

Understanding the ABCDs of young adult breadwinning phenomenon: The Baseco experience

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Abstract

As a result of widespread unemployment and lack of work opportunities in the country, especially for those parents, who are supposedly the breadwinners in the family, the young adults and yet undergraduate children of these families in Baseco were forced to work and assumed the role of being the young adult breadwinners. This young adult breadwinning phenomenon provides an eye opening concept which is called the ABCDs to survive, a social lens of a young adult breadwinner model. This 4-sphere model of breadwinning stands for Accountabilities, Benefits, Consequences and Dreams.

Keywords: Breadwinner, poverty alleviation, income earning

Introduction

The family is considered as the basic unit in the society. This basic unit, also known as social institution, binds two or more individuals that comprise the entire nation. This basic unit must be strong because a strong family is essential for the creation of a strong nation. The U.S. Census Bureau (2009) defines the family as simply as two or more people living together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. These social institutions, once provided with the right opportunities could become strong pillars that build the character of the entire nation. Gentry and Commori (2009), emphasized that families are stake-holders in all societies and marketing systems, and plays an important roles in improving their lives. But what if the parents (fathers and mothers) of these supposedly pillars are not given the right opportunities to earn for their families? Or they don't have the capability to work? What if the labor market provides limited jobs for them? What role in the family will they play? Who will assume the role of being a breadwinner in the family? Child carers?

Traditionally, fathers have the role to provide for the family practically in almost all countries in the world (Kelan, 2008) while mothers are simply homemakers which is based on the conservative family model (Kelan 2008; Emmenegger, 2010). Several researches claims that highly religious people are likely to be supportive of the male-breadwinner model (Cunningham, 2008, Emmenegger, 2010). This concept was strengthen legally through the formulation of policies on minimum wage that expands a male-breadwinner structure (Mutari, 2004) long before. Unfortunately, this concept is no longer exclusive to men nowadays because the society have already accepted the idea that women can actually help their partners in providing for the family and can balance work and family requirements (Van der Lippe et al., 2006). It is possible

because of the changing environment brought about by changes in technological, legal and cultural environment (Soobedar, 2004). Women are given equal opportunity as men in the workplace which resulted to an increased in their participation in the labor market (Spain and Bianchi, 1996, Cunningham, 2008). Unfortunately, most working women are single mothers or divorced (Rife, 1995; Kelan, 2008).

Reports reveal that women's role to become the primary financial providers in the family (Lan, 2003, Glynn, 2012) not only in developed countries but also in the third world countries as well such as the Philippines is increasing. These situations are blatant wherein the fathers are forced to stay at home for the lack of opportunities or capabilities to work (Lan, 2003). Or simply, fathers have no drive and motivation to do so and they are so dependent on their partners and children for livelihood

In the U.S., it was reported that women participation in the labor force had increased since 2007. Nearly half of the workforce (49.9 percent) are women (Glynn, 2007) and contributed almost 45 percent of the family income (Smith, 2009) which was motivated partly by personal choice and partly by economic factors. Cunningham (2008) illustrated in his study that during the 20th century, an increasing number of married women in the United States has entered the paid labor force to support their families.

In March 2000, for example, the Lisbon European Council targeted to increase the rate of women's employment to 60 percent as against to their male counterpart. A change that drastically affect the traditional male-breadwinner model. Obviously, the change is brought about by the economic erosion experienced globally (Kelkey, 2003).

Meanwhile, Gillian Pascal (2008), explains that in UK the pay gap between male and female workers has decreased. It is partly because the proportion of female workers in part-time work was very high despite of its disadvantaged condition with very low pay (Grimshaw, 2007).

The increasing involvement of women in the labor market has loosened the traditional concept of male-breadwinning in the family and provide new highway for exploration for the welfare states in Europe, specifically in the field of social organization of care (Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004; Crompton, 2006, Ciccia, 2012). In European countries, the universal breadwinner model is the second most common concept which promotes the ever growing female employment (Ciccia, 2012). In a study conducted by Holter (2007), a new trend in the European labor market shows that there is a dramatic change from the breadwinner masculinities (male-breadwinner) towards caring masculinities.

The concept of male breadwinner in other Asian countries were also declining. Mari Osawa (2006) claims that the male breadwinner model of Japan was not a traditional system but rather it was introduced in 1960 during the rapid economic growth of his country. Meanwhile, in 1980 the double-income family exceeded the family with full-time mothers. Obviously, the male breadwinner model system did not succeed because of the failure in handling the post-industrialization in the country. Obviously, the female breadwinner phenomenon is widely accepted all over the world.

In the Philippines, because of the lack of job opportunities, housewives are forced to seek employment overseas. Migrant Filipino women became "transnational breadwinners" (Rei-chai Lan, 2003) in the host countries. Meanwhile, majority of the Local Filipino Workers are still working in the local industry having limited opportunity to earn more for the family. These workers have no other choice but to grab these jobs just to earn something and save their families from starvation. Regrettably, these women were subjected to low pay, long hours, and informal working arrangements (ILO, 2011). As a result, these women are more exposed to the risk of poverty which is higher as compared to their male counterpart in informal employment.

These young adults are residents of a popular depressed area in Tondo, Manila – Baseco. Baseco is a community which is a perfect representation of the entire informal settlers' condition in the Philippines. Shanties here are just built without following the housing construction standard. People here have already experience 3 fire blazed that consumed practically the whole community. Baseco Compound has an estimated population of 6,200 families. It was known before for its rampant crimes and offenders. This bad reputation of Baseco was very unfortunate that even during the day, taxi drivers are still afraid to bring their passengers to the place – it is unfortunate that it is still the stigma to the community up to this time.

Most children here are not given the right opportunities to finish education which is provided for free by the government. The usual reason of the parents during the initial and informal sharing made by the author with them was the lack of money. They admitted that instead of sending their children to school, they are forced to engage in menial jobs for a fee. These jobs help them cope with their basic needs daily, at least for food. S

Method

Subjects

This phenomenological study is a bold attempt to describe the role of young adults as primary financial providers (breadwinners) in the family living in Baseco. The gender, age, educational background, physical conditions and enthusiasm of the individual may not be factors that forced them to assume this responsibility, but basically the instinct to survive because of poverty. It focused on four (4) elements such as accountabilities, benefits, consequences, and dreams of being a breadwinner. Participants of this study were purposively selected based on their role as breadwinners in the family. This concept is derived from the sharing during the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) collected in April 2013. The FGD lasted for 90 minutes (1 1/2 hour) where the participants were given freedom in providing necessary information about the topic.

Date Analysis

The proceedings and discussions were transcribed by a transcription specialist in verbatim form and was encoded in word processing document in order not to miss out any single information necessary for the analysis. After which, transcribed information was systematically analyzed by formulating categories and surfacing themes that would help determine the underlying concepts and ideas that each participant had shared. Transcribed and interpreted results were presented individually to the participants for verification.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

The FGD guide questionnaire is structured in 3 sections in order to gather the perceptions and feelings of the respondents about breadwinning. To supplement the FGD, the participants were also provided with information sheet to secure profile of the participants such as age, gender, educational attainment, number of family members, monthly income, parents (still alive) and kind/nature of work. The author also have several chance of socializing with the participants during the community services provided and organized by the department for the partner community. During these occasions, other significant information about their livelihood and economic activities are gathered. These information are helpful gathering data during the FGD and profiling This study hopes to provide a social lens that would help magnify the role being played by the young adults as breadwinners.

Findings

Interestingly, an eye opening concept of a breadwinner had surfaced in the study after the conduct of cool and warm analyses. This is the ABCDs to survive, the social lens of a young adult breadwinner model as perceived by the participants (see fig. 1 below). This model describes how young adults perceived themselves as the primary financial providers in the family. A 4-sphere model was developed, the ABCDs of breadwinning that stands for Accountabilities, Benefits, Consequences and Dreams. Being breadwinners, these young adults believed that they are accountable to their parents and siblings. Details of these will be discussed as the concept is being presented.

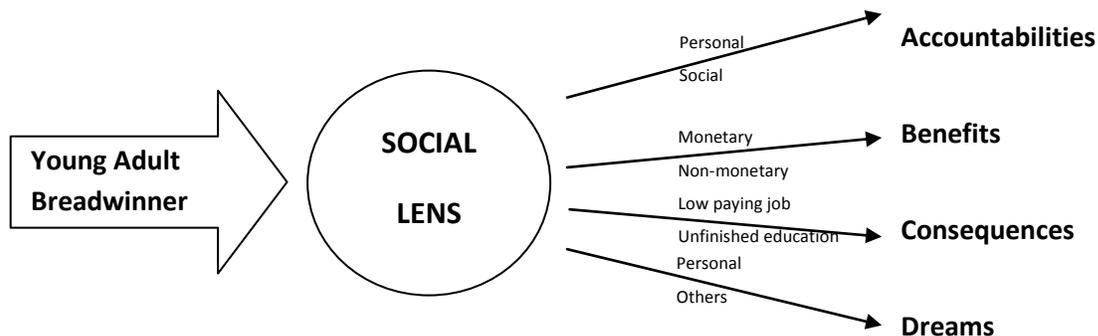


Figure 1 - The ABCDs to Survive: A Social Lens of a Young Adult Breadwinner Model

The Accountability Sphere: Personal Decision and Social Function of Breadwinning

The Accountability Sphere is an area where the young adults feel that they are answerable to their parents and siblings. They believe that no one has the capability and concern for the family except for them that is why they assumed the responsibility to be the primary financial providers. This decision was brought about by several reasons such as being the eldest in the family, parents are already old, sick or just passed away. Or the family was a victim of an unfortunate event such as fire blazed. These young adults entered the world of breadwinning as their personal obligation since the situation in the family left them no other choice but to work. For some young adults, the responsibility to provide for the family is an obligation which is based on the principle of social function. It is their way of giving back to their parents the love and care the later provided for them and their siblings. These experiences of the young adult breadwinners-participants enable them to fulfill their role in the family as they perform their responsibility within the accountability sphere of breadwinning in the light of social function.

The Benefits Sphere: The Monetary and Non-monetary Gain of Breadwinning

The Benefit Sphere suggests how the young adult breadwinners provide the necessary help and support every family requires such as food, clothing, shelter, education and even comfort, security and love. These benefits are being enjoyed by the family members. Similarly, the

breadwinners themselves enjoy those benefits as well. These benefits are not limited to monetary but also extended in the form of non-monetary gain such as the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction.

One form of benefit as suggested by the participants is in the form of money since they support the entire family for their daily needs. This participant admitted that being a breadwinner is a great responsibility that he needs to sacrifice even his personal ambition just to support his family. As mentioned, the benefit of being a breadwinner is not only monetary but also non-monetary as expressed by one participant. Being a breadwinner gave this young individual a pride that he can already stand on his own feet and survive the challenges of the times. He claims that he is even more responsible as compared to other young adults who are just relying on others for a living. It is interesting to note that these common experiences of participants allowed them to enjoy the fruits of their labor. The fulfillment and satisfaction that they feel is more than the monetary benefits that they provide for the family. Indeed, it is not only the money that can make a person happy and fulfilled but more than anything else is the satisfaction that he receives from the people he loves and cares for.

The Consequences Sphere: The Cost and Price of Breadwinning

In this study, it is interesting to note that being a breadwinner also have negative consequences. The participants boldly expressed these cost and price of breadwinning wherein they were not able to finish their education, either secondary or tertiary.

Noticeably, all participants shared the same sentiment that one particular area of their lives was greatly affected when they assumed the breadwinning-role in the family – that is education. Their assumption of the role – or the situation that forced them to play the role – has deprived them of their chance to finish school and acquire necessary knowledge and skills to become competitive. As a results, since they did not finish secondary or tertiary education, when they apply for a job, they usually land in a low paying job. It makes their situations even more difficult and complicated. Most of the young adult breadwinners, except for the one who was able to finish vocational course, are high school level or graduates. This kind of educational attainment forced them to accept whatever job available for them. Unfortunately, these jobs offer very minimal salaries, which is below the minimum wage as mandated by law.

Aside from the fact that they lost the opportunity to study and land in a high paying job, another unacceptable reality in the family, is the fact that their elder sisters or brothers, instead of working and helping the family, they also rely to their younger brother/sister who act as breadwinners.

In spite of the difficulty accompanied in this role, some of them still manage to study. This realization would lead us to the dream sphere where these young adults still see hope in their present situation.

The Dreams Sphere: Education and Descent Job as Breadwinners' Vehicles to Survive

The dream sphere describes the desire of the young adult breadwinner to eventually break the poverty cycle in the family through education. This area illustrates the aspirations of these young individuals for their younger brother or sister, who is bright, to finish education.

These young men and women, who are currently earning and providing for their families are highly stimulated by the money and their job. During the discussion, it was very noticeable that their eyes are so bright and full of hope when the education aspect was touched. The energy was overflowing and could be felt through their voice. Some of them even think of going back to school and finish college education or vocational course or even high school once given the opportunity.

One participant, for instance, is very eager to finish his high school. He is working during the night to earn for the family and attend public high school in the morning in order to be educated and somehow be competitive.

Education is the only way for them to escape and survive the ocean of poverty. One of them suggested that education is the only wealth that cannot be taken away from him once he has it. To support this claim, one of the participants who was able to finish vocational course is the only young adult breadwinner who earns minimum wage. Although, in spite of this opportunity, she was still subjected to some sort of discrimination in the workplace which favors mostly those who finished four-year course. Nevertheless, the doors of better opportunities may be opened for those who finished even vocational course.

In the final analysis, these young individuals would do everything just to save their families from the curse of poverty that continuously cripple and stop them from furthering their cause – and that is through better and quality education!

Discussion

Qualitative research allows an individual to explore his ability to puzzle out words and be able to formulate significant concept that could be derived from any research undertaking. To describe the phenomena of breadwinning as experienced by the young adults would definitely contribute to the vast collections of knowledge significant and noteworthy of references and sources of new data. In this research undertaking, the Accountabilities-Benefits-Consequences-Dreams spheres provide a social lens that would help the readers understand the important role these young adults play – which is to provide for the family, enjoy the benefits, face the consequences and eventually break the cycle of poverty through education.

As shown in the study, the accountability sphere left no choice for the participants but to assume the role of being the breadwinners in order to provide for their families. The findings in this paper confirmed some of the researches that the mothers and fathers – male breadwinner (Kelan, 2008; Walsum, 2008), female breadwinner (Cunningham, 2008; Kelan, 2008; Glynn, 2012), or dual breadwinner (Osawa, 2006; Pascall, 2008) – are the one who must assumed the role as breadwinners and support the entire family. Unfortunately, the inability of the parents (particularly the fathers) to stay as the primary financial providers because of old age that would lead to sickness and death forced these young adults to assume the role. This finding runs parallel with what Kelan (2008) has suggested that “*ageing was particularly important in this regard, functioning as a focus of anxiety about how long it would be possible to maintain this entrepreneurial work*”.

Indeed, ageing could lead to sickness of the breadwinner (father) that hinders him from performing his job and earn for the family, or it could lead to his death that could eventually stopped him forever from supporting the entire family. Generally, the fathers often find themselves in a crisis because they are too poor to perform as successful breadwinners (Fodor, 2006) in the family. Similarly, for women, their ability to find a new job is often influenced by

gender and age is definitely disadvantageous for older women (McMullin & Berger, 2006; Weller, 2007, Kelan, 2008).

As shown also in the findings that instead of the eldest in the family to assume the role of being the breadwinners, they got married just to escape the responsibility of taking care of their families. Similar to the situations of women in India as illustrated by Clark (2007), they got married even before they reached the age of 18 and expect for a dowry. Dowry in India provides the couple with the seed money or property for the establishment of a new household in order to help feed and protect the family. It may also serves as a form of protection for the wife against the possibility of sickness or death of the husband. On the contrary, the eldest in the families of these young adult breadwinners got married without the dowry since it is not part of the Filipino culture.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that in the absence of the breadwinner in the family, one will surely emerge as the new financial provider who will be willing and strong enough to assume the responsibility, regardless of his age, gender, educational attainment, physical condition and even status in the family. It is an obligation of an individual young adult which is part of the social function to help and save his family from hunger and starvation. This situation is rampant in the Philippines, especially in the family who is living below the poverty threshold.

The benefits sphere of breadwinning in this study, on the other hand, is characterized by monetary and non-monetary factors. Recent studies show that over the last generation the male breadwinner/housewife family has gradually become outdated as the dominant normative model for family households (Knudsen and Wærness, 2008) where parents are responsible in providing monetary and non-monetary benefits for the family. Contrary to the findings of this study where parents are incapable to support their families, Knudsen and Wærness (2008) further explained that the parents in the adult worker family model are having financial independence and sharing of household work and childcare between spouses. It shows that children and young adult are not supposed to assume the role of becoming breadwinners. For the younger people, *'there seems to be great ambivalence on how the distribution of childcare and housework should be included in a financial management system that could be evaluated as just and reasonable'* (Burgoyne, Reibstein, Edmunds, & Dolman, 2007) since it is not yet part of their responsibilities.

A young adult breadwinner provides financial support to his family in order to satisfy the basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. As Susan Thieme (2008) in her study presented a situation of one female breadwinner wherein she supports her family and she needs to work even she is sick – she claims that she still needs to work and earn money for her family in spite of her condition.

Although, these young adults enjoy the benefits of being breadwinners, it cannot ignore the fact that there is a sudden jump in their role from being students to young adult breadwinners. Meanwhile, this young adult breadwinner role in the family may only last for a certain period until these young individuals became a real and full pledge breadwinners (male or father) to support their own family.

On the other hand, being a breadwinner has its cost and price that an individual must pay. As presented in the consequences sphere, there are two aspects in the life of these young adults which are greatly affected by their role as breadwinners – the opportunity to finish education and the opportunity to land in a descent job. Since they were trapped in this situation at a young age, they were not able to finish their education primarily because of the slim of financial support. Contrary to what Gillian Pascall (2008) have presented in her study that the parents (father and mother) have equal rights and obligation to support their children to finish

education and have a good life. In the case of these young adults, neither the father nor the mother can support and sustain their education except them, which is quiet impossible since their income as young adult breadwinners from a low paying job is definitely limited. Although, the problem of low paying job is not isolated in the Philippines as discussed by Sarah Jane Glynn (2007) in her, it is also happening in other parts of the globe particularly in the lower income families. For instance, for the family where both parents are working, they tried to make both ends meet (Kelan, 2008; Bianchi, 2011).

Lastly, the dream sphere illustrates the aspirations of these young adult breadwinners to eventually break the vicious cycle of poverty in the family and that is only possible through education. A case in point is the experience of a particular participant who was given a chance to finish vocational course wherein a better job opportunity was opened for her in the labor market. Mick Cunningham (2008), in his study, concluded that education plays an important role in the life of the breadwinner (specially for women) in finding a high paying job. Being a breadwinner, someone must be competitive, therefore he must acquire knowledge and skills necessary to perform a job (Kelan, 2008) which is possible through training and proper education.

Although the government provides free education for Filipino children, still a vast number of Filipino children are not attending schools because of economic reasons – lack of transportation allowance, no budget for books, school supplies and uniform. As a result, these children when they reached adulthood and the need to work, they would usually land in a low paying job. And once they got married and have their own children, they cannot also afford to send them to school as what their parents did during their childhood. The cycle of poverty in the family is not broken as if it is a curse – that once a child is born in a poor family, he will always be poor all his life. At this point, the government may also consider the enactment of laws and appropriate policies that provide discounts for these young adults who would like to continue their studies. The Philippines, being known for its enormous source of man power must give priority to its human capital.

Conclusion

This phenomenological paper uses FGD and cool and warm analyses to describe the concept of breadwinner as perceived by the young adults in Baseco, Tondo Manila. It surfaced the ABCDs of breadwinning. Contrary to the traditional concept of male or adult breadwinner model, female or dual breadwinner, and universal breadwinner wherein the parents have the responsibility to support their respective families because of the role built-in in parenthood, the young adult breadwinners assumed the role at a very young age – even before the legal age of eighteen – which is against the law because it is still considered as child labor.

In this study, both young men and women, are fully engaged in the labor market, similar to the case of the adult breadwinners, not considering that their income is below minimum wage. Currently, the Philippine government mandates that all business organizations must provide a minimum wage to all employees regardless of age, gender and educational attainment, which is also based on the International policy for equal opportunities in employment and a commitment to equal pay for men and women (Pascall, 2008). Unfortunately, these young individuals are embracing and accepting this situation because they want to save their families from poverty. It happened because they don't have the degree and they don't possess the necessary skills.

Finally, the results of this analysis may serve as template or guide for other institutions to collaborate for a better and comprehensive programs that would further enhance the capability of

these young adults in order for them to become competitive and have equal chance in the labor market. Therefore, academic institutions, government agencies, the church and other non-government organizations and the society may provide opportunities for these young people to equip themselves with the necessary and right opportunities. Specifically, the legislative body may formulate and legislate policies that would provide better benefits for these young adult breadwinners similar to what the adult breadwinners (mothers and fathers) enjoy.

Future study should explore this issue on how different organizations may collaborate to provide long term and structural solutions to this structural problem on young adult breadwinning.

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