

**Exploring Older People's Perspectives of Community Organizing: A Photovoice
and Videovoice Study in the Philippines**

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“For well over a century, poets and sages have reflected on what old age could be and have dared to imagine a new old age. Together they have prepared a vision of aging as a continuation of human development.”

-William Thomas, 2007

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Abstract

Help Age International (2002) estimates that by 2050, the proportion of older people in developing countries will rise from 8 to 19 percent, and the proportion of children will fall from 33 to 22 percent (HelpAge, 2002). In developing countries, older people are among the poorest (HelpAge, 2002). In many developing countries, the public sector plays a small role in supporting social welfare provisions for older people (HelpAge, 2009). The issues and challenges of a rapidly ageing population are complex and multi-faceted, and concern all of society (Help Age, 2002). Community organizing, facilitates older people's perspectives, and is an approach that mainstreams ageing issues in the development process (Heslop, 2002). Community organizing is a social welfare intervention that places the realities, needs, and capacities of older people at the forefront of development policy and practice (Heslop, 2002). This is qualitative case study exploring older people's perspectives of community organizing, in the Philippines. Community based participatory research methods, photovoice and videovoice were used. Three interconnected themes emerged, important to understand the team members' perspectives of community organizing: the traditional Filipino value of *bayanihan*, meaningful participation, and self-sustainability. This study shows how older people have unique insights and perspectives that are valuable contributions to community practice and development. Findings of this study have implications for future community and international development practice with older people.

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To the Nanays and Tatays I am privileged to have worked with, who teach me how to age beautifully. To the committed staff of COSE (a truly grassroots organization), who showed a graduate student how idealism: a belief in the power of ideas to affect human life can be realized in practice.

Introduction

A confession

Before I embark on a section that details the importance of the study and its relevancy to both the international and Canadian context, I begin with a confession. Prior to my experiences with this research study, with the non-governmental organization, the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE) and with older people from the PILKAN Federation, the idea of ageing frightened me. I was afraid because I believed that ageing meant to regress. I believed that opportunities to grow and to learn will gradually fade, with old age. The ageist perceptions that I held, gradually unveiled, through personal reflections from this research process. I realized how misguided I was the whole time, and it was not ageing that was my enemy, it was the damaging perceptions of ageing that I held. The ageist perceptions were like invisible chains, and with every passing year, the links appear one by one. My experiences and reflections uncovered the totality of this invisible chain. The ageist perceptions were damaging to my human development and to my future practice as a social worker. However, the people I met, the stories I heard, and the relationships I built with older people, show that many issues and challenges of old age are not a matter of ageing— but a matter of perspective.

Ageing happens to us every minute, every hour, and every day. Ageing is more than just human genetics; it is about human development (Thomas, 2007). Human development is concerned with philosophical and spiritual questions that explore a meaningful life (Thomas, 2007). For example, in the book, *What are older people for? How Elders will save the world*, Thomas (2007), describes human development as the act of being (Thomas, 2007). He (2007)

says, "...it is being that guides us to the deepest, richest veins of human experience, we find meaning in being. This meaning can easily become more important than life itself" (Thomas, 2007, p. 118). For Thomas (2007), human development is concerned with questions, such as "how are we to live our lives?" (Thomas, 2007, p. 111). Ageing is like the development of a series of chapters in a book. Ageing is a continuous story, a story that needs to be told, and a story that needs to be shared. This report documents the findings of a research study exploring older people's perspectives of community organizing. At the same time, this is a story of ageing, where older people are the main characters, actively exploring opportunities to grow, learn, and to be.

Purpose of research

PILKAN is a federation of 12 different community organizations of older people, focused on addressing issues and challenges of older people, in poor and underserved urban communities, in the Philippines (COSE, 2011). A profile of PILKAN is provided later, in the background section of the report. PILKAN serves as a model for other community organizations of older people (COSE, 2011). The participants of this study are older people active in community organizing, and members of the communities in which they serve. The purpose of this study is to explore older people's experiences, perceptions, and reflections, of their participation in community organizations of and for older people. The research objectives are:

1. To understand contributing factors, to participation of older people, in community organizing
2. To identify processes and objectives of community organizing, for older people

3. To understand how community organizing can affect change for older people, and for the larger community

The study combined photovoice and videovoice methods, with other traditional data collection methods. The data collected (visual and non-visual), were used to produce two videos. The first is a 45 minute video that documents the research methods and findings, detailed in this report. Copies of this video were provided to each team member and COSE. The video was also uploaded onto youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XLdznynKb0>. The second is a 5 minute video, submitted to a video production contest, hosted by COSE. The second video focuses specifically on the theme: older people as pillars of strength in times of emergencies. Copies of this video were provided to each team member, and submitted for the video production contest, held during the week of the elderly in the Philippines (October 1st-7th). This video was also uploaded onto youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnmIKpP0NBQ>. The videos are discussed in more detail, in the results and discussion sections.

Background

This study is within the international practicum and research course (SOWK 695) requirements for the Master of Social Work program (specialization: International and Community Development), at the University of Calgary. This study is conducted in Quezon City, Philippines, in collaboration with the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE).

COSE

COSE is a national non-governmental organization that works with older people in poor and underserved communities, in Quezon City and other regions in the Philippines (COSE, n.d.).

COSE's mission statements are:

1) Organize the marginalized sector of older persons, urban and rural; 2) mobilize resources to support the various concerns and programs of older persons; 3) motivate and assist institutions, NGO's, PO's desirous of initiating programs for older persons particularly community-based programs; 4) establish and maintain support groups for older persons; 5) raise awareness on the worsening crisis in a society that has traditionally cared for its older persons; and 6) provide opportunities to recognize and maximize the uniqueness, experiences and wisdom of older persons (COSE, n.d.).

PILKAN Federation

PILKAN stands for *Pingasamang Lakas at Karunungan ng mga Nakatatanda*, in the tagalog language, which means the united effort of strength and wisdom of older people (COSE, 2011). PILKAN is a federation of 12 community organizations in different areas, all within Commonwealth, Quezon City (COSE, 2011). The community organizations that make up the federation are the first organizations that COSE helped to facilitate, which began in 1989 (COSE, 2011). It was not until 2002, that the 12 organizations joined and became the federation, PILKAN (COSE, 2011). Currently, they have 1400 members and this number continues to grow (COSE, 2011).

Facilitating self-reliant communities of older people is one of COSE's objectives (COSE, n.d.). A self-reliant community is described as one that received financial and technical help

from COSE in the past, and now has reached a point where financial support is no longer needed (COSE, n.d.). PILKAN is a self-reliant community of older people, led and driven by older people. PILKAN has various community based programs that include local health teams, income generating projects, fundraisers, burial fund benefits and *pondong damayan*. These programs are described in the results and discussion section. PILKAN's subsequent success as a community of and for older people, are highlighted through the various community based programs and the PILKAN building (COSE, 2011). This building is located in the Pilot area of Commonwealth, Quezon City (1 of the 12 areas of PILKAN). Members drafted up a project proposal, to receive funds from an agency in the Netherlands, for the raw materials (COSE, 2011). All labour for the building came from older people themselves, volunteering their time, skills, and efforts (COSE, 2011). Due to limited funds, only two storeys were completed (COSE, 2011). However, the building is regularly used by members as a multi-purpose centre for older people, and other community members as well (COSE, 2011).

Literature Review

Community Organizing

Community organizing is a social welfare intervention, at the grass roots level, working with the collective (Plyes, 2009). There are different perspectives of community organizing—how it should be done (the process) and the goals it sets to achieve. Rothman (2001) provides three modes of community organizing that illustrate different processes and goals (Rothman, 2001). The three modes are: (1) locality development, (2) social planning/policy, and (3) social action (Rothman, 2001).

Locality development is focused on the community, and is process oriented (Rothman, 2001). Capacity building, participatory democracy, local leadership and promotion of social integration are emphasized within this mode (Rothman, 2001). The premise of this mode is that social change is informed by grassroots initiatives and expertise (Rothman, 2001). Community organizing is an intervention used to facilitate social cohesion, and identify a common set of community values (Rothman, 2001).

Social planning/policy address particular social problems within a community (Rothman, 2001). This mode is task oriented, and utilizes technical processes (i.e. data collection and analysis, and fact gathering) to address social welfare issues (Rothman, 2001). Social change is not a primary concern of this mode, and the degree of participation varies (Rothman, 2001). In this mode, community organizing is an intervention to solve specific community problems, and formal organizations are the avenues to address social welfare issues (Rothman, 2001).

Social action adopts a structural approach, and emphasis is placed on social justice, redistribution of power, democracy, and access to resources (Rothman, 2001). This mode links community level efforts to social movements, with objectives to alter existing social systems that create injustices and inequalities (Rothman, 2001). In this mode, community organizing is an intervention that mobilizes people around an issue, to affect social change (Rothman, 2001).

The three modes illustrate distinct objectives and goals of community organizing. Plyes (2009) spectrum of community organizing frameworks is another way to understand the different perspectives (Plyes, 2009). Community organizing frameworks, fall into a spectrum with a utilitarianism orientation on one end, and a transformative orientation on the other end (Plyes, 2009).

A community organizing framework with a utilitarianism orientation is ends oriented and objectives are to achieve concrete and measurable outcomes for the community (Plyes, 2009). The utilitarianism orientation focuses on achieving incremental changes for the community, rather than institutional changes within social systems (Plyes, 2009). Saul Alinsky's ideas of community organizing are an example of a framework with a utilitarianism orientation (Plyes, 2009). Alinsky was a community organizer in the United States, from the 1930s to the 1970s, and his ideas and methods were directed at achieving practical victories for the community (Plyes, 2009). Improvement in areas such as child welfare, public education, and neighbourhood stabilization, are examples of areas in which organizing efforts were directed at (Plyes, 2009). Community organizing was an intervention, used by Alinsky and his followers, to demand inclusion within existing political and social systems (Plyes, 2009).

A transformative orientation of community organizing focuses on achieving structural changes, with processes directed to change unequal power structures within groups, organizations, communities, and social systems (Plyes, 2009). Paulo Freire's ideas of popular education are a primary example of a community organizing framework with a transformative orientation (Plyes, 2009). Popular education is an educational process, as well as an organizational process (Hammond, 1999). The goal of education, within this framework, is not simply about developing literacy, but about developing critical consciousness, enabling the learner to identify and challenge oppressive and unjust social structures (Hammond, 1999). Paulo Freire applied his ideas of popular education with poor communities in Brazil (Plyes, 2009). The educational process is aimed at facilitating dialogue between community members, social cohesion and building community capacity (Hammond, 1999). Social justice is a core

concept within this framework, and community organizing is an intervention used to alter existing political and social systems (Plyes, 2009).

Rothman's (2001) three modes and Plyes' (2009) spectrum of organizing frameworks, illustrate different perspectives of community organizing (Rothman, 2001; Plyes, 2009).

Community organizing is a vehicle for change that involves the participation of ordinary citizens (Plyes, 2009; Rothman, 2001; Hammond, 1999). This idea is a commonality shared between the different perspectives.

Community organizing with older people

Perspectives within Rothman's (2001) modes and Plyes' (2009) organizing spectrum, illustrate the potential of community organizing to build social cohesion and community capacity, and to create structural changes to unequal social, political, and economic systems (Rothman, 2001; Plyes 2009). Community organizing is a powerful social welfare intervention, for those seeking social change (Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon, & Lewis, 1996). Literature on community organizing highlight the use of this approach, with different population groups that are marginalized because of unequal structures and systems (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2004; Capraro, 2004; Delgado & Lee, 2007; Goswami, 2009; Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon, & Lewis, 1996; Hammond, 1999; Laing, 2009; Linthicum, 2002; Plyes, 2009; Stall & Stoecker, 1998; Wehbi,2007). However, there is limited literature highlighting community organizing with older people (Thompson & Thompson, 2001).

Ageism

“...old people are exposed to a bigoted ageism that is openly expressed and widely accepted...to be old in contemporary society is to inhabit a ghetto without borders.”

–William Thomas, 2007, p. 4

This is a quote from Thomas’s (2007) book: *What are old people for? How Elders will save the world* (Thomas, 2007). The book outlines how ageism is deeply embedded in our current social structures and systems, and how damaging it is, not just for older people, but for all ages and for society (Thomas, 2007). Contemporary society widely adopts what Thomas calls, a *declinist* view of old age (Thomas, 2007). Thomas (2007) argues for the need to combat ageism within our social structures, and redefine ageing and old age as a virtue, in order to address the issues and challenges contemporary society face (Thomas, 2007).

Intergenerational exchange is a matter of survival in traditional societies (Thomas, 2007). The idea is that different age groups held unique capacities and strengths, which each group is interdependent on (Thomas, 2007). Old age and ageing is a virtue in traditional societies (Thomas, 2007). Ageing and old age experienced a radical reinterpretation, as societies became urbanized, and dependant on sophisticated technologies (Thomas, 2007). The declinist view dominated, and older people are seen now as a burden on society (Thomas, 2007).

Thomas (2007) argues that ageist perception are “...so ingrained that it sometimes seems that no other perspective is possible” (Thomas, 2007, p. 84). Uncovering ageist

perceptions, and deconstructing the ageist structures and systems within society are critical, to address the issues and challenges of a rapidly ageing population (Thomas, 2007).

Thomas (2007) says,

Old age and the place of the aged in society are both much more complex than we realize. There is no single story that can explain them to us. These ambiguities are the sources of ageing's greatest strength. Ageing endures because it is so full of complexity and contradiction. (Thomas, 2007, p.90)

Combating ageism is important to pave an alternative way of thinking, of ageing and old age. Shared experiences of older people that highlight ageing and old age as a virtue are needed, to reflect the lived experiences and capacities of older people (Thomas, 2007).

International Context

Community organizing, and its ideas of capacity building and social justice, is aligned with an empowerment approach to social welfare (Rothman, 2001; Plyes 2009). In the 21st century, where a rapidly ageing population is a major structural issue, community organizing is a critical social welfare intervention with older people (Help Age, 2002). By, 2050 it is expected that the number of people over 60 will outnumber people under 14 (Help Age, 2002). The issues and challenges of a rapidly ageing population are complex and multi-faceted, and concern all of society (Help Age, 2002). However, the current global political and economic structures, characterized by neo-liberal ideas of free-market capitalism, retrenchment of the welfare state, individualism, and privatization, increasingly leave civil society with the responsibilities to address these issues and challenges (Plyes, 2009). Current civic structures discredit older people as active participants (Grenier & Hanley, 2007). Ageism and notions of

ageing, dominated by medical discourse, are major obstacles to the representation of older people in civil society (Grenier & Hanley, 2007). Literature that highlight the pivotal and active roles older people play in civil society, are limited (Greiner & Hanley, 2007; Martinson, 2007; Thompson & Thompson, 2001). Literature that highlight voices of older people to identify their own issues and strengths, are sparse (Greiner & Hanley, 2007; Martinson, 2007; Thompson & Thompson, 2001). Older people and their perspectives are essential to address the complex and multi-faceted issues related to a rapidly ageing population.

Ageing in developing countries is an important area of research (Help Age, 2002). Help Age International (2002) estimates that by 2050, the proportion of older people in developing countries will rise from 8 to 19 percent, and the proportion of children will fall from 33 to 22 percent (HelpAge, 2002). In developing countries, older people are among the poorest (HelpAge, 2002). In many developing countries, the public sector plays a small role in supporting social welfare provisions for older people (HelpAge, 2009). For example, many older people do not have access to social pension in developing countries, leading to dependency on less reliable sources of income and increased vulnerability to poverty (HelpAge, 2009).

Worldwide societies are experiencing unprecedented growths in the number of older people, due to social and economic progresses (Heslop, 2002). However, this development is marred by an over representation of older people living in poverty, in developing countries (Heslop, 2002). Older people are largely neglected in the development agenda, and the unique needs and capacities of this diverse population are not recognized in development policy and practice (Heslop, 2002). Older people's perspectives are critical in the development context.

Community organizing, facilitates older people's perspectives, and is an approach that mainstreams ageing issues in the development process (Heslop, 2002). Community organizing is a social welfare intervention that places the realities, needs, and capacities of older people at the forefront of development policy and practice (Heslop, 2002). Community organizing with older people has huge potential to address issues and challenges of a rapidly ageing population, and the complex issues older people face in developing countries (Heslop, 2002). However, research in this area continues to be limited.

Canadian Context

In Canada, the population of older people is rapidly growing (Austin, Des Camp, Flux, McClelland, & Sieppert, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2006). The number of older people is projected to surpass the number of children under 14 years of age, by 2033 (Statistics Canada, 2006). The growth rate of the population of older people in Canada is expected, in upcoming years, to increase at more than twice the growth rate of Canada's population, as a whole (Statistic Canada, 2006). These changes in demographics are becoming a focal point of interest and concern for all levels of government; funders; non-profit, community, and faith based organizations; post-secondary institutions; neighbourhoods; families; and individuals across Canada (Austin, et al., 2005).

In a qualitative study conducted by Austin et al. (2005), multicultural practice emerged as a key theme, for community development practice with older people (Austin et al., 2005). Austin et al. (2005) state that "multicultural community practice requires organizing strategies based on the unique culture of each group" (Austin et al., 2005, p. 408). Canada's rapidly ageing population is culturally diverse (Statistics Canada, 2006). The number of immigrant seniors, who

belong to a visible minority group in Canada, was 23% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2006). This number has significantly increased, compared to 6.8% in 1981 (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Culture is the “totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, and way of life of a group of people who share a certain historical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, or social background (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2009). Laing (2009) states, “culture serves as a schema for living and interpreting reality” (Laing, 2009, p. 20). Culture is a powerful factor that permeates all aspects of community organizing and community practice, including:

- 1) how members interact with each other and the external environment; 2) conceptualizations of power; 3) processes of developing critical consciousness; 4) relevant community vehicles for mobilization and consciousness raising; 5) definitions of community problems; 6) orientations to community change; and 7) problem solving strategies. (Laing, 2009, p. 21)

Successful ageing frameworks and practices must pay attention to the centrality of culture (Austin et al., 2005; Laing, 2009). However, literature that highlights the central role of culture in community organizing is limited.

Social Work Practice

Social work practice is not confined to working with the individual, family and/or group (Austin et al., 2005). Community level practice is included in social work practice, and plays a critical role in facilitating social change (Austin et al., 2005). Community level practice has always been included in social work discourse and practice (Austin et al., 2005). However, community practice with older people is an underdeveloped area (Austin et al., 2005). This gap is apparent, when Austin et al. (2005) were recruiting staff for their qualitative study (Austin et al., 2005). Austin et al. (2005) explained:

In our initial attempt to hire program staff, we found that applicants were either experienced in working with older adults as service providers or had general community development experience, but not both. In Calgary, community workers with experience organizing older adults were impossible to find. (Austin et al., 2005, p.405)

This gap is in stark contrast with the changing demographics (Austin et al., 2005).

Gerontological social work largely focuses on service provisions for older people (Austin et al., 2005). This narrow focus stems from dominant discourse and practice informed by a care focused approach to social welfare provisions, rather than an empowerment approach (Thompson & Thompson, 2001).

A care focused approach, to social welfare provisions, is informed by medical discourse, which assumes chronological old age leads to physical and intellectual decline in older people (Thompson & Thompson, 2001). A care focused approach is paternalistic, and older people are forced into the role of passive recipients of care, incapable of their own decision making (Thompson & Thompson, 2001). A care focused approach supports disempowering stereotypes of older people, categorizes older people into a homogenous group, and ignores the unique strengths and capacities of older people (Thompson & Thompson, 2001).

An empowerment approach realizes the idea that older people have the same range of problems and strengths as any other individuals (Thompson & Thompson, 2001). This approach identifies chronological age as only a physical reality, and resists the socially constructed roles and expectations forced on older people (DeJong & Love, 2010). This approach recognizes the diversity within this group, and the critical interplay between ageing, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and culture (Thompson & Thompson, 2001). In an

empowerment approach, the idea is that older people are the experts of their lived experiences and of issues they face (Thompson & Thompson, 2001).

Methods

Literature review

Multimedia methods, such as photovoice and videovoice, are applicable to diverse populations, and are increasingly used as a community based participatory research (CBPR) method with different groups (Sullivan, 2009). However, photovoice and videovoice, as methodologies used with older people are limited (Sullivan, 2009). In addition, these research studies focus specifically on physical health issues of older people (Baker & Wang, 2006). Ageing is complex and multi-faceted and embody political, economic, and social dimensions (Heslop, 2002). Research with older people need to go beyond physical health issues related to chronological ageing, to encompass these multi-dimensional aspects.

The limited examples in social science research, using photovoice and videovoice with older people, stem from the underdeveloped field of CBPR with older people (Blair, 2009). In social science research there is an increased attention and use of CBPR, with the exception of research with older people (Blair, 2009). Blair (2009) explains that in CBPR:

...the individuals or communities to whom research applies maintain agency in key aspects of the research process: defining research questions, carrying out the research itself, building community capacity while gathering and interpreting data, disseminating research findings, and using such findings as the basis for social action. (Blair, 2009, p. 652)

The negative stereotypes of older people impede opportunities for older people to act as collaborative partners, in the research process (Blair, 2009; Jacelon, 2007). Older people's perspectives are critical in the research process to challenge disempowering stereotypes, acknowledge diversity within this group, address the multi-dimensions of ageing, and recognize unique strengths and capacities of older people (Blair, 2009; Heslop, 2002; Jacelon, 2007; Sullivan, 2009).

Community based participatory research

Community based participatory research (CBPR) is more an approach to research, than a methodology (Catalani, 2009). This approach emphasizes collaboration and equal participation with communities (Catalani, 2009). This includes participation in defining the research question, design, implementation, dissemination of findings and action (Catalani, 2009). Methods within this approach are diverse and include both quantitative and qualitative techniques (Catalani, 2009). This qualitative study adopts the CBPR approach, and the multimedia methods of photovoice and videovoice are used.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a method that links research to social action (Blair & Minkler, 2006). Participants of a photovoice study are provided with cameras, and use photography to express their issues and challenges, as an individual and as a collective (Sullivan, 2009). There are three objectives of the photovoice method:

1) Enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns; 2) promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important critical issues through group discussions of photographs, and 3) to reach policy makers and people who can be mobilized for change. (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370)

Videovoice

Videovoice is a method that follows the same principles of photovoice (Catalani, 2009). It builds on the photovoice method, by adding movement, audio and sequential narrative to the participatory process (Catalani, 2009). Videovoice also allows for different ways to disseminate findings, such as theatre, television, computers and mobile devices (Catalani, 2009).

In Harmony: New Orleans Videovoice Project is the first study published, in peer reviewed academic literature that uses the videovoice methodology (Catalani, 2009). Catalani (2009) defines videovoice "...as a health advocacy and research method through which people, who are usually subjects or consumers of mainstream media, get behind video cameras to research issues of concern, communicate their knowledge, and advocate for change" (Catalani, 2009, p. 66-67). The objectives of videovoice are to facilitate: 1) research and documentation by community members, to assess community strengths and challenges, 2) communication across communities and with policy and decision makers, institutional leaders, and program planners, 3) mobilization and action on public health challenges, and 4) discussion of issues of importance in groups, to promote critical consciousness and empowerment (Catalani, 2009). These objectives are aligned, with the objectives of photovoice (Catalani, 2009). Both

multimedia methods are informed by the theoretical bases of new media theory, critical theory, and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Catalani, 2009).

Setting and CBPR team

This study took place from May to August 2011 (12 weeks), in Commonwealth, Quezon City, Philippines. PILKAN is comprised of 12 individual areas within Commonwealth. The CBPR team includes eight participants, from 5 out of the 12 PILKAN areas. The age of the team members ranged from 55-76, with the median being 66. The majority of the members, six, are female, and two are male. All members speak and write English. All members are actively involved in PILKAN's core programs and activities, and hold various official roles within the federation. The number of years, team members have been involved with PILKAN (including involvement in the 12 different areas, before its federation) ranged from 6 to 15 years, with the median being 9 years. Other members of PILKAN participated during the videovoice activities, conducted by the eight team members. However, their participation was limited as the interviewees and they did not participate in all other activities.

Team member recruitment

This study is a component of the researcher's international and community development practicum, with COSE. Due to time constraints and as an outsider, the researcher requested COSE facilitate the recruitment process. A copy of the research proposal was provided to COSE, and PILKAN was the federation selected, by COSE, to recruit participants. COSE organized a date for the researcher to meet with active leaders of PILKAN, where eight members were in attendance, and these individuals also became the CBPR team.

A staff of COSE and a Local Community Organizer Volunteer (also a former staff of COSE), from a different community organization of older people, co-facilitated the first three meetings. Their roles were critical at the beginning stages of the research process, to act as a bridge between the outside researcher and the rest of the CBPR team.

Data collection, analysis and interpretation

Findings emerged from the triangulation of several kinds of data, collected from both photovoice and videovoice activities. From photovoice activities, data include team member's photos, journal entries, and transcripts of discussion sessions. From videovoice activities, data include team member's environmental footage, interviews with other members, and transcripts of discussion sessions. Each team member was provided with a digital camera which also included a video-recording function, for the photovoice and videovoice assignments.

Photovoice

Photovoice group sessions

Two hour group sessions were held every week, during mid-May to mid-June 2011. A total of four group sessions were dedicated to photovoice activities. Three out of the four group sessions, a co-facilitator was present. Group discussions were mixed, in both English and Tagalog. All group sessions were audio-taped, translated and transcribed. The activities and group sessions drew from elements of the photovoice methodology developed by Wang & Burris (1997). The theoretical model, that informs this study's photovoice process, is described below, in figure 1.

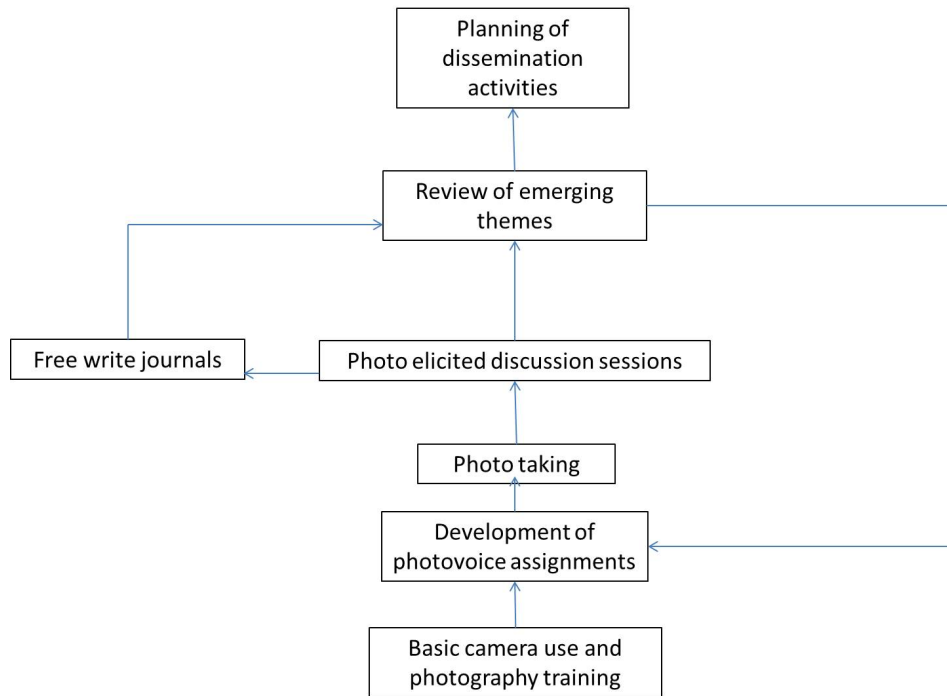


Figure 1: Photovoice theoretical model

Basic camera use and photography training

Due to limited funds, three out of the eight cameras were purchased brand new and the remaining five were donated and previously used. Cameras were randomly assigned to each team member, through a draw of numbers. The researcher facilitated one group session for training on basic camera use. The advocacy officer of COSE facilitated the basic training on photography. The advocacy officer was selected to facilitate because of his experience in photography, which include photography published in COSE’s annual reports, calendars, and Christmas cards.

Photovoice assignments and photo taking

The team was initially provided with the following photovoice assignment: “help the researcher understand community organizations of and for older people, by telling your story.” The photo assignments were more focused, as themes emerged through weekly discussions. A total of three photovoice assignments were completed, during this time. For each assignment, team members were instructed to select five digital photos for development. Three were used to facilitate group discussion and two were personal photos for team members to keep.

Photo elicited discussion sessions

The discussion sessions followed Lykes (2001), photovoice technique, an adaptation of Wang and Burris’s (1997) SHOWeD technique (Lykes, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1997). Lykes (2001) photovoice technique include: 1) the photographer telling the story in the picture, to the group, 2) explaining the reason for the selection of the picture, 3) the group selecting 2-4 photographs and putting them into topic groups, 4) the group identifying common themes between the photographs, and through open dialogue analyzes the different themes (Lykes, 2001). Key themes emerged from weekly discussion sessions, and these themes are described in the results section.

Free write journals

The free write journals were provided to members to document additional thoughts, ideas, and reflections that emerged from the photo-elicited discussion sessions. Team members had the option to write in English or Tagalog. The journals entries written in Tagalog were translated.

Review of emerging themes

Each discussion session was audio-taped, translated and transcribed. In addition to common themes that emerged from discussion sessions, transcripts were coded and analysed by the researcher using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparison method, for additional themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparison method is a qualitative data analysis approach, in which data is coded, generated into categories and hypothesis, and then compared with one another for emerging themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The themes that emerged after each meeting were presented to the group for editing and accuracy, that it reflected their views. The researcher used PowerPoint, Windows Live Photo Gallery and Windows Live Movie Maker, to compile the quotes and photos used to support the key themes.

Planning of dissemination activities

One group session was held at the end of July, to discuss dissemination activities for the final products. The team reviewed the final products, and key themes that emerged from the sessions. The discussion focused on the following questions: Who do you want to view these products, and why? What activities can the team host to showcase these products?

Videovoice

Videovoice group sessions

Three group sessions were held between mid-June to the end of July, and each meeting was approximately three hours. Co-facilitators were not present in these sessions. The activities and group sessions drew from elements of the videovoice methodology presented in Catalani's

(2009) study, described earlier (Catalani, 2009). The theoretical model, that informs this study's videovoice process, is described below, in figure 2.

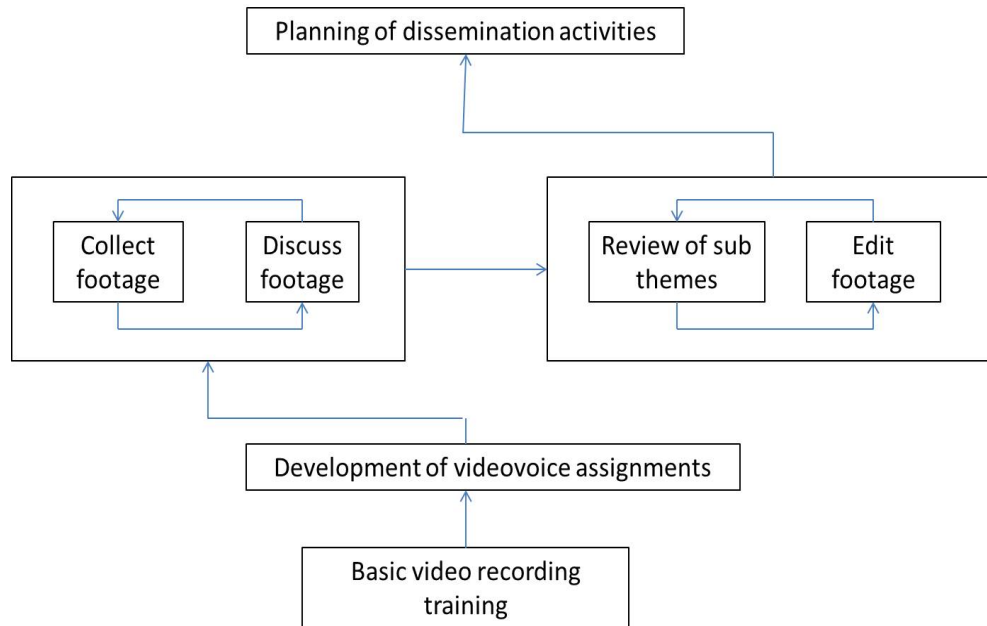


Figure 2: Videovoice theoretical model

Basic video recording training

The digital cameras provided to team members, were also used for collecting video footages. All eight cameras have a video recording function. The researcher facilitated a one day training session on basic usage of this function.

Videovoice assignments: Collection, discussion, review of sub themes, and editing of footage

Initially, the videovoice assignments were to build on the themes that emerged from the photovoice sessions. The first videovoice assignment did focus on those themes. However, a

call for video production submissions, for a contest hosted by COSE, was announced at the end of June. The group decided to dedicate the remaining (2 of the 3) videovoice assignments to focus on collecting footage, for the contest theme: Older people as pillars of strength in times of emergencies. The group decided they will submit a video for the contest, using the videovoice method.

The criteria for video submissions were: 1) must be five minutes or less, 2) original, and 3) depict older people positively in times of emergencies. The video assignments were developed by the group, and discussions were structured around the contest's theme. Editing of the footage, with team members, was incorporated throughout the three sessions.

Planning of dissemination activities

One dissemination activity was the submission to the video production contest, hosted by COSE. COSE hosts annual contests, with themes that highlight older people positively. Past contests include song compositions and paintings. Past judges include individuals from all different sectors of society. Judges for this year's contest may include individuals from government departments; non-governmental, non-profit, faith based, and/or community based organizations, at both the local and national level. The awards will be presented during the week of the elderly (October 1st-7th) of 2011, in Manila, Philippines. During these events, 500-1000 people are in attendance, including the secretary of social welfare department, other non-governmental organizations, local and national media. In addition, to the above dissemination activity, one group session was dedicated to plan other dissemination activities for the final videovoice product. This discussion focused on the same questions for the photovoice final

products: Who do you want to view these products, and why? What activities can the team host to showcase these products?

Results

Photovoice

Three key interconnected themes emerged: the traditional Filipino value of *bayanihan*, meaningful participation, and self-sustainability.

Bayanihan value

Team members provided numerous examples of how community organizing is connected with the traditional Filipino value of bayanihan. Team members agreed that the bayanihan value is deeply embedded in their community organizations. The bayanihan value, described by the team, is shared expectations and responsibilities, and collective efforts to achieve goals and objectives, for the common good. One team member provides the following description:

“Culturally, the Philippines has this system of bayanihan, or sharing. Not just in the benefits but also in the responsibility.”

Team members agreed that in urban areas this traditional value is seemingly lost, but in rural areas, it is still very much alive. One team member said:

“You don’t see this idea of bayanihan much in the cities, people are too busy with their own work, and they don’t take the time to get to know each other. But in the provinces everyone knows each other and they work together, to get things done.”

However, team members agreed that PILKAN, a federation of community organizations operating in urban areas, embraces the bayanihan value. One team member said,

“The bayanihan spirit which started with our ancestors has been the guiding spirit for this organization. If you have a commitment, share it with others. If you serve others, you will feel happy, at the end of the day, you can reflect and be happy and be satisfied with a job well done. Members realize that. That is what is necessary to be a good example; it attracts a lot of other members.”

Team members expressed that objectives of PILKAN are achieved through group participation, collaboration and united efforts. One team member used the example of the development of PILKAN’s multi-purpose building, to highlight how the group achieved one of their goals:

“We only had enough funds for the materials to build the centre, so we all volunteered; members from the 12 different areas contributed to the labour, for the building. None of us received any payment for our labour, but we worked hard every day. Seeing that we were able to have a building of our own, was like a dream come true for us.”

Team members agreed that the bayanihan value meant responsibilities and benefits are intertwined. They expressed that benefits (both material and non-material) are only received, when members are committed, and follow through with their responsibilities. This expectation is articulated, during the orientation meeting of new members. One team member explained:

“For me, I understand that to help others, it is already a policy. We give them an orientation, so that they know what is expected of them, and what they can expect from the organization. Helping from the heart, no ill feelings, members are not proud or boastful, show a good character or attitude. For me this is the criteria.”

A few team members expressed that some people join PILKAN simply for the benefits and do not want to contribute to collective group efforts. However, team members agreed that individuals with vested personal interests soon drop out, as they realize that benefits cannot be obtained, without commitment to collective responsibilities. One team member said:

“We have seen this happen a lot, where people join for personal gain or recognition. For example, all our area presidents and vice presidents are elected by the members every two years, some people just join right before new elections to get a position, but after that they vanish, they are not involved in the activities, they are not committed to their responsibilities, and soon enough members will know and they are not elected again.”

Team members agreed that many people initially do join for benefits, but as their participation in the activities increase, they begin to enjoy and take pride in their contributions to the collective group efforts. One team member used her own experiences as an example:

“You can’t expect new members to take initiative immediately; it takes time to develop it. In truth, when I joined, I was thinking of socialization—the beach outings. It was cheap and sounded like fun. But when I became active, I learned a lot more. I became a CG [community gerontologist, an older person volunteer, trained by COSE staff to administer medical attention to members of the community. Training includes first aid, reflexology, herbal plants, blood pressure, and spotting illnesses that need immediate medical attention] and had training in taking blood pressure, monitoring vital signs, etc. There are a lot of ideas that you get from others. People tend to be very genuine and supportive of you. Everyone is a good leader; they all have wonderful traits and dedication to the work, commitment as leaders.”

In addition, another team member shared this personal reflection:

“When I joined, I confess I was always thinking for myself, but as I grew more and more involved with organizing and developed the great relationships with the other members, my thinking started to change, I begin to think more for the group.”

Team members agreed it is an ideal for communities to be rooted in the traditional value of bayanihan. At the same time, team members shared the perspective that for poor and underserved communities, the bayanihan value is also a necessity. One team member shared this insight:

“The bayanihan spirit, you do not see this much with rich people, they can afford to isolate themselves from others. For the poorer sector this is where you can see the spirit of sharing, volunteerism.”

Meaningful participation

A number of discussions focused on exploring the variety of reasons older people joined a community organization of and for older people. Team members shared many of their personal reflections of what contributes to meaningful participation. Three sub-themes emerged from these discussions: spiritual development, skills and knowledge development, and socialization/bonding

Spiritual Development

Team members made numerous connections between meaningful participation and their faith. Team members conceptualized spiritual development, as opportunities to connect with their faith, by helping others. One team member shared this perspective of spiritual development:

“Pakiki paghalubilo [being sociable], it is about getting to know myself and others better. The ability to share myself with others, to learn more about life.
Pagpapayamang-isip [being wiser], learning to decide, thinking morally and ethically and being of service to the community.”

Another team member shared this personal insight:

“When I join the organization, it’s not so much gaining something in return. I join the organization because we have so many needs as human beings, spiritual, social, and other needs, and in joining an organization, we are able to meet these needs. You learn a lot in the process, and you are able to share things that you are not able to learn in school. That is the main motivating power for a person to join an organization—help others and gain knowledge. Things we learn only by interacting with others, and not in school.”

Another team member, shared the following, while explaining why he took a photo of two other members,

“This is why I joined the organization. We are run by older persons, who want to serve and share what the Lord has given them, commitment. This is a photo of two members of PILKAN. I want to share this with you because they are examples. You can’t see on their faces when they have problems, but they like everyone else do, and yet they are still so devoted to helping others, they work hard and are committed.”

Another team member provides the example of their local health team [a group of volunteers, of community gerontologist, masseuse and home care assistants, all older people, who are trained by COSE staff, to monitor the health of other older people in their communities] conducting their regular monitoring visits, to older people in their communities, to highlight this sub-theme. The team member said:

“Those of us in the local health teams, we are all volunteers, we go as a team and we do our regular monitoring visits to those who are bed ridden and sick. The home care assistant helps with washing clothes, cleaning dishes, etc., the CG [community gerontologist] takes their blood pressure and vital signs, and we have masseuse to do massages as well. We also listen to their stories, and talk to their families, they need support too. We do this because it makes us feel happy, after all the visits, we think over what we have done the whole day, that is helping other people without any compensation, we feel happy about that.”

Skills and knowledge development

Team members agreed that opportunities to acquire new and/or improve skills and knowledge, contribute to meaningful participation. Team members provided many examples, of their own skills and knowledge development, since joining the community organizations. One team member, who is also a community gerontologist, shares her experiences:

“I have developed so many skills, since I have been here. For example, I know how to take blood pressure and check vital signs of the members. Sometimes, our local health team is invited by organizations to attend free health seminars focusing on older people, and this is where I can improve my knowledge. For example, next week we are invited to a whole day seminar focused on chronic health issues for older people, and ten of us from the local health teams of PILKAN are attending, including me.”

Another team member, who manages the Botika Binhi (a small drug store that PILKAN operates, where older people have access to cheaper medicines), also shares her experience:

“I learned a lot since joining, like how to do book keeping and recording, and knowledge about drugs and their use. I manage the Botika Binhi. I need to present account summaries every month and give updates to the group in our meetings, so that is why I learned these skills. I have little formal education, but the people here have shared their skills and knowledge with me, they taught me, and I am happy for it.”

Socialization/bonding

Team members shared the perspective that socialization/bonding contributes to meaningful participation. Team members conceptualized their inter-personal relationships through the Filipino value of *pakiki sama* (togetherness). One member provides the following explanation of *pakiki sama*:

“*Pakiki sama*, is more than just a relationship between two people. It is about a deep understanding, that I understand you and you understand me, it’s an unspoken understanding for each other. It takes time to develop this type of relationship, *pakiki sama* doesn’t just happen, it takes time and effort.”

Formal social events PILKAN hosts include the Lolo and LoLa (Filipino terms, for Grandfather and Grandmother) Valentine’s Day (which is also a fundraising activity) and beach outing, held annually. Socialization opportunities, are not exclusive to formal events, and are embedded in every activity and program. For example, one team member said the following, while explaining a photo showing a member of the local health team, checking the blood pressure of another older person:

“See here, we are addressing the health needs of not only members, but other older people in the community, as well. You can see that we do things together; we go as a health team, as a group, to visit our members, and other older people. You can also see we are laughing, because for us it is also a time for socialization and bonding.”

Team members agreed that these opportunities are bonding moments, where older people can develop their own network of peers, for companionship and friendship. One team member shared this personal reflection, highlighting the deep bonds developed in the group:

“When we started the group, we were all strangers to each other but now we have a deeper bond. This is where the seminars, visitations come into play. When we started, we did not know each other but because of this bonding spirit, it was developed. Chances for us to get to know each other were more common. You start to know the people you work with. I mean many of us have been living in the same neighbourhood for a long time, but we were never close, until we came together through the organization. I come from a different province, same with the others here, but now our closeness; it is different.”

Self-sustainability

The team agreed that PILKAN is a network of interdependent older people, where older people can achieve a level of self-sustainability. Self-sustainability is, perceived by team members, the ability of older people to address issues and concerns related to income security, health, and other matters, specific to needs and challenges of older people. One team members shares the following perspective:

“The people here are support for me, support for issues and concerns that I don’t really want to be dependent on my children for and things that the government doesn’t support with either. The group shares the burden of the problems I have, and this helps.”

Income Security

One team member shares this perspective, in relation to income security:

“Nobody wants to be totally dependent on their children. So, we have an income generating program, members can apply for money to help them with their income generating projects. These savings and lending programs we have are important, to help

older people from being victims to high interest rates, and so they don't have to borrow from loan sharks."

Another team member commented that in some situations, older people are the primary financial support for their families (children and grandchildren). One team member explained, through a photo she took of an older person, who received a small loan from the organization to operate his home based store, financially supporting his family:

"This is a photo of a leader in the community. He has a business. He can't stop working because he needs to help sustain the family. Even if he is 72 years old, he can't give up working, he has to support his children and grandchildren."

Another team member expressed through the Filipino value of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), how important the income generating programs were for her to achieve a level of self-sustainability,

"Utang na loob, that describes how I feel toward the organization. If it were not for the income generating programs, and the money they lent, to run my small home business, I don't know how my family and I are able to survive."

Team members also provide examples of how self-sustainability for older people is related to structural issues, and how advocacy activities are needed to achieve long term sustainability.

Team members shared the perspective that the government does not provide comprehensive programs and service for older people. One team member shares the following example:

"There are no comprehensive programs for us in this country. We are marginalized. The government does not pay a lot of attention to us, so we have to help each other. In the Philippines the government just passed a social pension for poor older people, and even still people are not receiving it. This is still a battle for us, the first was to get social pension, now the hard part is to make sure the government follows through."

Another team member added:

“You know the Expanded Senior Citizens Act? It’s supposed to provide us with a 20% discount on medicine, but only the large pharmacies actually give the discount, and these places are located far from the areas where the poor live.”

One of the members interviewed by the team member shares this perspective:

“One of the benefits of the community organizations is that it helps the government become aware of our issues, our problems we experience.”

Health

Examples were provided by team members, highlighting opportunities for older people to address various health issues and concerns, through the community based health programs of PILKAN. One team member said:

“Health is a common issue—expensive, the government does not have concrete plans and it is inaccessible to the poor. Medicines are expensive, and the legislation that passed giving seniors 20% discount, is only given in big drug stores not accessible to the poor. We have our Botika Binhi, but we don’t have all the medicines in our store. At least it’s a way older people can access some cheaper medicines.”

Other Issues

There are other issues, specific to older people, the team members relate to self-sustainability and community organizing. For example, the burial funds benefits (BFB) and *pondong damayan* (mutual aid) programs within PILKAN are programs that emerged from a common challenge faced by their members. To have the financial means for a burial, for themselves and/or their spouse, is a challenge for older people who are poor. In the BFB

program, members contribute a monthly fee of 12.50 PHP (equivalent to approximately \$0.30 CDN), and benefit amounts are dependent on contribution amounts. The benefits claim amount range from 1000 to 8000 PHP (equivalent to approximately, \$24-\$190 CDN). Pondong damayan is another program that assists members and their families for funeral funds. In this program, every member of the community organization contributes 10 PHP (equivalent to \$0.24 CDN) to the family when a member or their spouse passes away. For example, one community organization of the PILKAN federation, has 600 members, so upon death of a member or their spouse, the family can collect 6000 PHP (equivalent to approximately \$143) from the pondong damayan program. The funds from both the BFB and pondong damayan program, address a critical issue for older people and their families, who cannot afford basic funeral costs. One member shares how these programs emerged:

“A lot of families do not have enough money for a funeral, these programs came about because this was a concern expressed by us, and these programs is a way we older people can ensure that we have enough money for our own burial or for our spouse”

Another team member added:

“The best program that the community organizations have is the BFB and pondong damayan program, because it helps those of us, who are really poor, and cannot have a proper burial. Knowing that there will be funds for this, is one less thing we and our family have to worry about.”

Videovoice

Spirituality, community organizations, and lived experiences of older people, are key interconnected themes that emerged from the team member’s perspectives of how older

people are pillars of strength during times of emergencies. These three themes are also interconnected with the key themes that emerged from the photovoice sessions.

Spirituality of older people

Team members conceptualize this spirituality, as a strong will and a commitment to help others. One team member provides this perspective:

“Pakikipagkapwa tao -I will help others out for as long as I can, even if it is in small things. Whatever, I can do in times of emergencies, whatever it is, I will help. Being able to help brings me much joy. Helping others is a reflection of God’s love for us.”

Another team member commented:

“Helping others is a commitment we make as an older person in this organization, and this means we do whatever we can to help others, in times of emergencies, those who are worse off because of the disasters. When Ondoy [a typhoon in 2009 with major impacts] happened our area was not as affected as others, some areas were badly affected, and of course we knew we had to help.”

One team member shared this perspective:

“We want people to know that older people can help, that it’s not just those who are young we can help in so many different ways when disasters happen. We are strong, just in different ways, and we will do whatever we can to help others.”

Community organizations of older people

The community organizations are organized networks of older people, and from the team member’s perspective, this represents a pillar of strength, during times of emergencies.

One of the older persons, the team members interviewed said the following:

“When Ondoy happened, we did not get any help from the local barangay [local government unit]. The first to help us were COSE and the older people of the bagong silangan federation. The older people of sitio bakal was not organized before Ondoy, and after we experienced this, and the help that the older people from the community organizations in other areas provided us with during a time we needed help most, we saw how important it was for older people to be organized.”

One team member shares this experience:

“When Ondoy happened, we immediately got together as a group. We were not as affected as other areas. We had emergency meetings, with all the leaders from our areas, we discussed what we could do to help, and we asked COSE how we can help the other areas. We helped with putting the care packages together at COSE for the older people in other areas we went around our neighbourhoods asking for old clothes for donations, as part of the care packages.”

Lived experiences of older people

The lived experiences of older people in numerous disasters throughout their life represent another unique strength of older people during times of emergencies. Team members agreed that older people have much to contribute in relief operations, in addressing both material and non-material needs of people during these difficult times, as they have been repeated survivors of previous disasters. One team member commented,

“I myself have experienced many disasters already, not just in the cities, but also in the province where I lived. Tidal waves that would sweep our houses away, I have experienced that in my province. I think just being a survivor is a strength already. Having survived not one, but many disasters, is already a strength of older people.”

One team member commented even if they were never directly affected by many disasters, they have participated in many relief operations:

“I myself have not experienced directly many disasters, but I have been part of many relief operations, helping others who are most affected. This is where our help, those who are not as affected, this is where our help is needed the most.”

Planning of dissemination activities

Team members agreed that the final products can be used as resources for PILKAN, when soliciting donations to fund their future projects/programs. One team member said:

“We develop proposals for funders to donate to our projects/programs, and this video can be used to show others about what community organization of older people is for, and the programs and services that we operate, how it helps older people in poor communities.”

Team members also agreed that the photos developed, can be put into a photo album and brought to new orientation meetings to show other older people, what their community organizations are about. One team member said:

“We can put the pictures into a photo album, for others to see. Maybe for new orientation meetings, other older people who are interested in joining can see the pictures in the album and get a better idea of what we are about.”

Discussion

Implications of Research

Community organizing with older people: modes and frameworks

The discussion and key themes emerged from this study, present a perspective of community organizing that incorporates elements from all three of Rothman's (2001) modes described earlier in the Literature Review (Rothman, 2001). The integration of the traditional Filipino value of bayanihan, presented by team members, is about collective and united efforts, for the common good of the community. This idea is aligned with the locality development mode, which is about building social cohesion and identifying a common set of community values (Rothman, 2001).

Team members identified how community organizations are avenues to solve specific problems, experienced by older people, living in poor and underserved communities. This perspective is aligned with Rothman's (2001) social planning/policy mode, which community organizing is an intervention to solve specific community problems, and formal organizations are the avenues to address social welfare issues (Rothman, 2001).

The recognition of older people as a marginalized group, and the discussions around various structural issues and advocacy activities, connect with Rothman's (2001) social action mode (Rothman, 2001). Their experiences in advocacy activities, such as lobbying for a social pension, highlight how community organizing is used to mobilize older people around issues, to affect social change.

On Pyles' (2009) community organizing spectrum, the perspectives provided by team members, present a community organizing framework that falls toward the transformative end. Paulo Freire's (1973) ideas of popular education, facilitating dialogue, raising critical consciousness and capacity building are emphasized through the shared perspectives of the team (Freire, 1973). The personal experiences and reflections of team members, of their personal growth and development, are examples of how community organizing is used to facilitate Freire's (1973) educational process (Freire, 1973).

Team members' perspectives also show elements of a community organizing framework with a utilitarianism orientation. The income generating programs, community based health programs, burial funds benefits and pong dong damayan programs, are examples of how community organizing is used to achieve concrete and measurable outcomes for the community (Pyles, 2009). The advocacy activities related to the Expanded Senior's Citizens Act, and social pension for older people who are poor, are also examples provided by team members that highlight this utilitarianism orientation, to demand inclusion within existing political and social systems (Pyles, 2009).

Team members' perspectives of community organizing are not reduced to a specific mode or framework. Rather, community organizing is dynamic and adapting to the needs of its participants. These perspectives of community organizing reflect the diversity within this age group, and the complex and multi-faceted issues and challenges experienced by older people. Important in understanding the team's perspectives of community organizing, is not specific models or frameworks adopted, rather the idea that community organizing creates

opportunities for older people, ordinary citizens, to facilitate changes for the individual, others and larger community.

Combating ageism

The study shared experiences and perspectives of older people, and the themes that emerged shape a view of ageing and old age that reject the declinist view, described earlier by Thomas (2007). The experiences of the team members show how growth and development, as for any other age group, is important with older people. For example, team members' personal reflections on spiritual development show how exploring deep philosophical questions, such as how are we to live our lives, do not stop, as we approach the older years of life. The passion to learn new skills and knowledge also continues into old age, and the findings of this study highlight this perspective. Ageism permeates current social structures (Thomas, 2007). Ageism frames the rapidly ageing population as a problem, and actively creates the problems (Thomas, 2007). The shared perspectives of the team members, contribute to the deconstruction of these ageist structure, and to a radical reinterpretation of ageing and old age—one that reflects the lived experiences of older people and their capacities (Thomas, 2007).

International Context

Older people represent a large portion of the poor, in developing countries (Help Age, 2002). Addressing poverty issues, in the International context, require a focus on the unique needs and issues of older people. The shared experiences of the team members, in poor and underserved communities, are examples of how older people and older people community organizations, contribute to the international development. For example, the income

generating programs provide a level of income security, for older people who are poor. The advocacy activities, shared by the team members, highlight how through community organizing, older people are mainstreaming issues of ageing and old age into the development agenda, at both local and national levels.

Canadian Context

The qualitative study was conducted in the cultural context of the Philippines. The results of the study show perspectives of community organizing that emerge from the cultural context of the participants. Deeply held Filipino cultural values, such as bayanihan, pakiki sama, and utang na loob, play a central role in organizing process and objectives, meaningful participation, and relationships within the group. The findings of the study contribute to literature that promote the centrality of culture, in community discourse and practice. This is important in the Canadian context, home to a culturally diverse population.

Social Work practice and research with older people: CBPR and visual methodologies

Social justice and human rights and dignity, are two core values of the social work profession (International Federation of Social Workers, 2004). However, gerontological social work has largely focused on a care approach to practice with older people. This CBPR study focused on community level practice with older people, a neglected field within gerontological social work. The shared perspectives of this study, voices the unique capacities and strengths of older people, encouraging an empowerment approach to practice with older people. An approach to practice that respects the human rights and dignity of older people.

The production of a video, depicting older people as pillars of strength in times of emergencies, emerged from the request of team members. Team members took ownership of this project, and developed their own video assignments and planned their own activities. The researchers contributions were primarily in compiling their ideas and products into a final video production, using Windows Live Movie Maker. The study is an example, where older people are equitable partners in the research process, and also developed their own research project within this process. A CBPR approach to research and visual methodologies used by older people in this study, highlight older peoples abilities to both participate and lead the research process.

Conclusion

“Our experience with longevity is entering into a new phase that will test and overturn some of our most cherished assumptions, new and old. Like a great conquering army resting quietly outside a sleeping city, old age is preparing for its greatest triumph.”

-William Thomas, 2007

This qualitative study shows how older people have unique insights and perspectives that are valuable contributions to community practice and development. The experiences of the team members are examples of how older people are creative social actors, addressing many of the social welfare issues and challenges, we are facing in the 21st century. The study highlights how when opportunities are available for older people, their unique insights, capacities and strengths are realized. Findings of this study represent stories of ageing and old age; of growing, learning and of being. These stories belong to older people, who are radically re-interpreting what ageing and old age means.

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