

## Socioeconomic Status of Urban Poor Community Amidst the Pandemic in a Chartered City: A Case Study

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**ABSTRACT** This study was conducted in order to define and understand the socioeconomic status of urban poor communities in Naga City during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed a mixed research methodology where data was collected from 226 households using survey, direct observation, and key informant interviews. Results indicated that most of the respondents' homes are being supplied by the local electric and water utilities, and about a third of homes were built with concrete. The study also found that despite that there were only about a third of the households without a college degree holder, the pandemic was a challenge due to job losses and diminished income, especially during the lockdown. Despite their living standards and educational attainment, urban poor communities were vulnerable and affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19.

### INTRODUCTION

Escalation of COVID-19 crisis has endangered human lives, disrupted livelihoods, and harmed trade, the economy, and enterprises worldwide (Acharya and Porwal 2020; Ibn-Mohammed et al. 2021). The global economy has begun to experience massive upheavals, and it is on its way to a severe recession and an unparalleled economic disaster. Because the global economy is increasingly integrated and interdependent via global supply networks, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact. All demographic groups were impacted by COVID-19, especially the weakest members of society, which led to an increase in the number of individuals living in poverty (Hammad et al. 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic undeniably has impacted society. Different sectors of society have suffered losses and challenges at the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic has triggered devastating economic and societal crises in its infected countries (Carter et al. 2020).

With the implementation of community lockdown due to the pandemic, devastating socioeconomic impacts such as income loss, business impacts, and health concerns were observed. Basic consumer

needs were affected. In the wake of an unfamiliar crisis, the lack of awareness among communities further exacerbated the situation.

According to a study, Southeast Asian countries have unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their population and high poverty rates (Rasul 2020). The Philippines, as one of the countries in Southeast Asia, suffers from the identified factors that bring a great challenge amidst the pandemic. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan, China which is in Asia. However, the first recorded case in the Philippines was on January 2, 2020 (Vallejo and Ong 2020). Then lockdown or the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) was implemented throughout the country on March 15, 2020, hoping to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The fight against the threats to the COVID-19 pandemic suffered profound effects and impacted almost all sectors of the society. Just like a domino effect these resulted in wide-spread disruption such as travel restrictions (Chinazzi et al. 2020), closure of schools (Viner et al. 2020), global economic recession (Fernandes 2020), political conflicts (Barrios and Hochberg 2020), racism (Habibi et al. 2020), and misinformation and controversies (Enitan et al. 2020) to name a few.

This paper describes the socioeconomic status of a poor urban community in Naga City, which is a chartered city geographically located in the Province of Camarines Sur, Philippines. Experiences of its residents were also narrated to show how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the life of the people.

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## Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to define the urban poor community in Naga City amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study intended to identify the socioeconomic status of urban poor communities in Naga City amidst the pandemic along standard of living, education and employment. It also aspired to narrate the experiences of some residents of an urban poor community amidst the community lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study employed a mixed method approach using a survey checklist, direct observation and key informant interviews in gathering the necessary data for the study. Survey methods were conducted to determine the socioeconomic status of the urban poor community in the study. The data were gathered through a house-to-house survey. The survey checklist used is divided into three parts, wherein first is the respondents' profile, such as their role, age, and sex. The second part aimed to get their status by describing the make of their houses, and the third pertains to their household income. The 226 respondents of the study are representatives of their households and are above 18 years old and are living in the urban poor community in Naga City, which is located in the province of Camarines Sur, Philippines. These representatives are either the father or the mother, or of age children. To analyse the data gathered, frequency and mean were used. Written consents from the respondents were secured before conducting the survey and interview.

### Data Gathering Procedure

Informal interviews were conducted with the established household heads to determine their experiences in the ongoing pandemic especially when community lockdowns were implemented.

The informal interviews with the household heads were done via phone calls and the current standard in which physical contact is minimised. Other informal data collection interviews were performed through face-to-face contact while adhering to social distancing protocols.

Survey methods were also conducted in which the research is assisted with the barangay workers of identified urban poor communities in Naga City.

## Instruments

The interview questionnaires, which include the respondent's profile and open-ended questions to address topics concerning their experiences during the community lockdown amidst the pandemic, were used as research instruments in this report. The interview questionnaire consisted of an open letter read by the researcher informing the respondent of the purpose of the interview. The questionnaire is structured with questions to gather the profile of the respondents and questions to elicit an in-depth understanding of the household experiences in the community lockdowns during the pandemic, and the survey checklist in which socioeconomic status of the 226 households in different urban poor communities are identified.

## Data Analysis

To interpret the data collected for this study, narrative analysis and frequency count were used. The socio-demographic profile of participants is defined using frequency count and percentage. Then, for the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, responses were coded and analysed to identify emerging trends and search for patterns in the reactions.

## RESULTS

### Socioeconomic Status of the Urban Poor Community in Naga City

#### *Standard of Living*

Presented in Table 1 is the standard of the urban poor community in Naga City. Based on the data gathered, 104 out of 226 household respondents reside in single family homes.

Along with the type of materials, 78 out of the 226 (35%) respondents' houses are built of concrete materials. The survey also revealed that 96 percent of the households have Naga Water District as their water source however there are still some households using water pumps and deep wells as their water source. 84 percent of the households also have their own electric connection.

#### **Education**

Presented in Table 2 is the household highest educational attainment of urban communities in

**Table 1: Standard of living of the urban poor community in Naga City**

<i>Standard of living</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Type of Housing</i>		
Single family home	104	46
Townhouse, Row house, Multi-level home	88	39
Rented apartment	34	15
<i>Type of Materials the House is Built of</i>		
Concrete	78	35
Light materials like plywood, bamboo and other	46	20
Combination of concrete and light materials, however mostly concrete	38	17
Combination of concrete, however mostly light materials	33	15
Makeshift (improvised) materials	25	11
<i>Source of Water</i>		
Metro Naga Water District	218	96
Deep well	5	2.2
Water pump	3	1.8
<i>Have Own Electric Connection</i>		
Yes	189	84
No	37	16

Naga City. Based on the data gathered, 37 percent of the households at least have 1 or 2 members that graduated college. However, despite the high percentage of families having members who graduated college, there are still 31 percent who do not have a family member that has a college degree. The result also revealed that despite being a member of the urban poor community in Naga City, 26 percent of the households have more than 2 members who graduated college and 6 percent are pursuing graduate school studies.

**Table 2: Household highest educational attainment of urban communities in Naga City**

<i>Highest educational attainment in the household</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
None of the household members is a college degree holder	69	31
At least 1 or 2 members of the household are a college graduate	84	37
More than 2 members of the household are college graduates	58	26
At least one member of the household is attending or ed graduate school	15	6

**Employment**

Presented in Table 3 is the household head employment status of urban communities in Naga

City pre-pandemic and during the first three months of the pandemic in which enhanced community lockdown is strictly implemented. Based on the data gathered, pre-pandemic, 28 percent of the household heads were government employees. It can also be noted that there were no household heads that were not employed. On the other hand, during the pandemic period, 22 percent of the household respondents lost their job, only 8 percent still have their own business, 9 percent are vendors, and 1 percent event organisers.

**Table 3: Household head employment status of urban communities in Naga City**

<i>Employment/type of employment</i>	<i>Pre-pandemic</i>		<i>During pandemic</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Small business owner/vendor	55	24	38	17
Teacher	15	7	15	7
Government employee	64	28	64	28
Garbage picker	14	6	14	6
Construction worker	25	11	0	0
Office staff	23	10	23	10
Freelancer	8	4	15	7
Event organiser	3	1	3	1
Driver	19	8	7	3
Not employed	0	0	47	22

**Household Income**

Presented in Table 4 is the average household income of the urban poor communities pre-pandemic and during the pandemic period. Based on the data gathered, 112 out of 226 (50%) of these household heads have an average monthly income of between ± 20,000 to ± 40,000. On the other hand, during the pandemic, it can be noted that the number of households having an average income

**Table 4: Average household income**

<i>Average household income during pandemic</i>	<i>Pre-pandemic</i>		<i>During pandemic</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than P10,000	4	1.77	47	20.80
Between P10,000 to P20,000	78	34.51	85	37.61
Between P20,000 to P40,000	112	49.56	71	31.42
Between P40,000 to P60,000	20	8.85	13	5.75
More than P60,000	12	5.31	10	4.42
	226		226	

of less than 10,000 pesos a month increased 10 times. Further looking at the table, the results suggest that there was about a  $\pm$  5,000 decrease in average monthly income of the respondents, that is, from about  $\pm$  28,000 to around  $\pm$  23,000 per month income.

These results may have been attributed to the implementation of the enhanced community lockdowns, which resulted in closure of different businesses and establishments. Furthermore, during the first three months of the pandemic various industries were forced to stop just like the construction business, event organising and other related industries that require a public gathering.

### **Narratives of the Urban Poor Community Residents Amidst the Pandemic**

In the advent of the pandemic, community lockdowns were implemented in which closures of businesses, schools and other establishments were implemented. Presented below are the narratives of three residents of the urban poor community in Naga City.

#### ***Resident 1***

Resident 1 is a 36-year-old father from Pacol, Naga City. He said that before the pandemic he was working as a jeepney driver, which is the main source of income for their family. With a 1-year-old child, he emphasises that he needs to work hard everyday just to buy milk for their child. However, during the pandemic he was required to stay at home and had no income during the community lockdown. He narrated that the barangay officials conducted a survey regarding their household necessities and during the first week of the community lockdown barangay workers gave them 5 kilograms of rice, some canned goods and easy-to-cook noodles. Every week of the community lockdown barangay officials or workers provided them with rice and various other things like eggs, vegetables and fish. However, he emphasises that these are not enough since he has a child who still needs formula milk. He also shared some of his sentiments regarding the pandemic, giving him a scare especially that his child was still too young and might acquire the virus. He ended the interview of saying, “*Mapagalon po ang igwang pandemic, dae basta-basta makaluwas and makata-*

*kot din lalo na po ta may aki akong sadit pano na lang po kung makakua ako kang virus saka madara ko sa harong. Ako kakayanon ko po, pero ang aki ko dae po.*” (“*The pandemic is very serious, one cannot just easily go out and it is even more frightening especially because I have a small child. What if I catch the virus and bring it home? I can manage myself, but not my child.*”)

#### ***Resident 2***

Resident 2 is a 40-year-old mother from Cararayan, Naga City. She has 4 children, all of whom are in high school. She narrated that during community lockdown, as a public high school teacher she still had her source of income however her husband lost his job as a truck driver. Thus, her savings were their saving grace during the community lockdown. Despite the government providing different assistance like food and financial assistance, they still suffered from different issues like going outside just to buy food but there is no jeepney or public transport available. Besides, there is an implemented schedule where you can go out to buy food but it is only limited to 1 person from each household. In terms of health, she and her family were too afraid to consult a doctor or a health professional thinking that a simple cold and fever may be suspected as the COVID-19 virus. She said, “*Nakakaparanoid po, ito pong maluwas ka. Nakakatakot na maray. Kang panahon lockdown po, ang alcohol, disinfectant and sabon po dae pwedeng mawara sa harong.*” (“*It’s making me paranoid, the idea of going out. It’s really scary. During lockdown, we cannot do away with alcohol, disinfectant, and soap in the house.*”)

#### ***Resident 3***

Resident 3 is a 49-year-old mother from Triangulo, Naga City. She said that as a member of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) she is receiving assistance from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) during the lockdown. She said that they are still receiving their financial assistance even during the lockdown. Besides, she also said that they have received Php. 5,000 cash as assistance during the pandemic. She shared that during the pandemic they still have four meals a day and added that the cash assistance provided was spent on grocery



items or food. She believes that this pandemic will pass, and says, "*Sa ngunyan po magtios-tios muna. Kung ano ang yaon dyan, iyo ang pagtyagaan.*" ("Endure for now. Bear with it and do with whatever is there.")

These are just the few narratives of the urban poor community residents' experiences during the pandemic. Undeniably, the pandemic has brought different challenges to the community especially the marginalised community, however with a positive outlook residents see to it that this pandemic will pass and they can still stand and work hard for what they need and want in life.

As stated by one of the household heads, "*Nagtao man po ning asistensya ang gobyerno, pero po grabe po ang kakulangan. Kang pagkapanemic nawaran po akong trabaho bilang driver.*" ("The government provided assistance during the pandemic however it is not enough especially since I lost my job as a driver.")

Another statement from a respondent was, "*Grabe ma'am pagtios ngunyan na pandemic, nagkawara-raan po kaming trabaho. May mga assistensya man po ma'am na tinatao ang gobyerno pero labi pong kulang. Lalo sa mga may dakula po na pamilyang arog ko. Kulang man po ang tinataong bagas saka subsidiya kang barangay. Pero pasalamat man nanggad po ta may nakukua pa man po.*" ("It's really difficult now, ma'am, during this pandemic. We have lost our jobs. There are government assistance programs, but they are still insufficient. Especially for those who have big families like mine. The rice and subsidies provided by the barangay are also not enough. But we're still thankful that we can still get something.")

When asked how they are coping up with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic various answers were garnered. Some respondents claim, "*Life must continue, malipas man po ni, sir.*" ("Life must go on, this will come to pass anyway, sir.")

Another respondent replied, "*Hanap po ning trabaho ulit, ngunyan po freelancer ako ma'am. Online tutor po minsan data encoder pero po work from home.*" ("I'm looking for a job again. Right now, I'm a freelancer, ma'am. Sometimes, I work as an online tutor or a data encoder, but it's work from home.")

Another also claims, "*Para po ma'am may extra income nag-bebenta po ako ma'am ning mga products online, ukay-ukay, cookies saka*

*kung ano pa ma'am.*" ("So that I can have extra income, ma'am, I sell products online, second hand items, cookies, and whatever else I can, ma'am.")

## DISCUSSION

The parameters shown in Table 1 were somehow affirmed by a study, which found that these are, indeed, the indicators of standard of living. The study also established that the parameters such as access to safe drinking water, power, housing conditions, and better sanitation facilities, had a stronger influence on the decrease of national poverty than other social factors (Mondal et al. 2023). This suggests that a community's economic well-being may be gauged through the availability, or the absence, of these indicators. Table 2 shows that about 60 percent of the respondent-households have at least 1 college graduate. However, despite beneficial advancements in research, education, and funding, attainment for economically disadvantaged pupils continues to be poor (Cartwright et al. 2023).

The set of respondents showed that the pandemic resulted in about 22 percent unemployment based on the data. However, if the same questionnaire is administered to the same set and looking at the trends the situations may have improved. According to the Philippine Statistical Authority, the nation's employment rate was predicted to be 95.2 percent in January 2023, up 1.6 percentage points from 93.6 percent in the same month the year before (DOLE 2023). It can also be expected that there is an increase in the average monthly income of the households.

The narratives of the respondents have somehow shown their resilience. That even contrary to certain challenges where the community plays an essential supportive role for the individuals, this form of assistance was significantly hampered during the COVID-19 pandemic because it was necessary to maintain isolation, social distance, and lockdowns (Adini and Kimhi 2023).

Meanwhile, community support may not be reduced to zero since the government provided emergency subsidies under the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) to the low-income households and provided financial assistance to individuals that lost their jobs because of the on-going pandemic (Cuaton and Su 2020). This subsidy amounts to 3,000-5,000 pesos for each household. Further-

more, various non-government agencies (CARE Philippines 2021) raised funds to provide health kits and food supply to different affected urban communities in Naga City. Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) also gave food supplies to the community. As part of their mandate, some state colleges and universities conducted training on sustainable livelihood programs (Albao and Rubi 2019). However, from the interviews with the respondents this is not enough to get them going. Another also claims that despite the given food and financial assistance of the local government, the pandemic brought a long-time impact on their family since most of their members lost their source of income and needed to start from scratch when the pandemic wanes. There have also been reports of job losses in the construction and public transportation sectors. During the pandemic, some small business owners also closed their doors. Meanwhile, respondents who are informal workers, such as sari-sari store owners and street vendors reported income losses.

### CONCLUSION

The study highlighted that despite the poor urban communities' living standards and educational attainment, they are still vulnerable and affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19. A substantial number of households lost their jobs. Experiences of the poor urban community clearly show how they are during the community lockdowns. It is good to note, however, that despite their vulnerabilities, their resilience can still be reckoned with. They can take multiple tasks, one after another, to sustain family needs. Along with this is their optimism that things will weather down and better opportunities would come after the crisis.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that a sustainable livelihood program be implemented to address the issues of unemployment during and beyond the pandemic. The result of this study will be shared with the local government of Naga City for their corresponding action. This study may be used as a baseline information for further studies.

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