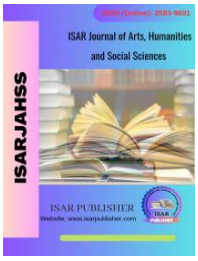
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# SPEAKING BACK TO FEAR: THE DILEMMAS OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted in different MSWDO (Municipal Social Welfare and Development Offices) of Second Congressional District of Cotabato, School Year 2022-2023. It deals on the experiences of Social Workers in the Local Government Unit. The researcher used narratology design with the participants ranging from 50 to 63 years of age and are Social Workers working in the Local Government Unit. It was found that the Social Workers having lack of resources, struggling with themselves, difficulties in planning, struggling in paper works, lack of understanding and lack of rest hours. In terms of their coping strategies, they convinced themselves that God has the purpose why they are in that situation; bonding or enjoying with their co-workers; shared their clients' problem to their co-workers so they can get advices of what is the best thing to do to solve the problem.

**Keywords:** *Dilemmas, Social Worker, Local Government Unit, lack of resources, struggling with themselves, difficulties in planning, paper works.*

## Introduction

They looked at how social workers in Australia believed that the risk they faced at work was motivated by the politics of fear and that this reoriented social work practice toward controlling and guarding against risk rather as sincere attempts to effectively respond to need. According to Stanford (2010) social workers are afraid of losing the integrity of their profession, being held responsible when things go wrong, and their own physical and emotional health. Additionally, it was discovered that conflicts between client self-determination and client best interests were present in the majority of social professional situations. When a patient's mental status was compromised and decision-making was difficult, dilemmas were more likely to occur. Delay in leaving the hospital, in-hospital mortality, and inadequate post-discharge care all presented ethical problems.

Additionally, an interview-based study of how local authority social workers, social services managers, and attorneys collaborate in cases involving children in England demonstrates how stressful care procedures can be for social workers and how much they rely on the lawyers for help. It also demonstrates how the intervention of the lawyers might create fresh difficulties. Lawyers are ready to defend their role and obligations, despite the fact that managers are especially inclined to dislike their perceived "over-involvement" Dickens (2006). The work of social workers has a variety of goals, including the redistribution of resources to those in need, social control and rehabilitation of the deviant, prevention or reduction of social problems, and empowerment of oppressed individuals and groups. Social workers perform a variety of tasks, including caring for, controlling, empowering, campaigning, assessing, and managing. Some contend that the value of social work is what keeps it together in the face of such a wide range of jobs and environments (Banks, 2020).

Additionally, social workers must deal with the growing gap between their professional values and the realities of their practice in the morally conservative framework of the neo-liberal risk society, which poses a danger to the progressive politics of social work. It is crucial to learn how to counteract the hopelessness and despair that such a milieu inspires and to be able to establish a stronger feeling of professional agency (Stanford, 2011). The researcher is unaware of any studies that have examined the experiences of social workers employed by municipal governments. The researcher is interested in learning how the local social worker deals with experiences they have had at work in this environment.

## Methodology

The researcher used the qualitative research design. Maxwell (2005) argues that such data is embedded in context, which explains why people prefer it. According to Bogdan and

Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers are concerned with context because they believe that human behavior was greatly influenced by the environment in which it occurs.

Specifically, the researcher used narrative research was all about collecting and telling a story or stories (in detail). Researchers write narratives about experiences of individuals, described a life experience, and discussed the meaning of the experience with the individual. Usually, a narrative research design was focused on studying an individual person.

## Results and Discussion

**Experiences of the Social Workers in Local Government Unit**

The experiences of the participants in the local government unit was found out that they encountered lack of resources, struggling with their self, struggles in paper works, lack of understanding and rest.

**Experiences of Nely, the No. 1 participant**

One of the participants named Nely not her real name explained emotionally what she experienced when she was assigned in a critical area, how scared she was in a big wave riding in a boat alone, until she got in the island. Her heart skipped when she saw how helpless the people in the community. Nely do not know what she supposed to feel because of her mixed emotions, pity and disappointed of herself because she wanted to help financially but then her salary is not even enough to provide the needs of her family. She felt frustratred because she do not know how to start and where to start when there is so many things to fix especially when she saw their daycare center that is not well structured, she stated that;

> ("My experiences are when I assigned in the island. It was critical, it is the most challenging because you have to ride in a boat alone that it's just you alone, the waves are so big, then when I got in there, I saw the people how helpless they are. The daycare center, you cannot even recognize that is a daycare center, because the structure is not yet standing at the right place, so I feel so frustrated because ahmmm… because, its lack of help.")

Nely explained heartedly how difficult she experienced working in the LGU. She shared that when she was the only registered social worker in the office, she needs to go in the different communities and at the same time; she has to attend important meetings. In this situation, she did not understand anymore what to do first especially that there are random clients coming in the office for help. She also shared those emergencies is the most common problems, like battered wife and rape case. She strongly admitted how difficult to handle the situation, it made her feel sick that she cannot understand even her writings and recordings and that are the challenges that she is facing, she stated that;

> ("when you are a social worker, but then you are just the one who is registered inside the office, that is the most difficult experiences for me because you have to go to the fields, attend meetings and then you do not know what to do first and then there's client coming randomly. Emergency is the most common problem, the battered wife, the rape case, it's difficult yes! It's difficult, you don't understand what's in your head, sometimes us, and we are not good in writing, so sometimes our recordings, we cannot understand. That's my challenges.")

Nely staring at the ceiling, seriously sharing her experienced, she shared that, she did not know what to do first because of her hectic schedules. She got in the office, she just done facing her clients dealing with their problem and she have to indulge of what she did today. One of her strategies was to write in her diary for what she did the whole day so she cannot easily forget her activities and then tomorrow again, she will make a plan what to do for the next day from the morning until afternoon, she stated that;

> ("you were from field, you just done to face your clients' problem, you have to indulge of what you did today, I have to write it all and make a diary, and then, tomorrow again, you have to make a plan every day, you have to make a plan for what you have planned tomorrow morning until afternoon.")

Nely did not control her feeling; you can see through her facial expression how she was frustrated remembering her experienced. She explained frustratedly how the senior citizens cannot understand that the pension from the national is only for those indigents who is in need and fortunate seniors is not allowed. It is already in the guidelines but then, fortunate seniors still in the line to get the pension where the national just mistakenly chosen them especially to those fortunate seniors who received a bigger amount of money every month. In the other word, they are a member of two government agencies wherein they can receive double pension, she stated that;

> ("there are some senior that is hard for them to understand, that this pension from national, are for indigent people only, and then there are fortunate senior, that is what to be a member, that sometimes, the national wronged chosen them to be a member so yeah, they become a member, so now, in releasing the pension, fortunate seniors are in the line, so must tell them that they are not qualified, if can, must sign a waiver, they must not get and refuse the help because fortunate senior are not qualify to receive pension especially to those senior that is pensioner.")

Nely explained clearly her difficulty in handling the senior citizen records because of the spelling of their names and birthdates was incorrect, so she has to do the home visitations in order to correct their records. She also explained why it is incorrect because of their ages, they are too old enough to see and write clearly and some of them, their sons/daughters the one who fill in the forms where they are not familiar of their parents' correct spelling of their names and birthdates so that is why they used to have the Id's but then it is incorrect, she stated that;

("in the senior citizen, delivering of cakes, we all want to visit the houses of senior citizen, and to correct their records because sometimes, the senior citizen, because of their age, or sometimes their son/daughter record senior citizens' birthdate, the spelling is wrong, they used to have the Id but their birthdate and the spelling of their names are incorrect.")

Nely shared proudly her most challenging experienced when she was handling the GRO's in Poblacion Antipas. She is so determined to checked all the places that has kareoke and drinks (KTV Bar) and if she saw a minor, she directly call the police to picked-up the GRO's, she shared that there so many GRO's they picked-up and sometimes not as many as the other day and then Nely is determined to help them, she sleep at the office to take good care of them, and she bring food for them until she refer the GRO's to where they lived. They're from Gensan, Davao, Malay Balay, Bukidnon, and Cagayan, Nely never gave up even how she struggled because she has to send the GRO's to their home, she stated that;

("My most challenging experience is when there is a lot of GRO, all the alcohols places in there that has karaoke we round and checked and then if they are minor we will call the police to pick them up, so many of GRO that we picked-up, sometimes not as many as the other day we picked-up and then I sleep at the office to take care of them because there is no house parent before, I am just all just by myself, I, the one who bring them food till they refer to where the live, they're from Gensan, Davao, Malay Balay and Cagayan, sometimes I did bring them back to their home, sometimes its round trip. That is difficult.")

It implies that Social Workers in Local Government Unit experienced lack of resources, hectic schedules because of different meetings that need to attend while dealing with different clients and made a diary where she can write her all activities in a day so she cannot easily to forget. She experienced handling GRO's where she chose to sleep in the office rather than going home and be with her family just to take care of them until she sends the GRO's to their real home. She never give-up and she is determined to face all the challenges, she survived. She also determined in helping a client financially even though her salary is not that much, she used to borrow money everywhere to provide the need of her clients, she do not think how much money she have left as long as she knew her client was in good situation. It only shows that the social workers even though she doesn't have enough money to provide the urgent need of the client she is resourceful, she is doing her best to find a way just to satisfy the needs of the clients.

**Experiences of participant No. 2 named Joya**

The participant experienced struggling with herself. She has difficulty to survive life. She is struggling sleeping at the right time, she also have the struggle how to be respected by the others.

Joya, not her real name, explaining herself with mix emotions; you can see through her facial expression and words how she really struggled a lot. She shared to me that one time, she already in the middle of her sleep when the supervisor called her, she felt so annoyed and disturbed because all she wanted to do is to rest because it's been days that she does not have the proper sleep. She referred the clients and home visit the clients which she questioned herself if what is she doing is right. Joya explained her side sadly, she is thinking about her future if she starts to build a family and she is working as a social worker, it is really disturbing to her family because she has to think the welfare of her clients, she does not have the peace of mind but then Joya comforting herself, she believed that God has the purposed why she is a social worker. Even though she comforted herself, she admitted that she still questioned her job if it is right for her. She stated that;

("I experienced one time, I already fell asleep, my gosh! All I just wanted is to sleep, because it's been days that I have sleepless night, there is a client that need to refer, there is a client that you need to bring in there, you also need to go for the home visitation, that time, all I just wanted is to rest, but then they called me, haaaaaaayyyyyyyy… I wanted to rest, that time think in myself, I think if it is in the future, I have this kind of job, I say, this job is disturbing to your family, to my peace of mind, because, of course, I still think of my client, if my client is, okay? What is my client doing, I still think of my client but then I realize, I am here because I have a purpose but I'm pretty sure you will still question yourself if the time come, especially that you have a lot of problems, a lot of deadlines that you have to do.")

Joya, also stated loud, clear and feeling disappointed for what she experienced that mostly, the common clients who asked for helped are the walk-in clients asking for dol-outs like rice and can goods or cash assistance. Joya felt disappointed while sharing her experienced in LGU, because sometimes the Agency can give cash if there is available but usually it is on process. There is a due process which mean the clients need to wait for a week to give the assistance. She stated that;

( " so mostly at the LGU is the individual client, they come ask help, walk-in clients, so you experience there's individual coming and asking help like dole-outs, so they ask rice, relief goods at the office, give cash if there is available, but usually it's on process, we must wait for the due process, that's the very common that we do in our job, and if the clients are qualified to those assistance, but then, must wait in due process, you cannot get the assistance easily, that's what I experienced at LGU.")

Joya shared her experienced how she having the difficulties of handling the incest raped because it is a sensitive case especially the victim is a child where she needs to be protected and secured. She stated that;

("There is the incest rape, it's difficult because it is a sensitive case, especially, it's a child, of course it is confidentiality, it's really

in our principle, but that incest rape, you must to protect the child, secure her safety.")

Joya, shared her experienced how she is having the hard time to explain to her clients that when to get their child at the agency, they must to follow the process or wait to the due process. She also shared that mostly, this kind of cases are broken family where the parents separated and they had the family issues. She also shared that the other couple, they are easy to settle and the other is not easily to settled She stated that;

("So, usually in that situation that the client wants something for you to get, like their son, like that, they want to get the child into the family, that is the common happening in the broken family, because the mother and the father separated, so they fight where the child will stay, so the other, they want to get their child immediately, so you a social worker, we have due process to wait, that we must encounter first, in barangay, wherever must to settle.")

Joya, explained heartedly what she experienced working in the LGU as volunteer, she chose to sleep at the office rather than she go home for the reason might she receive a call to her supervisor if there is emergency. Joya also shared that even how sleepy she was, she has to stay awake at night so that if the clients needed something, she can automatically respond. Joya also shared that if the supervisor/ police officer called her in the middle of the night, she has no choice but to wake up and go because as a social worker working in the LGU, it is 24 hours on duty. She also shared that, even if it is holiday as long as there is an emergency, she has to accept it because it is the nature of a social worker. She stated that;

("Most of the time before when I was working as volunteers at LGU, I chose to sleep at the office rather than I go home. I sleep at the office; might I receive a call from our head supervisor because might there is an emergency where you stay awake at night even your sleepy but you have to take care of your client or give what the clients need. There are deadlines, there is reports that you have to do, so, if the supervisor calls you that he asks you should be 24 hours on call, you should accept it because you are a social worker, so if the police officer will call you that you will be the chosen one to be with them to rescue even if it is in the middle of the night, social worker must go, so that is what the advices, social worker must 24 hours on call. You must accept it, so you see even if it's holiday today I am still on duty? Yes, social worker is still on duty even if it is holiday because there is a lot of clients that are waiting to you.")

It simple implies that even how many sleepless nights she been through because of emergencies that she needs to be awake even if it is in the middle of the night and how exhausted she was in dealing with different clients every day, she still managed to do her best as a social worker in the local government unit. She also struggling in paper works, dealing with her time management and due dates but still she overcome it all. There this time she questioned her job as a social worker because she realized how this job so difficult and she admitted that she does not have the peace of mind and it is so disturbing because all she wanted is to sleep at night but because of the nature of her job, she needs to accept that she must to be 24 hours on call. Even though how she struggled a lot and feel negative when there was a lot of problems came, she was still optimistic in life and after all the circumstances they still manage to survive.

**Experiences of Cath the participant No. 3**

Participant number 3 experienced difficulty in planning because of many workloads and she cannot even decide which will be done first. Sometime she has the difficulties to divert different ideas in different situation of her clients. Also, it is difficult for her how to deal with sensitive situations.

Participant named Cath, not her real name, who answered truthfully, comparing herself that she is not as good as others in terms of financial support which make her feel so down and disappointed to herself because she cannot help her clients financially but only moral support, advices and counseling she can offer and she admitted that she is working as J.O (Job Order) where the salary is not that much. She stated that;

("Actually, during maam, MSWDO's time, it is not all, but, during in emergency, she refunded it, me, personally, I give nothing because I am just a J.O, my salary is not a lot, it's not even enough for myself, what I can give to my client are just moral support, advices, counselling, that's what I can only give, but personal money involved, actually, nothing, I am just honestly speaking. Just that, I will just link to other Agencies where she can ask help to other.)

When Cath the participant asked, she explained clearly how difficult to settle the marriage couple because the other couple is difficult to settled and the other is easy to settled. She stated that;

("ahhh… in couple, in a married couple, there is a case that is a little bit difficult, because the other one do not want to settle, and there are also couples that it's easy to settle because they both willing to settle down.")

Cath shared her experienced how scared she was because of the war, there is so many what if she thinks even though it was already aftermath. Even though Cath is scared she just let herself understand her situation that God has the purpose why she is in that situation.

(Then I experienced, we went before, there is a war, but that was aftermath already, because it seems like there is no more war, but then the residence already evacuated, you can say that, oh my gosh! What if something falls in here, what if the war comeback again, like that, it's scary, but then it's really like that, you are there in that situation, God has purpose for you, so just pray and take care always.")

Cath expressed her feeling how sad she is every time she and her husband had misunderstanding because of her job, because she chose to sleep in the office rather than going home which made her husband feel that she does not have enough time to her family. Cath having the difficulties how can she make her husband understand the nature of her job as a social worker. She stated that;

> ("Actually, during covid time, we sleep inside the office, yes! there are times that my husband mad at me, my husband telling me while upset, "just bring your mosquito net, pillow and your clothes! Just sleep to your office.")

Participant experienced misunderstanding with her husband, because it is difficult for her to explain the nature of her job. Sometimes, she even delayed her time in going home because there are times that the client arrived late in her office.

She felt so disappointed sharing her experienced that she cannot spend her weekend or holidays for the reason that there are emergencies and it is given that social workers must be 24 hours on call.

> ("Yes! that's how it is, because we here at LGU, as long as you are a social worker, you'll never fix your time, because we experienced before, especially when we deliver a cake, we do not have weekends, holidays, all! And then sometimes it is 5pm already, it's time for us to time out from work, right? ohh… see… our time at work extended.")

Social Worker in Local Government Unit, faced challenges in life having different difficulties; She comparing herself to other social worker who helped their clients financially and feel down to herself because all she can was to give emotional support and advices, she also having the difficulties of how her husband understand her nature of her job as a social worker working in the LGU because she chose sometimes sleeping in the office rather than going home and she also have the difficulties in herself because she is not that brave enough to face the challenges especially when she assigned giving help in the place that there was war but it was aftermath already, she has a lot of what if, she so scared. Despite of these situations, social workers still seek their selves to overcome all the challenges.

**Participant No. 4 named Maglane**

The participant experienced struggling in paper works, especially if it is her first time to work at the government, and especially if it is massive, there are deadlines, incorrect records, even though they experience difficulties, they remain standing to keep going.

Maglane, not her real admitted how she struggling working in paper works especially when it is urgent, they will inform today and then the following day, they needed to get the documents as soon as possible. She also admitted that sometimes she does not know how to manage her time. She stated that;

> ("I experienced the programs in MSWD, in terms in paper works, before, I struggle a lot, especially if it is your first time to work at the government, the paper works are difficult, especially if it is massive, because, of course, there are deadlines, and then you have the client that need to entertain, sometimes you do not know how to manage your time management. Actually, I am not good in paper works but I am trying my best always.")

Maglane admitted that she is struggling based on her physical features because people see her as a grade 5 student. She does not know how to react if she will laugh or be sad. Most of the people do not believe on what she is saying. She shared that, if they see her as a young and not a senior, if they see her not an honorable, the people do not believe in her even though, she is old/matured enough, she stated that;

> (*"And then second, I struggle in my physical, why is that? Because the people are very judgmental, if they see you as not honorable, if they see you as ah… you are not a senior, the way they look at you, or they see as younger to them, they will not believe in whatever you say to them. There this one time, I never ever forget those, my client sees me as a Grade 5 student, she even told me, "Am I right maam? That you are the Grade 5 at the SBC? And I answered back, hahhhh? Grade 5? Since that day I never wear clothes that I look like a Grade 5 student. It is funny but at the same time I am struggling with myself.")*
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> "Maglane stated the fact that she is having the difficulties in diverting her ideas in terms of dealing with different clients' every day. She shared that when she is assigned in CiCL and another client again in the afternoon, dealing with family problem then she has to cater them. She admitted that it is really difficult to divert her mindset to her intervention ideas. She stated that;
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> ("So that is what I experienced, how to manage each of your client, and then it's really difficult because you have to face different problems, the way how you divert your ideas, for example from CiCL, and then another client in the afternoon is family problems then you cater them, so, how you divert your mindset, intervention and ideas, that is why it is very difficult.)

It implies that social workers in the Local Government Unit experiencing difficulties; difficulties in her physical appearance because most of her clients do not believe on her because they see her as young when she was already old/matured enough, difficulties in terms of paper works because when it is urgent, she will inform today and then the following day, they needed to get the documents as soon as possible and difficulties in diverting different intervention in different client's problem. It is also part of her job to be called in 24/7. She made their office as their second home. Holidays are just like a normal day of duty. Despite of all the circumstances, she kept going in life and always positive.

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