



Resilience in Shacklands: Exploring Family Dynamics in Informal Housing at Barangay Niugan Cabuyao City, Laguna

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of families residing in informal housing, known as “shack lands,” in Barangay Niugan, Cabuyao City, Laguna, with a focus on their resilience and family dynamics. A total of five (5) nuclear families, each comprising a mother, father, and at least two children, were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study identified seven major themes: (1) Closeness in Family Relationships, (2) Strengthening Family Bonds, (3) Family Roles in Overcoming Challenges, (4) Family Support During Challenges, (5) Adaptation and Resourcefulness, (6) Coping with Stress, and (7) External Support Systems. The findings revealed that everyday acts of support, communication, and role distribution helped sustain emotional bonds and resilience in the face of poverty and environmental hardship. The study recommends community-based support programs and inclusive policy interventions to improve the quality of life for families in informal settlements.

Keywords: Family Resilience, Informal Housing, Shack Lands, Coping Mechanisms, Family Roles, Community Support

1. Introduction

In the heart of rapidly urbanizing cities lie forgotten corners known as shack lands, where families build lives amid poverty, vulnerability, and resilience. In Barangay Niugan, Cabuyao City, Laguna, a significant number of residents live in informal settlements, areas characterized by overcrowding, lack of legal land tenure, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to basic services. Despite these conditions, families continue to thrive emotionally, socially, and psychologically, drawing strength from familial bonds and community support.

The concept of resilience, as framed by Norman Garmezy’s Resilience Theory, highlights an individual or group’s ability to adapt positively despite adversity. Within these communities, the family plays a central role in enabling this resilience. Equally important is Family Systems Theory by Murray Bowen, which emphasizes the interdependent nature of family members and their influence on one another’s functioning. This theoretical integration is crucial to understanding how informal housing residents collectively face day-to-day stressors.

In the Philippine context, informal housing remains a major urban issue. According to the Asian Development Bank (2020), nearly 3.7 million Filipinos reside in slums or unregulated dwellings, often near hazardous locations. These households face ongoing risks from environmental exposure, economic instability, and health vulnerability. However, academic discourse has historically focused on structural deficits, such as land tenure and service delivery, rather than the lived experiences and adaptive capacities of these families.

This research seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived family experiences within Barangay Niugan’s shack lands. Specifically, it focuses on how family roles, communication patterns, and support systems contribute to household resilience in a marginalized setting. The study gives voice to these families, allowing them to narrate their own strategies for survival, adjustment, and emotional cohesion.

Through this lens, the research offers a deeper understanding of how low-income Filipino families function not just as economic units, but as relational systems deeply rooted in shared responsibility and emotional connection. By capturing these narratives, this study also aims to inform local government programs, community development efforts, and policy interventions that recognize family resilience as a core driver of community sustainability.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to explore the lived experiences of families in Barangay Niugan. This design allowed for in-depth exploration of how family dynamics foster resilience in informal housing.

B. Research Locale

Barangay Niugan in Cabuyao City, Laguna was selected for its known prevalence of informal housing. It is one of the city's more densely populated areas and home to numerous families living in vulnerable housing conditions. The research was conducted in various household settings within the barangay to ensure ecological validity and authenticity of responses.

C. Population and Sampling

The study utilized purposive sampling to identify five nuclear families residing in informal housing in Barangay Niugan. Each family included a father, mother, and two children, totaling 20 participants. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) each family had been living in informal settlements for at least three to five years, (b) consisted of at least four members, and (c) had at least one employed household member. Families were selected based on their willingness to participate and their ability to provide meaningful insights into family roles, communication, and resilience strategies.

D. Research Participants

The participants were composed of five nuclear families, each with two adult parents and two children. All participants were residents of Barangay Niugan, and their housing status was confirmed through initial visits and barangay profiling. Participants represented varying levels of socioeconomic status within the informal community but shared similar challenges related to housing insecurity, financial hardship, and limited access to basic services.

E. Research Instrumentation

This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as its main data collection tool, designed to align with the core principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The guide allowed participants to share their personal and family experiences in depth, while giving the researchers flexibility to follow up on significant or unexpected insights. The open-ended questions focused on areas such as daily family routines, coping strategies, role distribution, emotional and practical support, and the specific challenges associated with living in shack lands.

Four members from each selected family were interviewed separately: the father, mother, and two children. All interviews were conducted in Filipino, audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and later transcribed and

translated into English for analysis.

F. Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection commenced after the researchers obtained formal approval from the barangay and established rapport within the community through preliminary visits. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria: residence in informal housing for at least three to five years, a family structure including both parents and at least two children, had at least one employed household member and willingness to share their experiences.

The researchers scheduled interviews at times and places most convenient and comfortable for the families, typically in their homes. Before each session, the research team explained the purpose of the study, reiterated the voluntary nature of participation, and obtained signed consent forms. For minors, both assent and parental consent was secured.

In addition to audio recordings, the researchers took detailed field notes to document the setting, emotional tone, non-verbal cues, and other contextual observations. After the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcribed responses to enhance credibility and accuracy of the findings. This procedure was critical in maintaining trust and ensuring that interpretations reflected the actual lived experiences of the respondents.

H. Ethical Consideration

This study followed strict ethical standards to protect participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, their rights to refuse or withdraw, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, and assent with parental consent was secured for minors.

To ensure data protection, responses were securely stored, encrypted, and made accessible only to the research team. Audio recordings and interview transcripts were permanently deleted upon project completion.

The study complied with institutional research ethics protocols and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Participants experiencing distress during interviews were treated with sensitivity and offered referrals to appropriate local support resources. The ethical conduct of this research was guided by respect, integrity, and a commitment to safeguarding human dignity throughout all phases of the study.

3. Results and Discussions

This chapter presents the results of the findings, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered. It provides a detailed account of the participants' lived experiences and the adaptive strategies they employ as families residing in informal housing at Barangay Niugan, Cabuyao City, Laguna. Additionally, this chapter offers an analysis of the participants' backgrounds, establishing a foundation for understanding their resilience and resourcefulness amidst daily challenges.

The results and discussion of the findings are presented in two parts. The first part addresses the Demographic Profile of the Participating Families, offering essential context for interpreting their daily lives and coping mechanisms. The second part elaborates on the emerging themes and their subthemes, drawn from the thematic analysis of the families' testimonies. This structured approach aims to provide a

comprehensive understanding of how family dynamics, roles, and community interactions foster resilience and help

families navigate the socioeconomic and environmental challenges inherent to living in informal housing.

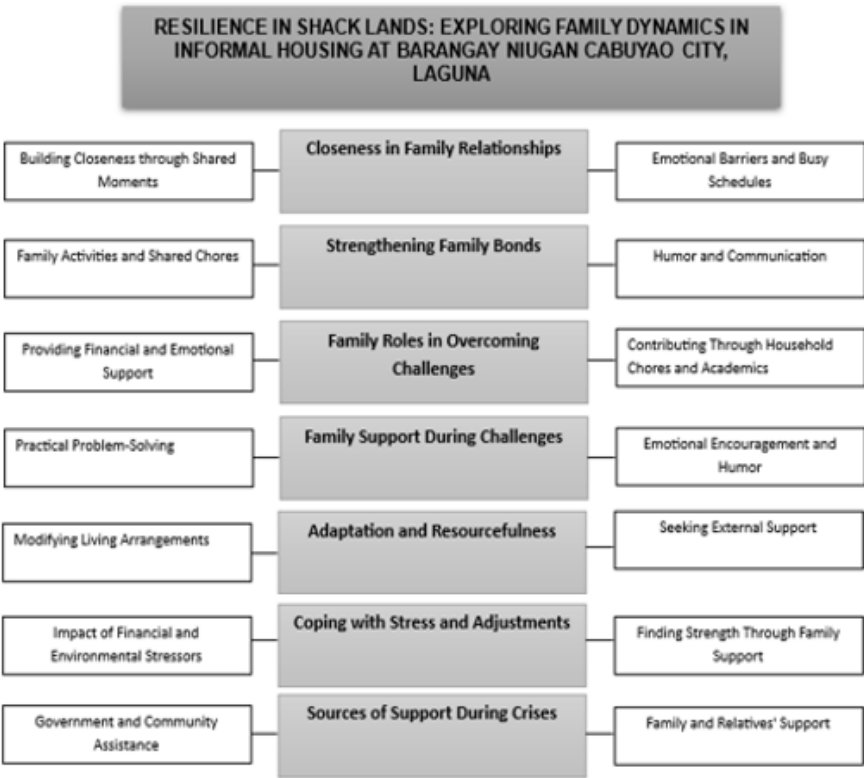
Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participating Families

Family	Number of Years Living in Informal Settlement	Number of Children	Ages of Children
Family 1	40 years (since birth)	4	18 years old 16 years old (minor) 14 years old (minor) 3 years old (minor)
Family 2	38 years (since birth)	2	19 years old 11 years old (minor)
Family 3	8 years	3	19 years old 11 years old (minor)
Family 4	30 years (since birth)	3	14 years old (minor) 9 years old (minor) 1 years old (minor)
Family 5	10 years	3	28 years old 21 years old 17 years old (minor)

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the five participating families residing in the informal housing settlement at Barangay Niugan, Cabuyao City, Laguna. Three of these families have lived in Barangay Niugan since birth, while two families have resided there for 8 and 10 years, respectively. The number of children in each family ranges from two to four, with children’s ages spanning from infancy to young adulthood. Most of the children are minors, reflecting the generational composition of these families. The researcher noted that all five families are long-term

residents of Barangay Niugan and have developed deep-rooted connections within the community. This generational continuity, along with the presence of young children and teenagers, highlights the significant role of family structures and shared responsibilities in shaping daily experiences and adaptive strategies. The researcher also observed that these families, despite the challenges of limited resources and insecure housing, demonstrate strong bonds and a determination to create a stable environment for their children.

Table 2: Emerging Themes and Subthemes



This chapter delves into the emerging themes that surfaced from the interviews. These themes provide a nuanced understanding of how families in Barangay Niugan cope with stress, build resilience, and maintain a sense of unity and belonging in the face of adversity. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Table 2 presents these seven themes: (a) Closeness in Family Relationships (b) Strengthening Family Bonds (c) Family Roles in Overcoming Challenges (d) Family Support During Challenges (e) Adaptation and Resourcefulness (f) Coping with Stress and Adjustments (g) Sources of Support During Crises. Each theme is accompanied by corresponding subthemes, which were identified through thematic analysis of the participants' narratives.

The first theme, Closeness in Family Relationships, highlights how everyday activities like sharing meals and doing chores together create emotional security and strengthen family ties. These shared routines help families momentarily escape daily stresses, reinforcing their sense of unity. However, some families acknowledged that maintaining closeness can be challenging when they are dealing with emotional strains or busy schedules, which shows the delicate balance they manage to keep their family bonds intact.

Strengthening Family Bonds also stood out as an essential theme, with families emphasizing the value of humor and laughter in coping with daily stressors. Jokes and shared stories lifted spirits and helped create a more positive atmosphere within the home. Open and honest communication was equally important, as it allowed family members to share worries, resolve misunderstandings, and maintain trust, enabling them to work together more effectively.

In Family Roles in Overcoming Challenges, parents and children described how they shared tasks and responsibilities, with parents managing both caregiving and work outside the home, while older children helped with chores and supported younger siblings. These roles were seen as acts of mutual care and resilience rather than burdens.

The themes of Family Support during Challenges and Adaptation and Resourcefulness revealed how emotional support and creative problem-solving are essential for coping with hardships. Families described comforting one another and working together to tackle daily problems, as well as seeking help from neighbors and community resources when needed.

Coping with Stress and Adjustments showed how shared routines, humor, and quiet reflection helped families manage ongoing pressures and turn difficult moments into opportunities for bonding and growth.

Finally, Sources of Support during Crises highlighted the role of extended family and community networks in providing both emotional and practical assistance, reinforcing the sense of solidarity within Barangay Niugan. Together, these themes and the interconnectedness provide a holistic view of how these families navigate the challenges of informal housing. The findings emphasize that family resilience is not just about surviving but about finding strength and hope in daily life, supported by both internal bonds and external community networks.

4. Discussion

The lived experiences of families residing in informal

housing at Barangay Niugan, Cabuyao City, Laguna, reveal how their daily interactions, roles, and shared responsibilities shape their resilience and well-being despite socioeconomic and environmental challenges. Their narratives highlight how the essence of family life in these communities is deeply rooted in a sense of togetherness and mutual support, where even the smallest acts of kindness and humor serve as buffers against the uncertainties of daily life. One of the most prominent findings is the central role of closeness and shared activities in sustaining family unity. Families described how eating meals together, sharing household chores, and finding time for laughter created moments of emotional safety and relief, even amidst the harsh realities of informal housing. These shared routines not only strengthened their bonds but also reinforced a collective identity built on trust and cooperation. Humor and open communication emerged as vital strategies in maintaining positive family dynamics and reducing stress. Families shared that jokes and lighthearted banter offered them a brief escape from their worries, while open conversations allowed them to express concerns and resolve conflicts constructively. These practices highlight the families' capacity to transform even the most challenging moments into opportunities for emotional connection and understanding.

The division of family roles also played a crucial part in fostering resilience. Parents described how they balanced informal work, such as construction, vending, or transportation services, with caregiving responsibilities. Older children took on tasks like helping younger siblings with schoolwork and household chores, creating an environment of shared effort rather than individual burdens. These cooperative dynamics highlight the families' adaptability and commitment to supporting one another. Emotional and practical support within the family unit served as a key protective factor during periods of crisis. Families recounted how they turned to one another for reassurance and worked together to find solutions to daily challenges, from financial pressures to physical hazards within the community. The researcher observed that this emotional closeness and problem-solving mindset allowed families to maintain a sense of control and agency despite external uncertainties. Adaptation and resourcefulness were evident in how families navigated the limitations of their environment. Many shared stories of creatively modifying their living spaces and seeking help from neighbors or community leaders when resources fell short. These actions demonstrate the proactive spirit and community engagement that are critical for survival in informal housing settings. While financial pressures and limited resources created daily stress, families described how they coped by fostering emotional resilience through shared routines and personal reflection. Moments of humor and family bonding not only lightened their burdens but also provided a sense of hope and purpose. These coping strategies highlight the importance of emotional adaptability in sustaining well-being amidst persistent adversity.

Moreover, the families' reliance on external sources of support, such as extended family networks, neighbors, and community-based programs, reinforced the idea that resilience is not built in isolation. Participants shared how these external connections provided both material and emotional assistance, strengthening the social fabric of the community and fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

The findings of this study suggest that family resilience in informal housing is a dynamic process shaped by daily

practices, shared responsibilities, and meaningful social connections. By actively nurturing these relationships and creatively adapting to their environment, families in Barangay Niugan demonstrate a profound capacity for hope and perseverance.

These insights underscore the need for programs and policies that not only address the material needs of families in informal housing but also support and amplify the emotional and social bonds that sustain them. Interventions should recognize and build upon the families' existing strengths, fostering environments that promote open communication, mutual support, and shared agency. By centering these lived experiences in program design, community-based efforts can empower families to navigate challenges more effectively and cultivate meaningful lives within even the most constrained circumstances.

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