Rising From Adversity: Unveiling Filipino Muslims' Motivation And Interest In Pursuing Career Success Through Education

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Abstract: This study underscores the critical role of determination and resilience in surmounting obstacles and achieving career success. This compelling study investigates the myriad reason behind school dropouts among Maguindanawn students, from financial hardships to armed conflicts in their communities. One participant even suffered from psychiatric illness due to the trauma of armed conflicts. However, these obstacles did not thwart the determination of the participants to pursue their academic goals with tenacity. Through their perseverance, they excelled professionally, gained invaluable leadership skills, and served as shining examples for future Maguindanawn students. This study highlights the crucial role of education in achieving professional success and fulfilling personal aspirations. It emphasizes the need for schools in Moro-dominated areas to promote education as a vehicle for financial stability, fulfilling religious duties, and succeeding in the workplace, inspiring all students, particularly dropouts, to return to the classroom.

Keywords: Maguindanawn, dropouts, motivation, higher education, and career success

INTRODUCTION

The impact of dropping out of school goes far beyond the individual and can have dire consequences for society as a whole. Unemployment, lower incomes, poor health, higher mortality rates, increased criminal activity and incarceration, reliance on public aid, and low voter turnout are just a few of the devastating outcomes that dropouts experience when compared to high school graduates. Alarming statistics reveal that one in ten Filipinos between the ages of 6 to 24 did not attend school in 2018. While the Department of Education reports an increasing enrollment rate, the numbers still paint a bleak picture. With a dropout rate of 6.38 percent for elementary school students and 7.82 percent for secondary school students, the Philippines now tops the chart with the highest dropout rates in any

ASEAN nation, sounding the alarm for urgent action to prevent a potential societal catastrophe (Tadalan, 2019).

When it comes to financial success and employment opportunities, the gap between high school graduates and college graduates earns a significantly higher median annual salary than their high school counterparts. This is because college graduates have the advantage of specialized knowledge and training, which opens the doors to higher-paying jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

However, the reality for some students in the Philippines is that the challenges they face in completing their education are much more basic. Hunger, work, and conflict can all disrupt their ability to attend school regularly, resulting in a significant number of students who are not currently enrolled in school. These issues are particularly prevalent in Mindanao, where decades of insurgent activity have left their mark.

The World Bank (2021) also reported the consequences of the challenges are evident in the high illiteracy rates and learning poverty that continue to plague the region. In the verdant provinces of Cotabato and Maguindanao, Maguindanawn students face a multitude of obstacles that threaten to derail their dreams of attaining a college education. The daunting challenges they encounter include poverty, insufficient resources, cultural barriers, and safety concerns. Yet, these tenacious students refuse to be daunted by these obstacles and remain resolute in their pursuit of educational and professional success.

Scholars in the field of career studies have, in recent years, delved deeply into the subject of career success in their theoretical and empirical research (Lawrence, 2011; Lirio, Lituchy, Monserrat, Olivas-Lujan, Duffy, Fox, and Santos, 2007). While significant strides have been made in the study of career success, the bulk of the research in this area has been conducted using quantitative methodologies in Western countries, primarily the United States. This has led to a growing call for more research on career success in diverse work environments, both across and within cultures, using qualitative approaches (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Heslin, 2005). To meet these calls, previous research has urged the expansion of qualitative inquiry into career success within non-Western contexts, such as the Maguindanawn people in Mindanao, living in remote provinces in the Philippines (Briscoe, Poon, Abdulghani, and Jones, 2015). This approach could enable a more comprehensive exploration of the particular difficulties in their marginalized community as they strive to attain professional success.

These Maguindanawn represent the epitome of resilience and fortitude, refusing to be held back by the difficulties they face in their pursuit of a college education stop them. They serve as an example for others, showing that, even under the most trying conditions, tenacity and perseverance are necessary components for success. This study can better encourage and enable understanding of these individuals' goals and aspirations by having a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Although many studies have investigated why students drop out of school, a handful of studies examined the experiences of students who returned to school after dropping out to receive their higher education and succeed in their careers, even though many studies have looked at why individuals leave school. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining not only the reasons for dropping out but also

what motivated students to return to school and how their college education contributed to their professional success. The research questions that this study aimed to answer were: What are the experiences of students who dropped out and later returned to school? How did their college education impact their career success?

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Research

The present study is a qualitative research inquiry that sought to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Maguindanawn participants. The research process involved employing accurate reporting and direct quotations from the participants' dialogues to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the findings. The qualitative methodology adopted in this study involved analyzing data, interpreting its relevance, and developing themes inductively from specific to general. To achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, the case study approach was specifically employed, with a focus on the experiences of Maguindanawn students who dropped out of school but later returned and completed their college degrees.

The study aimed to achieve a profound comprehension of the participants' experiences by utilizing a case study approach. Four Maguindanawn individuals were selected as the units of observation. The units of analysis were their experiences of dropping out and returning, their motivation to finish a college degree, and the significance of a college education in professional success, which were the primary focus of the study.

Subjects

To ensure the selection of appropriate participants, the inclusion criteria for the study were limited to Maguindanawn individuals who dropped out of school but intended to return, were motivated to complete their college degrees, and became professionals in their respective fields. Additionally, all participants were considered the first in their families to earn a college degree based on their parents' educational backgrounds. It is noteworthy that the participants' households had incomes below the poverty line, which was equivalent to PHP 5,000.00 per month.

Instrument

The present study employed a data-gathering method that involved thorough interviews of participants. These interviews were recorded through audio recording and subsequent transcription. Following the guidelines proposed by Boyce and Neale (2006), an introductory note was provided to participants, containing pertinent information on the length, format, and possible questions to be covered during the interview. The interviews were conducted in person and lasted an average of 60 to

90 minutes per participant. Because the interviews were semi-structured, a conversational style of inquiry was possible while still focusing on the research objectives. A pre-approved list of questions, created by a group of experts, was utilized to maintain consistency across interviews.

Data Collection

Individual detailed interviews offer more in-depth information for an information-rich case study, although they may be subject to bias (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood, 2015). Despite this, the study used this approach as it provides a relaxed and friendly environment for collecting information. The interviewing process was designed to facilitate participants in discussing their obstacles, perspectives, and how their college education played a role in their professional advancement (Creswell, 2009). The researcher documented, classified, and carefully examined all participant accounts or stories throughout the entire research process. To protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher assigned participant numbers to each interviewee (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, and Cheraghi, 2014).

Data Analysis

The study utilized inductive data analysis, which is a qualitative approach that aligns with the constant comparative method. The three concurrent activities involved in qualitative data analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction is the initial step in determining the meaning of the data, which involves identifying patterns, links, and relationships. Data coding is the second activity, which entails creating categories of phenomena from recorded data and then managing and retrieving data according to the codes. Researchers may choose to code descriptively or interpretively based on Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) suggestion of reading data several times before developing a coding scheme based on categories and details of settings, perspectives, and views of subjects, processes, activities, events, strategies, methods observed, and social relationships. Finally, data display presents the results of the analysis either in narrative descriptions or visual displays. The study used document reviews and interview transcripts as primary data sources and presented the results in narrative descriptions.

The results section of the study included a discussion since the analysis was qualitative. Thematic groups were formed based on the participants' accounts of their experiences with dropping out and returning to school, their motivations, and how earning a degree contributed to their professional success. The section presented and discussed the qualitative findings using the participants' own words to ensure the credibility and repeatability of the themes. The themes were all derived from the candid responses of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section discussed the experience of the participants in dropping out and returning. Armed conflicts, trauma, and economic difficulties in their barangays were the main causes of the participants' experiences that caused them from dropping out of school as well as the unique experience of Participant 2, who developed an undiagnosed psychological problem and unusual paranormal experiences.

Armed conflicts and trauma. As evidenced by the experiences shared by the participants in this study, armed conflicts and trauma in local communities can have a profound impact on individuals' access to education. The unique and diverse encounters with armed conflict discussed by each participant highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to addressing the challenges posed by conflict in education. A report by UNICEF (2015) has shown that millions of primary school-aged children are unable to access education due to armed conflict in their countries. This finding underscores the devastating impact that conflict can have on children's lives and the importance of providing support to those affected by it. Humanitarian organizations have recognized education as an essential component of aid efforts in conflict-affected areas, as it can contribute to stability and disseminate life-saving messages (UNICEF, 2015).

One participant in the study (Participant 2) presented a particularly unique experience, having to contend with both psychological issues and paranormal experiences, in addition to the challenges posed by armed conflicts and trauma. The combined impact of these factors further exacerbated the difficulties they faced in completing their college education. Nevertheless, despite the multiple obstacles encountered, all participants expressed a strong motivation to persevere and complete their education, recognizing the critical role that it played in their personal and professional success.

The study's results also revealed that the impact of armed conflicts extended beyond the physical destruction of property and infrastructure. The destruction of homes, as described by Participant 2 in the Maguindanawn language, resulted in the displacement of individuals, leaving them with no place to go. Such experiences highlight the urgent need to address the impact of armed conflicts on education and provide support to those affected by it.

"Katademan ko paganay na dili kami pakatalus pangagi ka penggilek kami pawn. Nya pan nakalunsan lun na dala den paguliyan nami ka pinutong nu mga sundalo" (I could still remember, during the war we could not continue our schooling. What aggravated out depressing situation was we had no homes to go to because the soldiers burnt them.) Participant 4 added:

"Panun i kapatalus nami mangagi i penggilek den i langun na mga taw. Su mga maystra na dili den pakapamandu ka delikadu i sitwasyon., su iskwela na napuno na bakwit" (How will I continue my schooling when the lives of the people were threatened. The teachers could not go to school because of the dangerous situation, and the schools were occupied by the Internally Displaced Individual or Families).

The narratives shared by the participants in this study provide a poignant testimony to the disruptive and perilous nature of life in the barangay during the 1970s. The lack of security in the area created significant challenges for adults seeking to work in their fields and for students attempting to attend classes. Specifically, Participants 2 and 4 noted that the situation was particularly dire during the martial law era in the Philippines, which further exacerbated the difficulties they faced.

During this period, soldiers of the Philippine Government and the Ilonggo Land Grabbers Association (ILAGA) inflicted mistreatment and violence upon men in the barangays, adding to the already distressing situation. Muslims who fought for their rights and were branded as rebels were imprisoned as a result of martial law being imposed by the Marcos Sr. administration. The testimony of Participant 2 brought home the seriousness of the situation because her father and brothers were imprisoned at the time (Mcamis, 1974).

These stories highlight the considerable difficulties and risks that people and communities living in conflict areas confront. The impact of martial law and the associated violence on education is a critical concern, with many students being forced to cease attending school. Those who took part in this study gave moving recollections of how the war affected their education and daily lives. The individuals and their families were severely impacted by the unpredictability and lack of security in their village. The armed struggle between the Philippine Government and the Moro rebel organizations was many decades-long conflicts that prompted all the participants from the two older participants (2 and 4) - who were Baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1964) and the other two younger participants (1 and 3) - who were millennials (born from 1982 to 1994) to leave their homes and drop out of school. The lack of peace and order in their communities was the common pressing concern for all the participants. The persistence of armed conflicts between the Philippine Government and the Moro rebel groups placed their safety in jeopardy, causing them to constantly move from one relative's house to another to avoid danger. The participants indicated their extreme frustration with the ongoing armed confrontations, with Participant 3 having lost a family member who had defended their land against government forces as a Moro warrior. She also had to move with her family from one relative's house to another to escape the potentially lethal situation. Participant 3 recalled this challenging tale by relating:

> *"Napasangan kami a benal sa guligaw lu sa lekami manawt ako pan, nasugat si Bapa ko na bala sya sa taligkudan a nadsabapan na kinapatay nin. Subla i kinggelek nami ka tigi ama makalebeng taw si Bapa nwa na mawa taw sya."* (My uncle was killed by a gunshot while we were living in a time of armed conflict, and my father told me that after we bury your uncle, we will leave this place right away because we were so terrified.)

The events described had a profound impact, causing not only a disruption in the student's education but also posing a serious threat to people's safety and freedom of movement. The consequences were dire as they prevented individuals from engaging in everyday activities such as

farming and working due to the risk to their lives. Participants stated having gone through trauma that would follow them even as they slept:

> *"Di kami makatulog dahil sa sobrang takot. Di kami pwedeng mag-ingay sa gabi dahil kapag marinig kami ng mga sundalo, di nami katawan basi imatayan kami nilan bun."* (*We were unable to sleep due to our fear, and we were afraid to make noise at night for fear that the troops would overhear us and kill us.*)

They faced significant challenges surviving due to their inability to satisfy their basic needs and fear for their safety. The older participants' accounts were confirmed by the fact that by mid-1971, a total of 18 communities in the northeastern part of the Cotabato Valley had been affected by sectarian violence (McAmis 1974, 46). This conflict resulted in greater losses in terms of human lives, property damage, farmer deaths, and displaced populations. The violence was solely aimed at new settlements in areas predominantly inhabited by Christians. In an editorial in a newspaper early in 1971, the violence was attributed to "Ilonggo extremists new to the area" (Mindanao Cross, February 20, 1971). These were the so-called Ilaga, or "Rats," Christian militias that used violence to terrorize Muslims. The majority of these Christians were Ilonggos. The most heinous deed the Ilaga ever perpetrated and the one that had the largest effect was the killing of 65 men, women, and children in a mosque in the town of Manili in June 1971. Several speculative writings have asserted that a group of Ilonggo Christian politicians created, organized, or financed the Ilaga (George 1980; Majul 1985; Mercado 1984). These hypotheses have a variety of logical problems as well as a lack of almost all reliable data. However, there is evidence to indicate that certain politicians gave some support, and reason to assume it would be in their interest to do so.

Financial Problems. Financial challenges were identified as one of the major obstacles in completing college by both the participants in this study and students who drop out of school. Research conducted by Hunter and May (2011) suggests that students from poorer backgrounds face increasing pressure to withdraw from school as they grow older, particularly as the opportunity cost of their time increases. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that most dropouts' parents are not employed, resulting in low household incomes and children being called upon to supplement the household's income by earning wages themselves or taking on additional tasks to free up other household members for work, leading to dropping out of school (Rauscher and Elliott, 2014). Financial challenges were identified as one of the major obstacles in completing college by both the participants in this study and students who drop out of school.

The armed conflict experienced by the participants harmed their financial situation, exacerbating the already difficult circumstances in the barangays where they resided. Although there was no guarantee that those who relocated to the barangay población during the armed conflict would not face financial difficulties, at least they were spared the threat to their lives. Participants 2 and 4 faced significant challenges in the absence of resources and other critical conditions. They were compelled to transfer to the Barangay Poblacion to stay away from the armed conflicts and continue

their schooling by transferring to the población schools. Participant 2 stayed with her sister, while Participant 4 became a working student in her aunt's house. To secure her safety from the armed conflicts and continue her education, Participant 2 helped take care of her eldest sister's children, but she still required assistance due to her serious psychological condition. She continued to see creatures following her and feared being captured by them. Participant 4 was employed as a seller at her aunt's modest restaurant during this time. She resumed her education at the start of the semester in the primary school in the barrio población after having dropped out of school in their barangay for three years while simultaneously working as a student by assisting in the restaurant to support her and her family's needs.

Similar to participant 1, who expressed his feelings that his family's continuing lack of financial resources was the reason he dropped out of school after moving from one barangay to another in order to spare their life from armed conflicts, *"Noong pag-stop ko, nainggit ako sa mga studyanteng nakasuot ng uniform at pumupunta sa school. Naisip ko na sana ako din, at dahil walang pangtustos ang aking mga magulang, napagitong ko i kapanuntol sa galbekan. Limu ako sa General Santos City ka menggalbek ako lu sa mga malls. Naka duwa lagun aku bun luba ka endu ku kadtabangan sila Umie endu si Abe. Salta na endu aku bun makalimud sa kulta para ipagenrol ko sa eskwela sa mauma a opening na klase".* He said that when he stopped from school, he felt envious of the students' wearing uniforms and going to school. So, he thought of working to support his personal and family's needs and to be able to save for his schooling in the incoming school-year. So, because it was impossible for the participants to continue their schooling, they decided to work (P1, P3, and P4), but P2 could not work outside her sister's house because she remained unwell with her difficult illness.

A psychological problem brought on by the trauma. According to Murthy and Lakshminarayana (2006), the mental health impact of war on the civilian population is one of the most critical effects of armed conflicts. Research shows that the incidence and prevalence of mental disorders increase substantially, especially among vulnerable populations such as women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The severity of the trauma experienced and the accessibility of physical and emotional support are key factors influencing prevalence rates. In developing nations, cultural and religious coping mechanisms are often utilized to address the psychological impact of war. Moreover, research has shown that combat-related trauma can have long-lasting negative effects on mental health. A study by Munjiza, Britvic, and Radman (2017) attempted to determine whether individuals who experience clinically significant personality-related issues 15 years after a conflict are more likely to have experienced serious war-related trauma than those who do not. The findings suggest that the long-term impact of armed conflicts on interpersonal relationships, social functioning, and mental health is significant and warrants attention.

The present study also found that armed conflict-related trauma had significant aftereffects, particularly in vulnerable populations such as girls and children. Participant 2, for instance, struggled to process her trauma, which ultimately led to troubling psychological issues. These findings highlight the critical need for interventions and support programs to address the mental health needs of individuals

living in war-affected areas, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Such efforts can help mitigate the long-term effects of war-related trauma and promote overall well-being in affected communities.

The participant opened out during the in-depth interview about her issues. She recalled that when she was 13 years old and was invited to a combatants' training by her older sister, a trained young woman combatant, her illness began. She recalled and said:

> *"Thirteen years old pa lang ako noon. Isang araw, isinama ako ng Ate ko sa training camp nila. Buong araw kami doon hangga't sa doon na kami nakatulog. Kinabukasan meron na akong nararamdamang hindi maganda. Nakauwi na kami noon sa bahay. Umiiyak ako ng malakas dahil natatakot ako. Meron akong nakikitang mga mata na nakatitig sa akin. Masigay i mga mata nilan. Sumisilip sila sa mga butas ng bintana. Pedtalu ku kila ama na dili aku nilan itabun ka aden kailay ku a mga mata. Natatakot ako dahil kukunin daw nila ako at dadalhin nila ako sa langit at ikakasal daw nila ako doon. Sobrang hindi ako makatulog noon."*

She said during the interview that her overnight stay at the camp was the cause of the psychological disorder. She was unable to sleep at night because she could see numerous shining eyes staring at her through the gaps in their windows. She was dying from a severe fear of being pursued by the *jinns* or evil spirits, therefore she could not be left alone. She was concerned that they would fly her up into the air to marry her. She was unable to sleep due to her intense fear. Participant 2 was still experiencing psychological symptoms, which she claimed could be made worse by her past experiences with being frightened by violence and armed conflict.

But, her family, in particular his father, continued to assist in her healing by using cultural and religious practices. Her condition improved after repeated tries from the healers, and now she hardly ever saw these animals. She was even sent to a medical doctor, but could not diagnose her condition. One day, when a healer learned of her previously troubled health, she offered to volunteer to help the patient's good condition remains stable for more than a year by calling upon the powers of the *jinns*. The patient claimed she was already ready to return to school. But, after healing numerous *Asatids* (meaning many *Ustadz* or Islamic pastors), Participant 2 turned down the old woman healer's offer. The following night, she would once more have a distressing vision of these monsters after rejecting the said healer. She said:

> *"Basi na-offend ko sekanin, sa offer nin antu, na hiningi nya na i-inflict naman ako ng mga jinns."*

Her ailment returned, impeding her plans to finish school. Before she fully recovered from the *Asatids'* spiritual intervention, these intermittent circumstances persisted for 3 to 4 years. *Asatids* were tasked with routinely healing her by calling upon the powers of Allah the Almighty to ward off the jinn disturbance to let her recover from her misery. This was the start of her quest to attend school.

Returning to school experiences

This section explores the participants' re-enlistment experiences, which centered on three themes: *(1) beginning to complete their education, (2) adjusting to missed classes,* and *(3) stopping the cycle of dropping out and re-enlistment.*

Beginning to Complete Their Education. The participants overcame many different reasons for leaving. They were prepared to begin the new academic year. After missing three years of education due to employment, participants 1 and 4 returned. They were able to save money for board and lodging and enrollment in regular school, but they continued to be working students. Participant 1 worked as a student-paid laborer at one of the school's institutes, whereas Participant 4 continued to work as an assistant in her aunt's restaurant. Participant 3 had a unique experience since she joined the Alternative Learning System, or ALS, to help her keep up with her primary school batch. Similar to Participants 1 and 4, Participant 3 was able to sustain herself by working with her relatives to sell local foods in the market. Participant 2 had returned to school after experiencing psychological hardship and paranormal experiences for three to four years. Her oldest sister and her sister's spouse paid for her school fees.

Adjusting to missed school years from dropping out. All of the participants had to deal with coping difficulties, but they eventually overcame them. They typically overcame the difficulties by working hard in class and making an effort to keep up with their younger classmates. The participants would efficiently use the library to complete their assignments. When the older participants (ages 2 and 3) were having problems with their assignments, they would seek assistance from their classmates. To create PowerPoint presentations for their reports and projects, participants 1 and 4 borrowed laptops from their classmates. One participant recalled:

> *"Kung my mga reports ako, humiriram ako sa mga close ko na mga classmates or sa mga ka-org ko. Papedsembayn aku nilan bun umayka aden mga reports endu projects ako."*

All of the participants agreed that reading books aided in their ability to comprehend the lesson. Except for Participant 2, who made the honors list during her high school years, they were not among the pupils to graduate from school with flying colors. She claimed that because her sister's children were both high achievers and academically minded, her sister and her husband already had collections of encyclopedias at their home from when they both held well-paying jobs at the university. She was able to use the educational resources in her schooling as a result.

But, Participant 4 needed to finish the ALS modules. She, therefore, had fewer school experiences and merely needed to finish the modules at her speed and convenient time. To pass, she merely had to finish the modules. Thankfully, they all graduated from high school and were prepared to enroll in college.

Stopping the cycle of dropping out and returning.   Only Participant 1 among the four participants dropped out after enrolling for his freshman year of college owing to financial difficulties. There were 11 people in the family, including his grandparents and their other relatives who also sought

safety from their own family as well as the extended family members. He then resumed his employment and, after saving some money once more, enlisted once more the following year. Participant 1 recalled:

> *"Maraming beses akong nakatigil sa college, ka dala ba kulta a pakanggastu. Na nya ku den penggulan na pedtelin aku manem ka penggalebek aku manem". (I had to leave college on numerous occasions since we had no money to spare. I would stop, then I would look for work.)*

Motivation for Completing College Degree

Four (4) elements had a part in the participant's ability to complete their college degrees. These were intended to be models for successful Maguindanawn professionals, gain respect, meet financial obligations, and appease Allah, the Almighty.

To emulate successful Maguindanawn professionals. People are inspired to take on difficult tasks by others who have succeeded after overcoming barriers and difficulties, which serves as motivation for those taking on difficult tasks themselves. For instance, the study's participants found motivation and inspiration in those who were already benefiting from their achievement in their education. Participant 4 shared her admiration for the people whom she looked up to as a model. Whenever she saw her relatives who were already professionals, she would tell herself that she should strive to also reach their success. In Maguindanawn words, Participant 4 remembered that:

> *"Uman ko maylay i mga pagali nami a mga professionals, na kadtalu ku sa ginawa ku i mamikal ako sa kapangagi endu ko bun mawma i nawma nilan".*

To earn respect. The participants strived hard to complete their schooling to earn respect from other people. Participant 1 shared that based on his experience, he did not want to be belittled by other people because he did not graduate from college. When he was working, there was a big difference between the treatment of other people to those who completed and did not complete college. He said:

> *"Ayokong maliitin ako ng ibang mga tao, dahil wala akong natapos sa pag-aaral. Na-experience ko noon habang kami ay nagtatrabo, malaki ang pagkakaiba ng trato ng mga tao sa opisina sa mga college graduate kaysa sa hindi mga college graduates".*

To sustain financial needs. All of the participants' motivation to finish their education came from the necessity to find work and support their families' financial requirements. They were able to meet the family's everyday necessities. When they attended the next school year, they were also allowed to have money to spend on their education.

To please the Almighty Allah. All of the participants were Muslims because they were Maguindanawns, an Islamized group in Mindanao, and it was agreed that obtaining a college degree allowed them to realize their ambitions of having successful professional careers. Although for Muslims, the hereafter is more significant than the present. Nonetheless, part of upholding one's

religious obligations in this life is to look for provisions that are halal (or permissible) and that they dedicated their hard work to Allah, the Most High.

For some Maguindanao students, withdrawing from school is a common occurrence due to various reasons such as financial constraints, family responsibilities, and security issues. However, re-enrolling in college is also a prevalent trend among these students, as they understand the value of education in achieving their goals. A lot of Maguindanawn students think that getting a college education is crucial for getting better employment opportunities, raising their earning potential, and opening up career opportunities.

College Degree as Contribution to Professional Success

The participants identified four (4) factors that they believed contributed to obtaining a college degree in achieving career success: *(1) employment with a higher salary, (2) development of leadership skills, (3) receiving high regard and honor,* and *(4) serving as an example to younger Maguindanawn generations.*

Enjoying employment with satisfactory pay. According to the participant's responses, the desire to obtain a well-paying job or one that would at the very least meet their basic needs was what motivated them the most to finish college. According to Benson, Esteva, and Levy (2013), their research results back up the belief that getting a bachelor's degree through the higher education system is still a wise monetary choice for both individuals and the advantage of society. According to Hout (2012), those with a college education are twice as likely to get higher wages, have better health, and benefit the socio-economic prosperity of society. This is similar to Delbanco's (2012) statement that obtaining a college degree is advantageous for the nation's economy and beneficial to society's capacity to compete economically. Given the well-known financial and career benefits of a bachelor's degree, it is conceivable to propose that access to these economic and social benefits (such as decreased crime rates, increased charitable giving, higher salaries and work benefits, improved health, advanced knowledge) is a motivator for beginning and finishing undergraduate education (Zaback, Carlson, & Crellin, 2012).

College graduates earn more, have higher employment prospects, and are less likely to live in poverty than those without a degree. Furthermore, those who complete tertiary education programs enjoy numerous benefits such as greater cognitive abilities, a better focus on tasks related to their profession, and an inclination to participate in volunteer work (Baum & Payea, 2013).

In a 2015 Gallup-Purdue University research of college alumni, it was discovered that 50 percent of the roughly 30,000 graduates "strongly agree" that the cost of their education was worthwhile. Recent college graduates, or millennials (defined as ages 18-35) may be beginning to find less value in pursuing and finishing a college degree than prior generations. This is evidenced by the fact that only 38% of graduates from 2006-2015 believed their college experience was beneficial, compared to the 50% of baby boomers who felt the same way. Despite the economic and social advantages of higher education, millennials may be viewing it differently than those before them.

Earning Leadership Skills. In addition to earning leadership skills that would benefit them in their future employment, the participants were driven and determined to finish their undergraduate degrees. Participant 2 held the opinion that her college degree had done a lot to boost her confidence. She achieved her master's degree in Islamic Studies from the University of the Philippines. She completed a second Master's degree in Language Studies at Mindanao State University before continuing to complete a Ph.D. there. Her educational background, which began with her accomplishment in acquiring a college degree, provided her with the opportunity to take additional positions, including dean of one of the Institutes in a University. Participant 3 had no opportunity of obtaining a Master's or a Doctorate because she was already in her mid-40s when she started working as an elementary school teacher at a state institution, and she thought she did not need it anymore because the graduate school would simply make her feel more stressed. Participant 3 worked as a domestic helper for a Saudi Arabian family as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) after earning her college diploma. She recalled:

> *"Nagabroad aku muna ka endu maka-start ako sa small business kauli ko, endu dapat na makapasad aku muna sa college, ka endu makauli aku na makapamandu aku bun."* (I went overseas to work to save and start a small business and I must complete my college first so; I could have more employment opportunities when I come back.)

She began her own small business upon her return to the Philippines and worked as an elementary teacher at a state institution. In addition, she obtained a management and leadership position as the college's head of guest and relations.

In general, it has been argued that higher education should offer several noneconomic advantages, such as socialization and nation-building. For instance, Lagemann and Lewis (2012) claimed that the goal of postsecondary education is more about training young adults with general skills and civic ideals, and virtues than it is about pursuing economic or career rewards. More precisely, according to the authors, a college education should impart new knowledge, competencies, and practical skills that are crucial for employment success, such as problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, and creativity, as well as leadership skills.

Being treated with high respect and honor. Those who are successful in their careers are highly respected in the Maguindanawn community. Professional Maguindanawns are held in great regard by their fellow Maguindanawns. People in the community develop trust for those who are successful in their occupations, hold high social status, and can afford their personal properties. The participants agreed that earning a college degree opens up job opportunities that not only pay well but also gain a person's respect from other Maguindanawns.

Inspiring the next generation of Maguindanawn students to succeed professionally. Participant 2 mentioned that she was able to take advantage of grants-in-aid provided to her by the university while she was in college. As a result, when she was employed at the same university, she also shared the honor she had received with other young Maguindanawn students who were having

financial difficulties while attending school. She related that she came across a lot of Maguindanawn students who were about to leave college, but she offered her own home to house them and also gave them money from her pay for allowance, food, and transportation to and from school. Participant 1 added that despite all the tragedies, he was also able to encourage his fellow Maguindanawn students to continue their education. Even though he is already employed, he nevertheless lived in the same boarding house with them. Because Participant 1 was a student leader and several members shared his financial struggles, he shared his meals with them to prevent hunger, just as he had done when he had borrowed laptops and other school supplies from friends and classmates. The future generation of Maguindanawns should be taught entrepreneurship skills, according to Participant 3. To meet their financial needs, she would cook and sell food around the school. She gave them advice on how to make good use of their free time by working throughout it. In addition, participant 4 motivates other Maguindanawn college students to volunteer before seeking a good job because volunteering shows that an individual is willing to labor even in the absence of remuneration.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the research conducted, it was found that the most common reasons for participants dropping out of school included conflicts in their barangays and financial difficulties. Additionally, one participant experienced psychiatric illness due to armed conflicts but was able to recover through spiritual intervention. Conversely, the motivations for completing college education included emulating successful Maguindanawn professionals, gaining prestige, meeting financial needs, and fulfilling their obligations to Allah. Participants who completed their college education excelled professionally, earned good compensation, acquired leadership skills, and garnered respect and honor, serving as role models for future Maguindanawn students. The result of the study also reveals that armed conflicts and trauma can result in the displacement of individuals and families, leaving them with no place to go and leading to interruptions in schooling. In such conflict-affected areas, it is crucial to provide support and resources to affected individuals and communities to ensure access to education and promote stability. These findings can contribute to the development of strategies and programs aimed at promoting educational attainment among individuals from low-income and marginalized families in the Maguindanao and Cotabato regions.

Given these findings, schools in Moro-dominated areas should prioritize highlighting the benefits of education to motivate all students, particularly those who dropped out, to resume their studies. This study recommends that schools should nevertheless provide a secure learning atmosphere so that children can focus on their studies without worry. A particular emphasis should also be placed on Maguindanawn students who must recognize the importance of education for success in the workplace, financial stability, and fulfilling their religious obligations.

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