

Impact of the Zamboanga Siege on Women Survivors: A Post-Conflict Analysis

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Double enactment of roles, divorce, and separation were the dramatic findings in the study, Impact of the Siege on Women Survivors in Zamboanga City. It aimed to determine reproductive roles and socioeconomic effects utilising descriptive quantitative and qualitative-phenomenological design via FGDs among twenty (20) women survivors. There were in-depth interviews for five (5) key informants and community observation analysis on the two transitory sites. The study revealed that the poverty situation has increased recently due to loss of homes and socio-economic opportunities; continuous, increase of dropouts in elementary and secondary levels; and problems on public transport, expensive fare, and financial and economic setbacks. However, free water and electricity government supply obtained satisfactory impressions. Hence, the study recommends: first, massive and longitudinal livelihood programs and training may be conducted strengthening women's expansive and extensive development of skills, crafts, and sustainability in financial and socioeconomic demands; second, periodic monitoring-recording of students' drop-out are conducted, localized or redirected on nearest affected schools is an option; third, women serve as neutralisers-negotiators in any conflicts or peace deliberations; fourth, educate everyone on the symbiotic spouses roles of equity and equality to avoid "double enactment of roles" among women; lastly, an immense need for marital counselling services from psychologists or counsellors, lawyers, social workers, community developers, religious sectors, and NGOs is deemed for holistic healing and reconciliation process.

Key words: *Social science, double enactment of roles, women survivors, reproductive roles, socioeconomic impact, descriptive quantitative and qualitative - phenomenology, Philippines.*

Introduction

According to Ocampo & Judd (2005), armed conflict always destroys much more than physical plants and infrastructure. The core of the damage is done to the fabric of society, to the stock of social capital. Tigno (2006) also expressed that violence has the potential to lead to conditions that produce significant collateral damage particularly involving civilians and non-combatants. He further explained that armed conflict can be the prevalence of poverty flare-ups and will eventually result to involuntary and forced evacuation of the people plus the economic marginalisation and social minoritisation combined with political neglect.

The September 9, 2013 Zamboanga crisis that lasted for a month has led to thousands and thousands of women and others being displaced. The sporadic fight between the MNLF insurgents and military forces which were accordingly heated from the MNLF elements insistence to hold a peaceful rally in support of the independence for Muslim-dominated areas in Southern Philippines. However, the local government of Zamboanga refused to give the permit on the account that the MNLF Rogue were heavily armed and failed to negotiate which resulted in an outbreak in the city. The almost one-month crisis has led to economic degeneration to the city's income, urban warfare, displacement and fatalities on both – government, MNLF elements and civilians particularly the women and children. The economic productivity including the livelihood of the people has largely affected by the standoff.

Records of the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication showed that an estimated 4,000 pregnant and lactating women were victims of the Zamboanga crisis delivered and attended by traditional birth attendants housed in Joaquin F. Enriquez Memorial Sports Complex known as the “Zamboanga Grandstand”. The local government has recorded the rapid increase of health cases such as diarrhea and other health and sanitation problems. The number of health cases and sanitation problems were due to lack of bathing facilities, gender-sensitive latrines, and insufficient health and sanitation supplies. Most of the victims were notably women and children. There were also cases of prostitution and women trafficking recorded.



Three years after the Zamboanga crisis, the women survivors and some others who were displaced remained in the transitory sites. They have not recovered yet from the damage or returned home because of the long-standing conflict between the government and the Moro insurgents. Thus, this study was made to assess the status of women survivors and determine impact of the Zamboanga Siege on the socio-economic and reproductive roles of women. Furthermore, this study would like to determine the level of political participation and decision-making, cohesion and collective action, level of trust of women survivors and women's perception on their poverty situation.

This study becomes significant as it seeks to contribute to the growing number of works and research on women in armed-conflict in the Philippines by exploring how women themselves make sense of their conflict experiences. This study does not only present purely academic research but intends to provide a description and analysis of how women make sense of their conflict experiences. The study will be helpful to the women, advocacy groups, the local and national governments, the academic institutions as this provides reliable information for analysis and future policy-making references for peace negotiation processes, women's empowerment, equity productivity to pursue a peace and sustainable development in a very meaningful way.

Methodology

Descriptive quantitative-qualitative phenomenological research design was used as a means for gathering, analysing and interpreting the data. There were two (2) types of respondents for this particular study: the women survivors (women who have experienced displacement, victims of crossfires and or trapped or hostages during the siege) who were subjected to focus group discussion; key informants from the City Social Welfare and Development, Barangay Chairpersons, Camp Managers and IDP Coordinators who were interviewed to validate women's responses during the Focus Group Discussion.

Twenty (20) women survivors selected and subjected to FGD in two separate sessions. The women participants were purposively chosen through the help of the City Social Welfare and Development Office, Camp Managers and IDP Coordinators. Ten (10) women participants were taken from Masepla 1 & 2 (first study site) while the other Ten (10) women participants came from the second transitory site (Tulungatong). Also, an in-depth interview was conducted to the City Social Welfare and Development Officer, Camp Managers and IDP Coordinators to elicit ideas and opinions on the problems being studied.

There were Three (3) research tools designed for the study:

First, the FGD participatory tool which is a module type of instrument that contain eight (8) activities bearing the objective per activity. The module has included the materials, procedures, sets of activities and questions undertaken. Each of the activities were timed to determine the number of hours consumed for each of the activity undertaken. Among the topics presented in the activity were: socio-economic impact, women reproductive role, poverty situation, access to basic social services, political participation and decision-making, social cohesion and collective action (*bayanihan*), and level of women's trust.

Second, the study utilised a semi-structured interview schedule for the key informant interviews designed to obtain in-depth responses from the identified key informants. The interview guide composed of eight (8) related questions/topics: socio-economic impact, leaderships and organisations, livelihood of women, access to basic social services, poverty situations, degrees of political participation and decision-making, social cohesion and collective action and women's trust.

Lastly, the study utilised a community observation tool to record actual behaviour of the people particularly the women after siege. Community observations involved interactions, conversations and descriptions of the locale and the women being observed. For this particular tool, the field assistant assigned should make a careful and objective note about what they see and hear.

All research tools were pilot tested and were translated to Filipino and Tausug (local dialect) to make it understandable to the participants of the study.

The study used descriptive discourse analysis to describe FGD responses of women survivors of the Zamboanga Siege particularly on the socio-economic impact, women's reproductive roles, degree of political participation and decision-making, cohesion and collective action (*bayanihan*), women's level of trust between and among community members and the government, and the women's perception on the poverty situation.

Findings

Socio-Economic Impact: Livelihood and Economy

The Zamboanga Siege gave a negative impact on the socio-economic status of women survivors. The study found out that those families living below the poverty line or low-income earners experienced severe poverty after the siege, as there was a low turnout in the income of women and other IDPs especially those street vendors and laborers.

Added to the financial difficulties of the participants is the '**distance**' of the resettlement area to their livelihood and economic activities. Since most of the families have lost their jobs and livelihood, women and other IDPs were dependent to government support and international donors that may lead to increase the possibility and the development of support seeking behavior among the participants.

The study found out that 'weaving', 'dressmaking' and 'bag making' were amongst the livelihood programs retained and learned by the women survivors and IDPs despite the numerous livelihood projects presented to them. This further implies that; however, that learning the skills and crafts on such livelihood programs, the mass production for a lucrative income is neither expansive nor extensive to sustain the daring needs for survival and normalcy in financial stability.



Socio-economic infrastructure

Access to socio-economic infrastructure is high as the women participants revealed that the presence of complete primary and secondary schools (except for Masepla 1 and 2), churches, mosques, sari-sari stores, plaza, water station, health facilities, government offices and market place were accessible near the resettlement area. The presence of the barangay hall that may likewise cater the needs and concerns of the IDPs was made available and open. Updates and progress of the barangay are provided in the barangay bulletin, citizen's charter and other informative charts.

The amenities are promising to note but in terms of security and assurance, health and convenience, however, the market place where most of the eking for living occurs is not as promising as the former situation. The shopping and buying capacities of the local consumers are low.

Access to Basic Social Services

This section presents the access of women survivors on the basic social services before and after the siege.

Education & Social Welfare

The study revealed that there was a high to moderately low access to basic education. Women participants revealed that basic education was promising before the siege. Also, the study found out that children's performance in the school has dramatically decreased due to various reasons: such as the 'distance' of the previous school where students attended, students were in the state of adjustment to the new schools' environment such as new circle of friends, new teachers, new peers and new teaching styles.



Moreover, social and psychological adjustments and even post-conflict healing and recovery for self-reconciliation or trauma healing are sought undeniably by learners to gauge and to scaffold the widening gap and barriers to relate with others.

Health Services

In terms of health services, the study found out that there was a very high to moderately low access to health services. Responses would indicate that access to health services has decreased after the siege.

The falling response of women participants to health services from a very high accessibility to a moderately low was due to the 'distance' of the transitory sites to the health facilities such as hospitals and health centers and stations. However, though there were installed health centers and stations in the transitory sites, women revealed that it was not favorable as the former. According to the women respondents, their former residence is just a walking distance to the one of the biggest hospitals (Zamboanga City Medical Center) and to the public health offices in the city, they revealed. Hence, health services did not obtain a promising response from the women survivors at the time of the study.

Public Transport

Public transportation was one of the major contributing problems to the women survivors. The two transitory sites were approximately 7-8 kilometers away from the city where women do most of their activities for living. The 'distance' of the transitory sites (temporary to permanent residence of the IDPs) to the city proper where most of the economic and livelihood activities and education of the children are conducted is another setback for women plus the expensive and extra fare for baggage has added to their financial difficulties.

Public transportation obtained a negative impact to women from a high to a very low access for public transport.

Clean water and electricity

Water supply and electricity obtained a positive impression from the women survivors. The moderately low to high access of water supply and electricity was due to the government provision of free water and electricity. However, despite the local government provision of free water and electricity, women are hopeful and determined to go back to their old residence making arrangements, conditions and promises that they are willing to pay for their water bills and electricity in exchange for allowing them to go back to their homes where all forms of economic, livelihood, education, health and other opportunities are provided.

Though it unburdens the women and other IDPs in the transitory sites because the local government has provided them comfort and convenience, women held that it was just part of the whole of their basic needs for survival. Though, water is a universal solvent that helps dissolve the essential nutrients needed by the human body, the staple foods or the square meals like rice and viands are equally as important. Thus, food and water for all is a priority.

Community Roles, Political Participation and Decision Making

The study found out that women have multiple roles to play after a siege. Responses of women revealed that they do most of the household chores such as cooking, sweeping, fetching water, washing cloths and taking care of their children.

The most dramatic findings in the study was the divorce and separation of women during the time of siege leaving women as head of the family. Aside from doing the household chores, the battle to equally participate in the decision-making in the community and to look for food are equally important to meet the demands of being a mother, provider, and an active member of the community.

Participation of women in the power structure and decision-making was not only essential, but it became extensive after the siege. While women know that their participation was important to the development of the community and society, their participation in various



undertakings such as seminars, trainings, and other relevant activities plus their involvement in many organisational roles was notably serious.

Significantly, women's participation in power structure and decision-making have significantly increased particularly in barangay assemblies and meetings.

Social cohesion and collective action

Women's sense of social cohesion and collective action begun after the siege as it has increased from moderately high to very high. Their active involvement in community related activities and dynamics commenced as they begin to organise women groups in the community and empower others. They have seen the importance of women to collectively and harmoniously work with other sectors in the community to start the re-building of lost communities and homes. The *bayanihan* spirit of women stimulated from their experiences during the siege.

The role of women not only in the peace-building but also to be part of major conflict issues is equally important. They begin to get involved in community action works and spearhead women's advocacy particularly among single parent.

Women's Trust

One of the important features of this study is to determine the level of trust of women towards strangers, other women in the community, barangay officials and to the local government officials. The study found out that women's level of trust towards a stranger have not changed since the siege. They held that trusting strangers is dangerous especially after the Zamboanga Crisis. Likewise, women's trust towards other women in community has not changed as they reported gossip incidence which led to conflict among their ranks.

On the other hand, women's trust towards the barangay officials as well as trust towards local elective officials has decreased from high to low. The significant change in the women's trust



towards barangay and local elective officials was because of their unfulfilled promises during the election period. According to the women-respondents, some barangay officials may only come to know them and their situations during the campaign and election time. They stressed that elective officials are good at promises but never fulfill their promises when they win the election.

Poverty Situation

The September 2013 siege in Zamboanga has contributed to the severe poverty due to loss of homes, job opportunities, livelihood income and loss of properties. The study revealed that that poverty situation has increased after the siege and has worsened the economic and social lives of the Zamboangueños. The numbers of drop-out students and lack of socio-economic opportunities plus the continuing demands of the women to return to their old residence were manifestations of women suffering from severe poverty. Given the limited resources of the local government and international supports, the women were alarmed and threatened as the local government ended the provision of free water supply and electricity. Added to their worries was the declining support of the international donors which will overburden the women and other internally displaced persons socially and economically.

The daring needs of the women survivors for survival have become more serious. Although the presence of the local government units, NGOs, Civil Society Organisations and international donors to help cannot meet the demands of all victims of the siege and crossfires. Therefore, it is their call to return to their homes especially that most of their livelihood and economic activities are found in the town proper.

Conclusion

The Zamboanga Siege incident, based from the findings obtained of the study on Impact of the Zamboanga Siege on Women Survivors in Zamboanga City: A Post-conflict Study yielded the following conclusions:

1. The situation for women has worsened after the siege.
2. Conflict is selective in terms of its impact. The findings showed that women suffered socially and economically in their livelihood, education and the women's reproductive and community roles.
3. The separation or divorce experienced among women developed emotional and psychological effect among them and their children.
4. The double enactment of roles among women increases their multiple burden to equally participate in the power structure and decision-making (i.e. family or community decisions).
5. Besides suffering from an increase of poverty, women, were often the most vulnerable to emotional and psychological effect including the divestment of their property and destruction. The findings were corroborated by various studies: (cf: Tigno (2006), Ocampo and Judd (2005), Fabian (2004) and others) which concluded that it is true that conflict and violence have direct effect and the core damages not only limited to the physical infrastructure, but to the social capital.

Recommendation

In light of the foregoing findings and conclusion, the study recommends the following:

1. Continue to conduct massive, longitunal livelihood programs, trainings, and seminars and strengthen the learning skills and crafts of women. This enables for expansive and extensive people centred sustainable development to meet the socio-economic demands for survival and financial stability of women survivors. There should be proper design of poverty reduction policies and programs targeting those affected by the siege. Future research on the stripping-off multi-dimensional poverty and its determinants is strongly suggested.
2. Conduct periodic monitoring and recording of the number of learners' dropping-out in both elementary and secondary level, largely those children affected by the siege and provide a mechanism to support their educational needs. Localising or redirecting students to the nearest elementary and secondary schools in the community can be the

best option of the concerned agencies to help minimised if not decrease the number of drop-outs.

3. Social facilities are relatively good for a speedy recovery and adjustment among women victims but amenities and infrastructures which will generate income among women utilising their recently learned craftsmanship and skills are more likely and attractive given the opportunity to have had investors and philanthropists who could finance them.
4. Educate men and women on the symbiotic roles (i.e. a balance of task, equal distribution of roles and responsibilities) between the spouses. The services of the Psychologist and Counselors, Lawyers, Social Worker, Community Developers Religious Sectors and NGOs are highly recommended to render extra services particularly on marital counseling and holistic healing and reconciliation processes is greatly needed.
5. The government should have clear platforms and a matrix for peace negotiation and inclusion of women, which serves as a neutraliser and negotiator of any conflict or peace deliberation procedures is strongly recommended.



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