as Perceived by Filipino Youth

Causes of Poverty	Ranking
Corruption	1
Lack of Job Opportunities	2
Poor Governance	3
Rapid Population Growth	4
Poor Quality of Education	5
Vices	6
Low Wage Rates	7
Illiteracy	8
Poor Welfare System	9
Apathy	10

The Filipino Youth ranked “Corruption” as top one cause of poverty in the Philippines. The study defined Corruption as one of the malpractices in government where the officeholder use state powers for illegitimate private gain that involves trading in influence and use of public funds. Forms of corruption vary but not limited to bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft and embezzlement.

Evidently, corruption does exist in the Philippines, and it greatly affects not only the country’s economy but also the welfare of its people. Filipino Youth, as one of the important public sectors in the country, primarily recognize Corruption as the top cause of poverty. This shows that contemporary Filipino youth can acknowledge such link between corruption and poverty.

Second in the ranking is the “Lack of Job Opportunities”. From the perspective of the youth (of adult youth at least), the lack of job opportunities can pose significant problems aside from poverty. Because they have no means to earn a living, the unemployed may have problems in paying rent or school fees. This may also lead to homelessness or the need to stop educational plans. Furthermore, unemployment can increase susceptibility to problems like illness, malnutrition, mental stress and loss of self-confidence and eventually depression. Although it is a known fact that unemployment can cause crime rates to increase, there is no proper evidence on this aspect. On the other hand, unemployment may force the youth to resort to ‘suicidal’ thoughts, due to the inability to cope with the mounting personal problems that arise with it.

Moreover, some worry about landing a job that does not fit the degree that they have finished or with the skills that they have acquired. This can result to underemployment due to lack of employment opportunities.

Moreover, in relation to poverty, according to Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisican, the heart of the poverty problem is the inadequacy of jobs, especially decent, high-quality jobs (rappler.com, 2013).

“Poor Governance” ranked as the third major cause of poverty in the Philippines as perceived by the Filipino Youth. With the growing number of controversies and exposé in government presented by media and the modern technology today such as the internet where information is just a click away, people have greater access to information. The data implies that Filipino Youth are well aware of current events, most especially what is happening in their government which somehow result to other causes of poverty presented in the table such as Corruption, Lack of Job Opportunities, Rapid Population Growth, Poor Quality of Education, Low Wage Rates, Illiteracy and Poor Welfare System for the people.

The most critical challenges concerning governance include corruption and lack of transparency in public financial management. In recent years, increased politicization of the bureaucracy has undermined corruption prevention and enforcement efforts. There are prospects for improvement, however because the Philippines has one of the most dynamic and influential civil societies in Asia and an extremely decentralized system of governance that generates pockets of reform and high performance. Recent examples of progress have often been driven on the demand side by the government, with procurement reform among the most prominent of these (World Bank, n. d.).

Filipino Youth ranked “Rapid Population Growth” as the top four cause of poverty. The population of the Philippines has been steadily growing for many years. In 2014, it is the 12th most populated country in the world, between Mexico and Ethiopia, and continues to increase at a rate of 1.89% per year (World Population Review, n. d.). With a growth rate of 1.89%, it is projected that the Philippine population is 98,734,798 and 100,617,630 in 2013 and 2014, respectively (NSO, 2012).

Rapid population growth is an obstacle to economic progress in the country, depriving the society of funds for investment to develop. At the same time, poverty fuels overpopulation by depriving women of both the incentive and the means to have fewer children (Population Matters, n. d.).

In this connection, the Philippines had set measures to address this problem through Republic Act No. 10354 or the Responsible Parenthood

and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, informally known as the Reproductive Health Law or RH Law which guarantees Filipinos universal access to methods of contraception, fertility control, sexual education and maternal care (RH Law, n. d.).

On the other hand, “Poor Quality of Education” ranked five among the causes of poverty in the Philippines. Even though the phrase “quality education” is not an easy concept, UNICEF was still able to define it. According to UNICEF (2000), quality education includes:

- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society (UNICEF, 2000).

The quality of Philippine education has declined a few years ago due to poor results from standard entrance tests conducted by elementary and secondary students, as well as the tertiary levels. The results were way below the target mean score. High dropout rates, large number of repeaters, low passing grades, lack of particular language skills, failure to adequately respond and address the needs of people with special needs, overcrowded classrooms, and poor teacher performances, have significantly affected the quality of education in the Philippines (Education and Skills, n. d.).

In the study, the Filipino youth perceived “Poor Quality Education” as a cause of poverty in relation to the lack of job opportunities. It is one thing that a person who lacks a good educational background has very limited job opportunity, and it is another thing that one who has achieved poor quality of education has very limited job opportunity. Hence, if one cannot find a job, it is either he lacks the educational requirement or achieved poor quality of education which can result to unemployment or underemployment.

“Vices” ranked as the number six cause of poverty as perceived by the Filipino youth. In this study, vices refer to practice, behavior or habit of a person that is wrong, socially unacceptable or immoral. For example, smoking, gambling, drinking and corrupting to name a few.

Even though vices run at a personal level, it gives an impact to society if all people have their vices. Filipino youth are more prone to vices due to the challenging period of their time.

In relation to poor quality education and lack of job opportunities, “Low Minimum Wage” ranked seventh major cause of poverty in the Philippines as perceived by the Filipino Youth. As discussed in previous paragraphs a person who achieved poor quality education has a limited chance of getting a job. Also, the lack of employment opportunities for Filipino people adds up to the problem of unemployment and underemployment.

With this, some Filipinos resort and settle into other available but low paying jobs. As of 2014, the NCR minimum wage is at 466Php per day, not enough to sustain a family of four’s daily needs since prices of basic commodities and services are constantly rising while wage rates remain hard-and-fast. (Horario, 2013).

Most youth are still dependent on their family in terms of their financial needs; therefore, if their parents only earn minimum wage to support them, it is clear enough that they also struggle which is why they can see that the problem in salary can also result in poverty.

The next cause of poverty had something to do with the quality and access to education and ranked eight as perceived by the Filipino Youth,

and this is non-other than “Illiteracy”. Illiteracy refers to the inability to read or write or the lack of knowledge in a particular subject or ignorance.

According to ABS-CBN News (2009), there were around 15 million illiterate Filipinos. Needless to say, this number was comprised of out-of-school children and school dropouts. The quality of education is critical to the outcome of children’s learning process aside from external factors like aural communication, socio-cultural factors and non-verbal communication system (Zaščerinska, 2013). Also, children’s learning process is affected by socio-economic factors, and here comes the “access to education”.

It is a universal truth that access to education is a right, but in reality only those who are privileged can enter school and finish elementary and/or high school and if fortunate, finish college. If this is the case, access to education is merely a question of affordability, and the people in marginal sector can hardly obtain it.

The Filipino Youth perceived illiteracy as one of the causes of poverty mainly because of its relation to employment. If one cannot read or write or don’t have the required knowledge and skills, he or she can hardly land a job to support himself or his/her family. Hence, this leads them to experience poverty.

Top nine cause of poverty, as perceived by the Filipino Youth, is “Poor Social Welfare System”. Social welfare system is a program that provides assistance to needy individuals and families. Welfare programs provide support to people and families such as health care, food stamps, unemployment compensation, housing help and child care assistance. However, the Filipino Youth perceived the social welfare system in the Philippines as poor and turned out as one of the causes of poverty in the country. Based on the result of the study, it can be implied that social welfare programs in the Philippines are not widely felt by most of the Filipino Youth.

Last but not the least in the ranking is “Apathy”. It is when people do not care, or when they feel so powerless that they do not try to change things, to right a wrong, to fix a mistake, or to improve conditions (Teachout, 2006). From this simple definition, it can be implied that no matter what happens in the society if there is apathy nothing will change. For instance,

on the issue of poverty, if Filipinos do not take action or at least make some effort to reduce poverty, the issue will only get bigger.

The Filipino youth perceived the causes above as the causes of poverty in the Philippines. Also these causes are not independent of each other because several items in the ranking can be linked to one another just like Corruption and Poor Governance, Low-Wage Rates and Poor Quality of Education, and Poor Welfare System and Rapid Population Growth to name a few.

Filipino youth are well aware of the current events most especially what is happening in their government which are somehow related or resulted to other causes of poverty presented in the table such as Corruption, Lack of Job Opportunities, Rapid Population Growth, Poor Quality of Education, Low Wage Rates, Illiteracy, and Poor Welfare System for the people.

Filipino Youth Living in Poverty or Not

Poverty for youth means many things. Poverty means a boy does not attend school because he has to sell *sampaguita* in the morning and earn Php30 for lunch for the family. It means that a family of six have only Php1000 per month to pay for their four children's school fees, and even if they did, their children could only have the option of reaching the fourth grade. It is also difficult to quantify and resolve poverty of opportunity, where a young person who grows up in a healthy family support system finds no local employment. The effects of poverty are especially felt in access to health, education, housing, power dynamics, and safety.

Table 3
Filipino Youth Living in Poverty or Not

Consideration if Filipino Youth Live in Poverty	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	144	36
No	257	64
TOTAL	401	100

Although the youth considered poverty as a serious problem, a significant majority or 257 (64%) of the Filipino youth did not consider their family as living in poverty while 144 (36%) respondents thought their family was living in poverty. According to Asian Development Bank (2009), majority of the poor live in rural areas and work in the agricultural sector, mostly as farmers and fishers. Those who live in the urban areas, such as Metro Manila, have large families (six members or more) and are found in slums and the informal sector. In two-thirds of poor households, the head of the household only has an elementary education or below, and they have no or few assets and minimal access to credit.

Though most of the respondents came from lower-class families, where parents are mostly laborers, respondents viewed themselves not poor. Also, this data contradicts the study conducted by YAFS last 2010, that self-rated poverty has ranged from 50% to 52% for most of 2010, peaking at 59%, an estimated 10.6 million people, in the second quarter. Moreover, in the survey released by the Social Weather Stations in one of its surveys in 2009, 50% of Filipino families or about 9.3 million, consider themselves poor, 27% put themselves on the borderline, and only 22% consider themselves as not poor. However, as the data implies, majority of the youth do not consider themselves as poor. The same findings contradict with the 2012 Social Weather Station 3rd quarter survey which found that Filipinos felt they were poor. Though the respondents of this study and of the SWS are different, youth views on whether they are living in poverty or not are different from those of the general population.

Also, as seen in Table 1, 76% of Filipino youth consider poverty as a serious social issue. However, as seen in Table 3, 64% do not consider themselves as poor. The data implies that the youth have high self-esteem and do not merely get affected by the challenges that confront them like poverty.

Ways to Reduce Poverty

Halving poverty is likely to be met by 2015 based on the Millennium Development Goals (World Bank, n.d). Extraordinary efforts are required by developing and developed countries if these targets are to be met. In

the past years, Global leaders agreed on a course of action to achieve these goals. The ways to reduce poverty in developing countries according to World Bank include: strengthen governance, create a positive investment climate, build transparent legal and financial systems, and fight corruption. Poverty reduction strategies or national development plans now provide the framework for the actions of countries and their partners to come together in accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. While this is a promising beginning, even more and better aid, greater market access and deeper debt relief are still needed.

Table 4
Recommendations to Reduce Poverty

Recommendations	Weighted Mean	Verbal interpretation
Provide free quality education	1.40	Very much Needed
Stop corruption	1.40	Very much needed
Provide job opportunities	1.44	Very much needed
Strict implementation of laws	1.51	Needed
Control population growth	1.56	Needed
Increase minimum wage	1.60	Needed
Provide social welfare programs	1.66	Needed
Affordable medical bills	1.94	Needed
Grand weighted mean	1.56	Needed

Table 4 shows the view of the Filipino youth regarding certain recommendations to reduce poverty. Three recommendations were deemed to be very much needed according to the respondents with a mean score ranging from 1.40-1.44, namely: provide free quality education, stop corruption, and provide job opportunities. The five other recommendations (affordable medical bills, controlling the population growth, increasing the minimum wage, providing social welfare programs and strict implementation of laws) are viewed as needed to reduce poverty in our country.

According to the Filipino youth, providing free quality education is one of the top things that the government should address in order to reduce poverty in our country. Education is viewed of vital importance in the Philippines as it is seen as a pillar of national development and a primary avenue of social and economic mobility. However, education faces several obstacles in order to play its part in Philippine development.

A study released by the Department of Education (DepEd) and the National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) revealed that one out of six school-age Filipino children is not in school. It is further seen that poverty is the top reason Filipinos are dropping out from their schools. In another study by the UNICEF last 2010, it is found that the top reason Filipinos are out of school is that they are looking for employment or work. Next to which is that their parents cannot afford expenses in sending them to school. Both of which are caused by the high cost of education. This is evident in the rising tuition fees in all stages of education from primary to tertiary. Though there are competent public schools and state universities all over the country which provides free or cheap tuition fees all over the country, they are bombarded with problems such as lack of teachers, classrooms and sanitation facilities.

Most people see that these problems in education are caused by another prevalent problem that needs to be stopped according to the Filipino youth—corruption. As discussed in Table 2, corruption is viewed by the Filipino youth as the top cause of poverty. Corruption is seen as one of the most widespread problems here in our country. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index 2013, the Philippines is the 94th least corrupt countries out of 175. It received a score of 36 based on the perceived level of public sector corruption (scale of 0-100 where 100 means that the country is seen as very clean).

Next on the list is providing job opportunities. At the last quarter of 2013, it has been reported that 12.1 million Filipinos are unemployed, 2.5 million higher than the 9.6 million reported in the previous quarter. The numbers themselves are curious to see since the Philippines has been experiencing a surge in terms of GDP growth at 7.2%, the second highest in Asia, next to China. The fast-paced unemployment rate in the Philippines

which was at 7.3% in the last quarter of 2013 is the highest among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Contractualization, also contributes to the rise of unemployment in the country. A contractual employee as defined by the Labor Code of the Philippines is one employed by a contractor or subcontractor to perform or complete a job, work or service pursuant to an arrangement between the latter and a principal. In this scheme, workers are usually let go after six (6) months so that employers will not hire them on a regular basis and thus pay for their benefits. This means that current contractual employees shall be added to the unemployed population after six months or less. In addition, contract workers do not receive the mandatory benefits, minimum wage and other labor rights given to regular employees.

As far as the Filipino youth are concerned, strict law implementation is another way that they recommend reducing poverty. In a case study done by Celia Reyes and Lani Valencia (2004) entitled "Poverty Reduction Strategy and Poverty Monitoring: Philippine Case Study", they stated that there are many shortcomings in the implementation of many programs, including the lack of information to support the national and local poverty reduction efforts.

As mentioned in Table 2, the Philippines is the 12th most populous country in the world, with a birth rate of 1.89% in 2013. In a study conducted by the Asian Development Bank in 2010, it is revealed that high-population growth is one of the leading causes of poverty in the Philippines. The high population growth, especially in Metro Manila exerts tremendous pressure for the government to provide essential services to their growing population. The result is an increase in the number of informal settlers and unemployed workers. The study also revealed that the poor has large families, usually with six or seven members.

CONCLUSIONS

Youth is a transition period where individuals experience marked changes in the way they think, feel, act and interact with other people. Most Filipino youth today differ from their parents and other adults in that

they have to deal with all of the changes in the context of a changing social environment heavily influenced by globalization and rapid technological progress. Far from being mere passive actors, the Filipino youth of today actively negotiate their way through maturity aided by internal resources that allow them to withstand frustration and make sense of what they are experiencing. Such resources, however, are not inexhaustible. Overly strained by thoughts about securing good education, landing decent-paying jobs, and their burgeoning sexuality, some of them might be tempted to engage in behaviors that will put them at high risks, seriously marring their chances for a bright future. Because of this, parents need to communicate more and explore better ways of reaching out to their young so that parents could also be partners with their young in appreciating the complexities of growing up. Government agencies may need to cooperate and coordinate with each other more so that they can optimally deliver services geared towards the development of the youth's full potential. The community in general and private sector, in particular, may need to take a more active involvement in youth development as public funds are becoming harder and harder to come by. No, less than a team effort is indeed necessary to take on this formidable task of facilitating the youth's transformation into capable and productive adult members of our society. The Filipino youth viewed poverty as a serious social issue and believed that this is caused by the aforementioned top ten causes of poverty in the Philippines. Also these causes are not independent of each other because several items in the ranking can be linked to one another just like Corruption and Poor Governance, Low-Wage Rates and Poor Quality of Education, and Poor Welfare System and Rapid Population Growth to name a few.

Filipino youth are well aware of the current events most especially what is happening in their government which are somehow related or resulted to other causes of poverty such as Corruption, Lack of Job Opportunities, Rapid Population Growth, Poor Quality of Education, Low Wage Rates, Illiteracy and Poor Welfare System for the people.

With the everyday challenges the youth faces from doing schoolworks, participating in recreational activities to making significant plans for the future it is important to note that, even though, most of the respondents came from the lower social classes or the proletariat class of

the society they do not consider themselves poor or living in poverty. The respondents strongly suggest that to reduce poverty, there should be free quality education for all, more job opportunities, and a stop in corruption in government, among others.

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