Photovoice in the Philippines
Through the Lens of a Survivor

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The Philippines is made up of over 7,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. The country is located in Southeast Asia and the islands are broken into three regions: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. My travels took me to Manila, the capital of the Philippines located in Luzon. There are over 12 million people in metro Manila alone and within the whole country there is estimated to be over 106 million people. Throughout the country there are over 170 dialects spoken.

Placement/Project Information

Photovoice is a community-based participatory research method that equitably involves community members in developing research questions and gathering information through photography.

My Photovoice proposal was embraced by She WORKS because it filled a need that was already identified within the organization prior to my proposal. In August 2019, I worked with a team of five core survivor-leaders going through the Photovoice process. Not only did the women engage in the research, but we worked on a training of trainers to focus on building leadership capacity for them to facilitate Photovoice in the future.

The She WORKS leaders developed their own research question for Photovoice, and they chose to look at their "Community Reality." Each session they selected three questions that they would go back to their homes to photograph. Through looking at their communities, the women explored the many systems that have impacted their own journeys.

Community Partner

My partner organization She WORKS (Women Of Reliability, Knowledge and Skills) is a training program for women formerly involved in sex trafficking who are interested in leadership, livelihood training, advocacy and have a desire to serve their communities.

The survivor-advocates had used photos in the past as a means to process their experiences. However, the photos were not culturally relevant to the Philippines, and She WORKS wanted to create more relatable content. They also wanted to use photography to promote discussion and awareness in their communities about the realities of human trafficking. Before I even proposed using Photovoice, the women attempted to fund their project "Through the Lens of Survivors;" however, they never received the resources. It was because of the funding through the Global Independent Study Grant and the CEW+ Research Fellowship that we were able to make this project a reality.

Outcomes

The She WORKS leaders found Photovoice to be a powerful research method, and they will be using the information we gathered for social action, popular education and tools for processing.

- She WORKS will be displaying their photos this November at a public prayer gathering held annually in the Philippines. They are currently looking for other partners that will display their photography and narratives about their community realities.

- We are collaborating to create a facilitation tool-kit in Tagalog.

- The She WORKS leaders will facilitate Photovoice with 60+ survivors in February of 2020 at their leadership camp.

- She WORKS will be using the photos to create a packet of 50 culturally appropriate photos to use in group sessions for women to process their experiences.

- The women are also using the photos to create a calendar that will be used for livelihood and advocacy purposes.

Connections

Classroom

- SW 799: Advanced Topics in Social Work, Photovoice. Our class explored Photovoice research while participating in the process at the same time. This class guided my work in the Philippines.

- SW 715: Adventure/Experiential-Based Social Work Practice. I was able to incorporate group facilitation techniques and activities. The check-in and check-out activities were a highlight of our sessions.

- SW 683: Evaluation in Social Work. This was the class that first introduced me to Photovoice research.

Career
My GIS has provided me the opportunity to pass on my education and continue to be involved in my Filipino community. My long-term goal is to work within the international social work community, and exchange information across cultures. There is such a wealth of knowledge that can be shared in social services, and I hope that Photovoice can be a means to learn from other cultures. I hope to explore different ways of recording and documenting the services provided to people in different communities where language barriers exist.

Skills Utilized/Developed

- Facilitating Photovoice and learning about community-based participatory methods
- Community organizing within a culture that is different from my own which required a commitment to building authentic relationships and working with cultural differences and language barriers.
- Listening and taking a step back when the Photovoice research took a different direction then we had originally planned

Lessons Learned

- Always be willing to follow the culture when it comes to "time." I came with a schedule, only to learn that there were three holidays while I was in country. All my plans changed within 24 hours of being there.
- Working with women who are committed to the mission of their organization makes a difference in the success of an organization and their commitment to their community.
- There are times when you do not fully see where your research is headed, but the process is so important when working with communities.

Advice:
To any student considering a Global Independent Study, do not think twice. My GIS has been the highlight of my time in the MSW program. Also, professors are excited to work with you. Do not be afraid to ask someone you do not know.

Acknowledgements