AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY AMONG ABANDONED YOUNG ADULTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY

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Abstract

Most people who live with physical disability belong to the poorest and marginalized. In familial context, being a young adult with physical disability sets extra demand towards the family because it causes exhaustion due to the additional care, attention and maintenance for medication. As a response to this, families seek the help of institutions with the belief that the individual with physical disability could get necessary help through them. It was due to those that the possibility of abandonment increases. The study utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the concept of family among abandoned young adults with physical disability as a response to the aforementioned issues. Derived from these were the objectives of this study:

[1] To know their view towards each member of the family and [2] to know how the abandonment affected their concept of family. Participants include 3 abandoned young adults with apparent physical disabilities (e.g. cerebral palsy, kyphosis and hip dysplasia) which are all from the province of Cavite, Philippines. Interview and drawing were the methods used to elicit responses. Results show that before abandonment, 1 superordinate theme emerged: primary family as an attachment unit; and for after abandonment, another superordinate theme emerged: Alternate family as a unit of healing and recovery. These were supported by local and international research and theories regarding topics that tackle the importance of the alternate family and the faith and values accumulated as ways to reconstruct the self, as well as the young adults' aspirations to be reunited with their family amidst abandonment.

1. Introduction

Millions of people who live with disability belong to the poorest and marginalized community. Among all the groups with disability, adolescents and young adults are considered as the least discussed in literatures and research, thus, there is an insufficient attention and reinforcement being provided as a response toward their needs as well as the issues that they have been experiencing. Physical disabilities among young adults are not common as it takes only part of the percentage of the population.

In familial context, having a disabled family member sets extra demands towards the family. Young adults who possess physical disabilities are frequently being abandoned and most of them are being brought to an institution because of the belief that they could get help. Also, due to poverty, families of these disabled individuals are not capable to raise their child because of the inability to sustain their maintenance for their medications. This may lead them to decide to abandon their child (Bernarte, 2015). An individual can also be ashamed of the disabled family member as well as his obligations towards them (Gerlach, 2015). With this, many countries engage in abandonment by putting the individuals in institutions as their usual response to lessen their burden (UNICEF, 2013).

Abandonment comes in two forms. Psychological Abandonment refers to the abandonment experienced by an individual who suffers emotional neglect from the parents, while, Physical Abandonment refers to the type of abandonment due to the sudden loss of parents

or the primary caregivers (Abandonment, 2016). Abandonment occurs when a member neglects responsibility because of the belief that improvement of the disabled person is nearly impossible and maybe due to the burden and stress that these responsibilities elicits, knowing that these are lifetime commitment (Gerlach, 2015).

The emotional injury brought by it could stay until adulthood unless abandoned individuals accepted and understood the causes of the acquired pain (Black, 2010). According to Kuvalekar et al. (2015), persons with physical disability have negative psychological domain which reflects their negative feelings, self-esteem, appearance, bodily image, spirituality, that results to a poor quality of life. They may also develop self-neglect, guilt, shame, fears, confusion, aloneness, and other negative behavior and emotions which could possibly lead to lower their family nurturance because of the stressors caused from being abandoned (Gerlach, 2015).

1.1 Concept of Family

Family is the smallest unit of the community who are connected biologically or legally, and emotionally (McDaniel et al., 2005). It is given emphasis in Carandang's work that Filipino families may include related and unrelated persons such as grandparents, unmarried aunt, unmarried daughter or probably a related cousin. In few words, Filipinos usually have extended families where it is inevitable to form and maintain pakikisama (Carandang, 2001). In the Philippines, a typical family consists of members and each one of them has roles (Geminiano G., 2013). The Father is considered as the head of the family because he is the one who usually works to provide for the family, whereas, the mother who is expected to take care of the children is considered as the "light of the house"; meanwhile, the role of the child depends whether one is the youngest, middle, eldest or an only child (Philippine Culture - Common Family Traits, 2006). But, not all Filipino family has definite roles as they expected because some have broken families and they intend to let their children be adopted (The Filipino Family In Modern Society, 2017).

Most parents feel denial which eventually progresses to anger, grief, and confusion (Brown, Goodman, & Küpper, 2003). But in the Filipino family context, there are some common factors that contributes to the problems of Filipino family, this includes disintegration which can result to broken families; domestic violence, absence of parents, which weakens the relationship of the family, economic difficulties, which results to malnutrition of the family, and the risk of biological parents to adopt their children (Escutin, 2013). These factors can be solved by

reducing one's pride or by having an open communication, but, these will all depend on the characteristics built by each member of the family (Zabala, 2016).

In mental institutions, social workers are defined as working professionals that plays a major role in helping individuals or groups to provide the individuals' needs (Fanning, 2017). Social workers provide supportive skills to the abandoned child, helps with empathy development to understand their condition and helps the abandoned child to build up their value system as well as their trusting relationship (Vasquez, 2017).

1.2 Young Adults with physical disability

Young adulthood is known as the transition from adolescence to adulthood. According to Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, a young adult's age ranges from 18-35 years of age where they usually establish interpersonal relationship related to intimacy and friendship (Learning Theories, 2014). The role of friends during this stage of life is important as it helps build one's self-esteem and improves socialization until adulthood (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2013). Young adults with physical disability are often isolated because of their apparent disability. Stigmatization is present as many groups support its rampant widespread. They also have difficulty in adjusting to their environment because of the mobility limitations, prohibitions of parents and minimal social interaction. Also, it is evident that isolation due to the accumulated disability can also affect their psychological disposition (Richardson, 2002).

1.3 Physical Disability

Physical disability is defined as a condition that an individual has through various reasons such as from disease or disorder, amputation, or loss that may affect any part of the body system which may impair a major activity of the individual (Foster, 2010). As of the 2010 Census of Philippine Statistics Office, the current statistics of Filipinos with physical disability, ranges from 193,000 (Region IV-A) to 26,000 (Cordillera Administrative Region). Physical disabilities can be commonly seen among males rather than females targeting the common age group of 5-19 years old (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2013). During the 2015 census conducted by the Philippines Statistics Authority, physically disabled individuals were excluded in the recent dated census that led to the disappointment of the National Council on Disability Affairs. This only promotes the invisibility of disabled people much more as the society affirms it so (Soriano, 2015). Persons with physical disabilities has different life experiences that could affect their view towards life. Studies show that perceptions of people with physical disabilities is different from normal people because of their either good or bad experiences starting from

childhood while negative impact on self might arise if disability occurred in adulthood (Agaton, Dayao, & De La Cruz, 2014).

Objectives of the research were as follows.

- To determine their view towards each member of the family
- To know how the abandonment affected their perspective towards the family

A considerable amount of research has been carried out, but little research has focused on the subjective view of abandoned young adults with physical disability in relation to their conceptualization of the meaning of Family. With this, the researchers presented 3 different abandoned young adults and their formed concepts on the family incurring the abandonment.

2. Methodology

The research employed a qualitative research design since it explored in-depth life experiences and phenomenon of the participants that it seeks to discover. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was utilized since it is used to understand the individual's meaning of lived experiences regarding specific events that answers the given objective to acknowledge the individual's world of how they interpret the event in their own personal perception in a phenomenological way and through interpretative basis. Smith (2004) described IPA as idiographic, inductive, and interrogative. It uses a small number of participants while having an in-depth examination of each individual participant. It reveals ideas and unanticipated themes that gives light to the research itself (Shank, 2006).

2.1 Selection Criteria

Purposive Sampling was used in the research due to the required criteria needed for its objectives. Participants should be an abandoned young adult with Physical Disability. As suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008), three participants could be an effective number in IPA since researchers could better dwell with the detailed examination of the participants' case and avoid the overwhelming data that a large sample size could provide (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015). Following the literature, three qualified participants from Amadeo, Cavite, Virlanie Foundation Inc., Dasmarinas and Imus Cavite were interviewed. A summary of the participant's profile is given below:

Table 1: *Physical Disabilities present among the participants*

	PHYSICAL DISABILITY	
Kuya Jon Jon	**Ate Tina**	**Ate Ella**
Short stature and Kyphosis	Cerebral Palsy	Hip Dysplasia
	AGE OF ABANDONMENT	
When he was 5 years old because of his family's financial problem	abandoned when she was young because of verbal and physical abuse	when she was 20 years old because of financial problem and verbal abuse

2.2 Instrument

The primary method of this research is to investigate abandonment effects on the concept-making about family of young adults with physical disability, and to gather rich and detailed account of a person's life through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. We reinforced a semi-structured type of interview and we conducted drawings about their concept of family before and after abandonment. Semi- structured interview allowed both the participant and the researcher to exchange details and facts related to the questions asked. Drawing also allowed a permeable interplay of visual representation that may connote a meaning and may reveal relationships that can be utilized to establish reliability of responses (Zweifel & Wezemael, 2012).

2.3 Ethical Consideration

Consent forms were given among the chosen participants from Amadeo, Cavite, Virlanie Foundation Inc., Dasmarinas and from Imus, Cavite. The safety of the participants is the priority of the research; hence, the participants were informed about their right to withdraw their participation during the course of data gathering.

2.4 Procedures in Gathering the Data

In lieu of the objectives, purposive sampling was seen to be the most appropriate in this research since certain criteria should be attained. Secondly, several institutions in Amadeo, Dasmariñas and Imus were visited to find participants. After the distribution of consent forms, drawing session regarding the participant's concept of family before and after abandonment was conducted. Explanations about their drawing were also recorded as part of the in-depth analysis of the drawings.

2.5 Data Analysis

The researchers used the rules and guidelines of Willig (2013) in analyzing data for an IPA study. After data encoding, emerged themes from the data gathered was formed to constitute the participants' responses. Clustered themes emerged and were formed into superordinate and subordinate themes. These themes were summarized and were bound to be supported by other literatures that could help the study.

2.6 Limitations

The present research has presented limitations. First, it included minimal sample size due to the lack of availability and incompetence of the found participants relative to the presented criteria. Here with, it would have been more beneficial if the research comprised a larger number of participants to allow variety of conceptualizations about a family. More so, if number of participants can be increased, generalized results can be obtained.

3. Results

Three (3) participants were interviewed and asked to draw their concept of a family before and after abandonment. The first participant, Kuya Jon is a 20-year-old male who has a short stature and kyphosis. The second participant, Ate Tina is a 31-year-old, female who suffers from cerebral palsy and the third participant, Ate Ella is a 23-year-old, female who suffers from hip dysplasia, all of them were abandoned and lives separately from their families. The following tables are derived from Canoy and Ofreneo (2012) that presents superordinate themes and subordinate themes formed across the paticipants' responses.

3.1 Objective 1

To determine the abandoned child's view/perspective towards each member of the family.

Table 2: *Superordinate and subordinate themes formed for each member of the family*

Member of Family	Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Father	Financial Provider	Source of financial support
Mother	Reliance and comfort	Gives emotional gratification
Brother	Courageous defender	Protects siblings from bullies
Sister	Affection Provider	capable of providing proximity
Grandparents	Subsequent Guardians	Someone who does not want to see their grandchildren hurt

3.2 Father as a Selfless Provider

Source of financial support. All participants see fathers as the one who primarily supports the family. They all believe that fathers have the responsibility of providing for the needs of his family. This has been apparent in the responses below:

> *"He acts as the pillar of the family as he is the one who strains*
>
> *himself to support the expenses and the needs of the family".*

3.3 Mother as the reliance and comfort provider

Gives emotional gratification. Even with the presence of maltreatment and neglect from their biological mothers, participants were still able to provide corresponding concepts of a mother. According to them, comfort should come from mothers as they are said to be emotional as well. It was observed that their responses were usually directed to positive connotations, contrary to their past experiences.

> *"The comfort should be in the mother. She should be the one who is more*
>
> *understanding because mothers are emotional that is why the comfort should be*
>
> *in hers…"*

3.4 Brother as the courageous defender

Protects his siblings from bullies. All participants see brothers as someone who is expected to have bravery and offer protection to his siblings. In fact, according to kuya Jon, his brother was his defender whenever others would hurt him.

> *"He is the person I can go to when someone bullies me…"*

3.5 Sister as the affection provider

Capable of providing proximity. According to kuya Jon, his sister was loving. Also, Ate Tina emphasized that she only has a brother whom she was not even close and so she developed a close relationship with her girl cousins whom she treated as her sisters. Her cousins have given her the proximity that she has longed for. Finally, Ate Ella said that the role of the sister is to understand her siblings and to initially offer a shoulder to lean on.

> *"…the role of the sister, especially the eldest, is to sacrifice, to be more*
>
> *understanding, and to share their shoulder for her siblings to lean on…"*

3.6 Grandparents as subsequent guardians

Someone who does not want to see their grandchildren hurt. This superordinate theme has two subordinate themes; someone who gives protection and someone who fulfils the duty of absentee parents. According to Ate Ella, who grew up with her grandparents because her primary

caregivers neglected her, grandparents should be the one to provide guidance to their children as well as grandchildren. Also, Ate Tina even emphasized that grandparents, especially grandmothers, usually provide protection.

> *"For the grandparent, it seems like she does not want me to get hurt, even though the wound is too small that is enough to make her angry and ask, "why would you hurt yourself?…"*

4. Objective 2

To know how the abandonment affected their perspective towards the concept of family

Table 3: *Concepts of family before and after abandonment*

Before Abandonment	
Superordinate Theme	**Subordinate Theme**
Primary family as a unit of attachment	Seeking for familial relatedness
After Abandonment	
Superordinate Theme	**Subordinate Themes**
Alternate family as a unit of healing and recovery	Feelings of acceptance from the abandonment
	Desire for reunion with the primary family
	Reconstructing the self through support

Themes were formed based on the participant's perspective towards their family, before and after abandonment. Before abandonment, one superordinate theme emerged: Primary family as a unit of attachment where it also has one subordinate theme which is the seeking for familial relatedness. After abandonment, one superordinate theme emerged which is the alternate family as a unit of healing where it has three subordinate themes which consists of the feelings of acceptance from the abandonment, desire for reunion with the primary family and the reconstructing the self through support.

Before Abandonment

4.1 Primary family as a unit of attachment

Seeking for familial relatedness. Participants have given their own perceptions towards the family by means of ideal concepts because of abandonment. They expressed ideal concepts related to dependency towards family as they also sought for it. As two participants attest:

"... because I want a pure trust which is not tainted by pretense. I like someone
whom I can share my stories with. With that, we can understand each other
despite the disagreements that we may have."

Figure 1: *Perception of Ate Tina towards family before abandonment*

"They are, I don't know about this but I think they should support (their family member with
physical disability)… in different aspects regarding mentality. It is because for me personally, I
did not experience that support from someone. I am just wishing that others could have that…
Just support (from the family)…"

Participants shared memories from the family before they were abandoned. Events like bonding moments and Christmas occasion were mentioned as those were the times when participants felt the positive emotions towards the family.
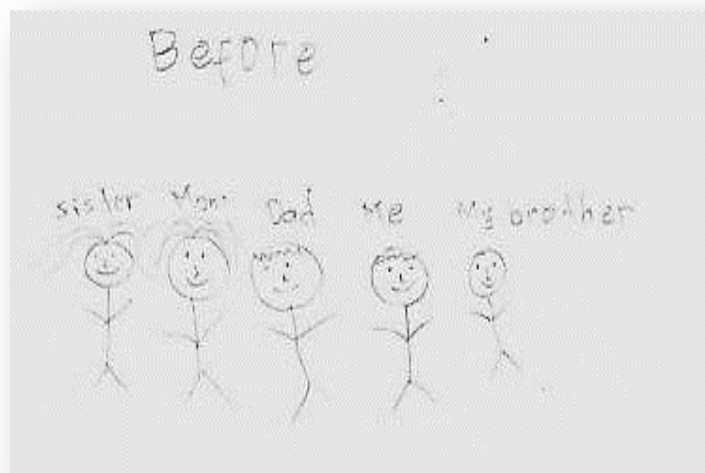

Figure 1: *Perception of Kuya Jon towards family before abandonment*

"I remember…when we were together…we were happy (pertaining to the drawing) like… the bonding that we have"
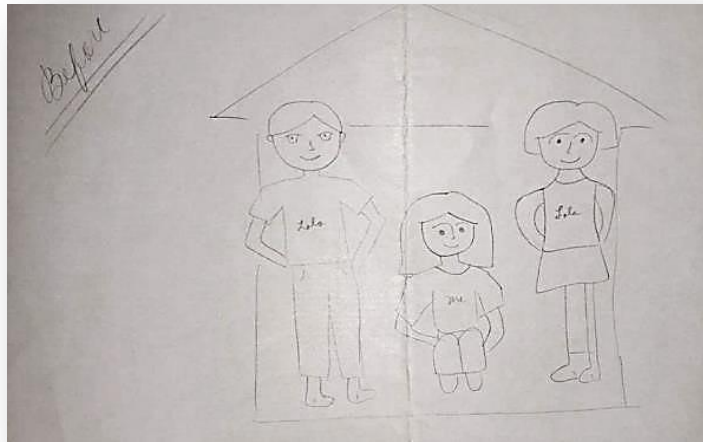

Figure 2: *Perception of Ate Ella towards family before abandonment*

"So before, we were complete, here is my grandfather, me, and my grandmother… our house before was the place wherein reunion of family members takes place…"

After abandonment

4.2 Alternate family as a unit of healing and recovery

Feelings of acceptance from the abandonment. Participants have already accepted the situation of being away from their family. According to them, they have recovered with the help of the support from their churchmates, social workers, an

"Acceptance... At first, I cannot accept the fact that I am not with my family anymore… It hurts because... they are not the people who you see before you sleep and after you wake up every morning. (Now), the people are different....it is not your family that you know. I suffered, but… little by little I accepted the fact that I am not with them anymore…"
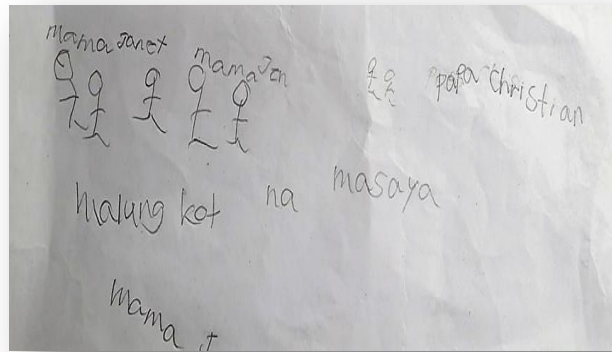
Figure 3: *Perception of Ate Tina towards family after abandonment of primary family*

"It's saddening because I am not with them anymore hence, I am with someone else. The two of them are mama Janette and mama Joy then the other 3 (pertaining to the drawing) are just a extras"

Desire for reunion with the primary family. Two of the participants wanted to be reunited with their respective families. One of them sought the help of a social worker in helping find his family, while the other planned to be reunited with her family. Below are two of the participant's sentiments:

"Yes, one time I went there, I was in the foundation by that time, a social worker helped me to visit them…"

Reconstructing the self through support. Participants regard their alternate family as the people who helped them cope with abandonment. According to them, their alternate family taught them how to rebuild and develop their self by being close to God by participating to church and by practicing the habit of daily praying. These values helped them to move on and learn from their past and rebuild themselves.

"…The church honed my personality as well as the way I approach other people, the way I interact with them…"

"…Maybe if I think thoroughly, church really helped me to build myself, for who I am"

Figure 5: *Perception of Ate Ella toward family after abandonment of primary family*

"since…when I was a child…I think…when I was seven (7) or six (6) years when I was already in the foundation …my mother and father was financially unstable…") ("nothing… just that... it's sad") (perspective towards his family)

"So this was my family before abandonment and change happened only this year. We are not living on the same roof because he is now living alone. It is because my grandmother is the only person who initiates reunions."

5. Discussion

The objective of the study is to determine the concept of the family among abandoned young adults with physical disability. In this study, it was revealed that abandonment does not have a continuous negative effect to the well-being of the person that could affect one's view towards the family.

There are different views regarding on each member of the family. The Father is seen by the participants as financial supporter, mother as someone whom can they rely on and siblings whom they can get strength and affection. Father is commonly viewed as the head of the family because he mainly supports the family needs, whereas, mothers have the responsibility of taking care of the children as she is also considered as the "*ilaw ng tahanan*"; meanwhile, the role of the child depends whether one is the youngest, middle, eldest or an only child (Philippine Culture - Common Family Traits, 2006). The grandparents on the other hand, are viewed in the Philippines

as persons who are the helper of parents in child-rearing (David, 2014). All of these were expressed by the participants as their ideal role of each members of the family.

A similar concept with that of Carandang's work was also evident in this research where a person becomes the *tagasalo* of the family experiencing crisis. Participants experienced crisis within in their families and so a person becomes the *tagasalo* who helps relieve the burden of the family and takeparts to the recovery of the individual who suffered (Tarroja, 2010). The *tagasalo* has the drive to take care of the family who experiences crisis; it holds the responsibility to provide harmony for the family.

The alternate family of abandoned young adults with physical disabilities plays a vital role in their recovery. In fact, people around individuals with developmental problems can effectively support them through their acquired skills and qualifications (Leroy & Simpson 1996; Ahmmed, Sharma & Deppeler 2012 as cited from Czyż, 2018).

In addition, research about parents who adopted abandoned children presented that even if there is conflict within the relationship of both the parents and the adopted child, the child still provided positive family profile and positive outlook on their parents. Participants presented a positive perception towards each member of the family as well as their view on a family as a unit despite the presence of abandonment (Simon & Alstein, 2002).

In fact, feelings of rejection, abandonment and lack of belongingness from their primary family have made an impact because of the absence of family connectedness. However, it was also noted in the study that even if those negative implications were given, abandoned young adults still want to have contact with their family such as having frequent visitation and reconciliation because they become a source of happiness and support (Mayock, Parker, and Murphy, 2014). Likewise, Woodman (2014) found out that young people continue to long for connection from their primary families even if that Individual run away from primary family, even if domestic violence became present, parents were separated, and there was difficulty among the relationship with the family (Woodman, 2014).

Participants are evidently involved in the final stage of abandonment; *lifting* where abandoned individuals starts to restructure their life and reinvest unto something new. Moreover, similar with their desires, is that, in this final stage, they develop imaginations of reuniting with their family (Susan Anderson, 2009)

Faith and values help abandoned people to undergo the process of healing and recovery from abandonment. This result of Kim (2002) emphasized that people who have strong faith can

help them to cope up with negative emotions, and can build a strong interrelationship with other people, is consistent with the finding of this research that faith is indeed one of the factors that could help people heal oneself (Kim, 2002). Moreover, Plante (2008) clearly indicated that different religious coping techniques are highly effective to combat stressors and can deliberately provide optimism and forgiveness that could lessen anxiety and depression.

Independence is also seen among the participants. Blomquist (2006), similarly found out that young adults with disabilities have a hard time in facing the responsibilities and challenges in life because of their situation. However, these young adults can achieve independence in a step by step process. Likewise, young adults with physical disabilities can achieve independence but not as rapid as what young adults without disabilities can attain. Moreover, it was noted that people who surround the individual can help the disabled to have positive views on their disabilities to become productive which soon may lead to independence through a gradual process (Blomquist, 2006)

6. Conclusion

Abandonment scars an individual's well-being. But as life goes on, there will be people who will help them to lift themselves up to acquire a certain level of satisfaction in life. After abandonment from primary caregiver, alternate family, which serves as the "*tagasalo*" of the individual, enters and holds the responsibility of helping the abandoned young adult in the process of recovering from the negative implications brought by the abandonment. Even with the presence of the alternate family, the individual still chooses to be reunited and reconciled with their primary families with the hope of believing that they could still be a source of happiness and support. The desire to be reunited with the primary family and the development of the positive perceptions towards them persists even if the life of the young adults before with the primary family is chaotic, problematic and is abusive in nature. Additionally, the young adult's acceptance of the abandonment is also observed to be brought by their enhanced understanding of their current situation garnered by certain coping strategies and learned practices such as developing faith and values as well as the development of religious coping techniques. These practices enhance the individual's optimism which could help to have a better understanding of the situation. Through these, goal-directed behaviors that are focused to help themselves and their primary families are manifested which unleashes their potential to be independent individuals.

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