



Lived experiences of learners and parents under the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps) of Ortega Integrated School for School Year 2024-2025

Febian J. Zorolla

Aklan State University, Banga, Aklan, Philippines
Corresponding Author email: febian.zorolla@deped.gov.ph

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Abstract

Aim: This study explored the lived experiences of learners and parents who are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) at Ortega Integrated School for School Year 2024–2025. The study aimed to examine how participation in the program influences their educational experiences, perceptions of livelihood, and sense of social inclusion.

Methodology: A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed. Ten participants, consisting of five learners and five parents who are active 4Ps beneficiaries, were purposively selected. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and shared meanings in participants' narratives.

Results: Five major themes emerged: financial assistance as a lifeline during economic hardship; pressures associated with program conditionalities; experiences of social stigma; perceived limitations of financial support; and the tension between gratitude and dependency. While the program contributed to sustained school attendance and improved access to basic needs, participants reported emotional stress, compliance anxiety, and concerns about long-term sustainability.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that the 4Ps program provides significant educational and financial support to beneficiary families. However, its implementation also generates psychosocial challenges that require attention. Strengthening complementary livelihood programs, promoting anti-stigma initiatives, and incorporating psychosocial support mechanisms are recommended to enhance the program's holistic impact.

Keywords: *conditional cash transfer, lived experiences, social stigma, human development, poverty alleviation*

INTRODUCTION

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs have been widely implemented across developing countries as a social protection strategy aimed at reducing poverty and promoting human capital development. Globally, programs such as Brazil's Bolsa Família, Mexico's Prospera, and Indonesia's Program Keluarga Harapan have demonstrated measurable improvements in school participation, child health outcomes, and household welfare by linking financial assistance to education and health compliance (World Bank, 2022). However, recent international evaluations emphasize that while CCTs improve access to basic services, their psychosocial and social effects on beneficiaries remain underexplored, particularly at the community and school levels.

In Southeast Asia, CCT programs have expanded significantly in response to persistent poverty and widening social inequalities, especially in the post-pandemic context. ASEAN-based studies have highlighted emerging concerns related to beneficiary dependency, stigma, and uneven access to complementary livelihood opportunities, suggesting that financial assistance alone may be insufficient for sustained empowerment (Asian Development Bank, 2023). These regional findings underscore the importance of examining not only program outcomes but also beneficiaries' lived experiences within specific sociocultural settings.

In the Philippines, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), implemented in 2008 through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), serves as the country's flagship CCT initiative. The program was designed to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by investing in children's education and health through



conditional financial assistance. National evaluations have consistently reported improvements in school enrollment, attendance, and access to basic health services among beneficiary households (DSWD, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Despite these documented gains, most assessments remain heavily quantitative, focusing on compliance rates and aggregate indicators.

Recent post-pandemic studies have begun to acknowledge that 4Ps participation may also generate psychosocial pressures, including compliance anxiety, social labeling, and uncertainty regarding long-term sustainability after program exit (Villanueva et al., 2024; David & Maroma, 2025). However, there remains a limited number of qualitative investigations that examine how learners and parents personally experience these dynamics, particularly within school communities.

At the local level, Ortega Integrated School serves a population where a significant proportion of learners belong to 4Ps beneficiary households. While administrative records document compliance with program conditions, there is limited empirical understanding of how the program shapes learners' educational experiences, parents' perceptions of responsibility, and family aspirations within this specific context. No known school-level phenomenological study has examined the lived experiences of both learners and parents in a rural integrated school setting while integrating human capital, social identity, and empowerment perspectives.

Accordingly, this study sought to examine the lived experiences of learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) at Ortega Integrated School for School Year 2024–2025. By employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how conditional cash transfers influence education, social identity, and perceptions of empowerment beyond measurable compliance outcomes.

Academic and Community Contribution

This study contributes to social policy research by extending CCT analysis beyond outcome indicators to include psychosocial and identity-related dimensions of participation. It advances qualitative welfare studies by offering a phenomenological account of beneficiary experiences at the school and household levels. The findings also contribute to educational sociology by examining how conditional welfare participation intersects with schooling, motivation, and stigma. At the community level, the study provides localized evidence that may inform more context-responsive implementation of poverty-alleviation programs in rural school settings.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is the Philippine government's primary conditional cash transfer initiative, targeting poor households with children through education- and health-related conditionalities. National evaluations have reported sustained improvements in school attendance, enrollment, and utilization of health services among beneficiaries (DSWD, 2023; World Bank, 2022). More recent policy reviews emphasize the program's role in mitigating short-term economic shocks, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Villanueva et al., 2024).

Despite these positive outcomes, scholars have noted that macro-level indicators provide limited insight into how beneficiaries experience program participation in daily life. Post-pandemic analyses call for qualitative approaches to examine psychosocial stressors, compliance burdens, and long-term transition challenges faced by beneficiary families (David & Maroma, 2025).

Educational Experiences of Learners under 4Ps

Education is a central conditionality of the 4Ps program. Financial assistance has been shown to reduce school-related expenses, contributing to improved attendance and reduced dropout rates (Villaflor et al., 2022). However, recent studies indicate that sustained attendance does not necessarily translate into improved academic performance, particularly in under-resourced public schools (Dizon & Reyes, 2020).

Emerging qualitative evidence suggests that learners from beneficiary households may experience heightened academic pressure due to the conditional nature of assistance, as educational performance becomes closely linked to household financial security (Alipio, 2021). These findings highlight the need to examine learners' emotional and motivational experiences within the program, beyond attendance metrics.



Parents' Experiences and Compliance Responsibilities

Parents play a central role in ensuring compliance with 4Ps conditions, including school attendance, health check-ups, and participation in Family Development Sessions. Recent studies report that parents perceive the program as essential for meeting basic household needs and sustaining their children's education (Melad et al., 2020). However, qualitative research indicates that compliance responsibilities may also generate stress and anxiety, particularly in contexts where access to schools and health facilities is limited (Navarro, 2018). Post-pandemic assessments further reveal parental concerns regarding livelihood sustainability and program exit, suggesting that financial assistance alone may not address structural poverty (Villanueva et al., 2024).

Social Stigma and Beneficiary Identity

Social stigma associated with welfare participation remains a documented concern. Studies indicate that 4Ps beneficiaries may be labeled as dependent or undeserving, reinforcing social exclusion within communities (Reyes & Tabuga, 2017). Learners, in particular, may internalize this stigma, affecting self-esteem and school engagement (Alipio, 2021).

Recent qualitative scholarship emphasizes that beneficiary identity formation is shaped not only by public perception but also by institutional practices such as monitoring and conditional enforcement (David & Maroma, 2025). These findings support the need for school-based qualitative inquiry into how stigma manifests in everyday educational settings.

Dependency, Empowerment, and Program Sustainability

While CCTs provide immediate economic relief, concerns regarding dependency and post-program sustainability persist. Recent Philippine-based evaluations suggest that beneficiaries often face limited livelihood opportunities after exiting the program, particularly in rural areas (Villanueva et al., 2024). Contemporary empowerment frameworks emphasize that sustainable poverty reduction requires not only financial support but also agency, dignity, and access to opportunities (UNICEF Philippines & DSWD, 2020).

Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that 4Ps has achieved measurable success in improving access to education and health services. However, there remains a significant gap in school-level qualitative studies that examine the lived experiences of both learners and parents, particularly in rural integrated school contexts. Existing research rarely integrates Human Capital Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Empowerment Theory within a single phenomenological inquiry.

This study addressed this gap by conducting a localized, school-based phenomenological investigation at Ortega Integrated School. By centering beneficiary narratives, the study extended existing scholarship by examining how conditional cash transfer participation shapes education, identity, and empowerment at the community level.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Human Capital Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Empowerment Theory to analyze the lived experiences of learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). These theories collectively guided the development of interview questions, thematic coding, and interpretation of findings.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory posits that investments in education and health enhance individuals' skills, productivity, and future economic outcomes (Becker, 1964). Contemporary applications of the theory emphasize education and health as foundational mechanisms for long-term poverty reduction (World Bank, 2022). In this study, Human Capital Theory informed interview questions related to schooling, attendance, health compliance, and perceived educational value of the 4Ps program.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory explains how individuals' self-concepts are shaped by group membership and social labeling (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), with recent studies emphasizing its relevance in welfare and poverty contexts



(Navarro, 2018). This theory guided the exploration of learners' and parents' experiences of stigma, labeling, and social inclusion as 4Ps beneficiaries.

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory focuses on individuals' capacity to exercise agency, self-efficacy, and control over life circumstances (Zimmerman, 2000). In this study, Empowerment Theory informed questions related to dependency, aspirations, and perceptions of self-reliance. It also guided the interpretation of themes related to gratitude, uncertainty, and long-term planning.

Integration of the Theories

The integration of these three theories provided a comprehensive analytical lens. Human Capital Theory explained the program's structural intent, Social Identity Theory captured psychosocial and social dynamics, and Empowerment Theory assessed perceptions of agency and sustainability. Together, these frameworks guided thematic development and ensured that analysis extended beyond economic outcomes to include educational, social, and psychosocial dimensions of 4Ps participation.

Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive implementation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) as the Philippine government's primary conditional cash transfer initiative, most existing studies have focused primarily on quantitative indicators such as school attendance rates, health compliance, and poverty statistics. Limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of beneficiaries, particularly at the school and community levels. While statistical reports demonstrate improvements in educational access and health participation, less is known about the psychosocial, emotional, and identity-related dimensions of program participation among learners and their parents.

At Ortega Integrated School, beneficiaries of the 4Ps program continue to navigate both opportunities and challenges associated with conditional financial assistance. The absence of localized, qualitative investigations into their lived realities creates a gap in understanding how the program influences educational perceptions, family dynamics, social inclusion, and long-term aspirations.

Therefore, this study sought to examine the lived experiences of learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the 4Ps program at Ortega Integrated School for School Year 2024–2025. By exploring their narratives, the study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human dimensions of poverty alleviation policies and to inform future program enhancements.

Research Objectives

General Objective:

To examine the lived experiences of learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) at Ortega Integrated School.

Specific Objectives:

1. To describe the lived experiences of learners and parents as 4Ps beneficiaries.
2. To determine how participation in the 4Ps program influenced their perceptions of education, livelihood, and social inclusion.
3. To analyze the challenges and opportunities that emerged from their participation in the program.

Research Questions

1. What were the lived experiences of learners and parents who were 4Ps beneficiaries?
2. How did participation in the 4Ps program influence their perceptions of education, livelihood, and social inclusion?
3. What challenges and opportunities emerged from their participation in the program?



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METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences of learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Phenomenology was selected because the study sought to understand the shared meanings and essence of participants' experiences with conditional cash transfer participation, rather than to generate theory or analyze a bounded system.

The phenomenological approach was operationalized through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words. To minimize researcher bias, bracketing was practiced by consciously setting aside prior assumptions regarding the 4Ps program during data collection and analysis. Data analysis focused on identifying significant statements, clustering meanings, and synthesizing themes that represented the essence of participants' lived experiences as 4Ps beneficiaries.

This design was deemed appropriate because it aligned with the study's objective of examining the educational, social, and psychosocial dimensions of program participation from the perspectives of learners and parents.

Population and Sampling

The study involved ten purposively selected participants, consisting of five learners aged 12–18 years and five parents of enrolled learners at Ortega Integrated School during School Year 2024–2025. All participants were active beneficiaries of the 4Ps program at the time of the study.

Inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Learners must have been officially enrolled at Ortega Integrated School and registered as 4Ps beneficiaries for at least one academic year.
2. Parents must have been the registered household representatives responsible for program compliance.
3. Participants must have been willing to share their experiences and provide informed consent (and assent for minors).

Both male and female participants were represented. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Recruitment was facilitated through coordination with school administrators and the designated 4Ps school coordinator, who assisted in identifying eligible participants. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided.

The sample size of ten participants was considered sufficient, as data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged during the later interviews.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide, designed separately for learners and parents. The interview guide focused on participants' lived experiences as 4Ps beneficiaries, including:

- Educational experiences and school participation
- Perceptions of program conditionalities
- Experiences of social inclusion or stigma
- Feelings of dependency, empowerment, and future aspirations

The interview guide consisted of 10–12 open-ended questions per participant group, with follow-up prompts to encourage elaboration.

The instrument underwent content validation by five experts: one specialist in language and linguistics and four experts in qualitative research methodology. Feedback from validators led to revisions such as rephrasing ambiguous questions, improving clarity of reflection prompts, and ensuring alignment with the study objectives. A pilot interview was conducted with one non-participant beneficiary to refine question flow and wording prior to formal data collection.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from October to November 2024 through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were held in a quiet and private room within the school premises to ensure confidentiality and minimal distraction.

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted primarily in Filipino, the participants' preferred language. Interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device with participants' consent, and



field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English for analysis, with careful attention to preserving original meanings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, adapted to a phenomenological context and aligned with the study's theoretical foundations.

1. Familiarization with the Data

Transcripts were read repeatedly to gain immersion and identify significant statements related to participants' experiences with 4Ps participation.

2. Initial Coding

Meaningful units of text were coded inductively. Codes reflected experiences related to financial support, compliance pressure, stigma, educational motivation, dependency, and empowerment.

3. Generating Initial Themes

Related codes were clustered into preliminary themes that captured recurring patterns in learners' and parents' narratives.

4. Reviewing Themes

Themes were reviewed for internal coherence and relevance to the research questions and theoretical framework.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

Final themes were clearly defined and named to reflect the essence of participants' lived experiences as 4Ps beneficiaries.

6. Writing and Interpretation

Themes were presented with verbatim excerpts to illustrate participants' perspectives, followed by analytical interpretation grounded in Human Capital Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Empowerment Theory.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by allowing selected participants to review summarized interpretations. An audit trail of coding decisions and theme development was maintained throughout the analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate institutional research ethics committee. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the school administration prior to data collection.

All participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from parents, while parental consent and learner assent were secured for participants below 18 years old.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reports, and all audio recordings and documents were stored securely and accessible only to the researchers. All data were used solely for academic purposes and disposed of after analysis in accordance with ethical research standards.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings derived from the thematic analysis of interviews with learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Five major themes emerged from the data. Each theme is presented with supporting participant narratives and immediately interpreted in relation to existing literature and the study's theoretical framework.

Theme 1: A Lifeline in Times of Scarcity

Participants consistently described the 4Ps program as a critical source of financial support that enabled learners to remain in school despite economic hardship. Learners and parents reported that the cash assistance helped cover school-related expenses such as transportation, supplies, and food allowances. One learner shared that without the program, schooling would likely have been interrupted due to the need to work.

This finding aligns with national and international evaluations indicating that conditional cash transfers contribute to sustained school attendance and reduced dropout rates by alleviating direct educational costs (Orbeta et al., 2014; World Bank, 2019). From a Human Capital Theory perspective, the financial assistance functioned as an investment that supported continued participation in education, reinforcing schooling as a pathway toward improved future opportunities.



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Beyond material support, the assistance became identity-forming, as learners associated school participation with family survival. Education was not perceived solely as personal development but as a responsibility tied to household welfare.

Theme 2: The Burden of Conditionality and Social Stigma

While participants acknowledged the benefits of 4Ps, parents reported experiencing stress related to compliance with program conditionalities, particularly school attendance and health check-ups. Fear of penalties or possible delisting created ongoing anxiety. In addition, some participants described experiencing social stigma associated with being identified as beneficiaries. One parent noted being dismissed with the remark *"galing lang yan sa 4Ps"* ("that only comes from 4Ps assistance").

These experiences are consistent with studies documenting the psychosocial pressures associated with conditional welfare participation (Navarro, 2018). Social Identity Theory helps explain how beneficiary labeling contributes to feelings of marginalization, as individuals internalize societal perceptions of dependency or undeservedness (Reyes & Tabuga, 2017). For learners, this stigma extended into school environments, shaping self-esteem and peer interactions.

Theme 3: Hopes and Perceived Limitations of Program Support

Participants expressed optimism that 4Ps created opportunities for education; however, they also recognized its limitations. Parents voiced concerns about program exit and uncertainty regarding livelihood sustainability once assistance ends. Learners expressed aspirations for scholarships or extended support beyond secondary education.

These concerns reflect findings from studies indicating that while CCTs provide immediate relief, long-term poverty reduction depends on complementary interventions such as skills training and employment opportunities (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011; Virola et al., 2018). Within the framework of Empowerment Theory, participants' narratives revealed partial empowerment—access to education was improved, yet perceptions of agency remained constrained by limited post-program opportunities.

Theme 4: "Sapat Ba ang Ayuda?" — Between Gratitude and Guilt (*"Is the assistance enough?"*)

Parents expressed gratitude for the financial assistance, particularly for meeting educational needs. However, this gratitude was frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt and concern about dependence. One parent stated, *"Masaya kami kasi may panggastos, pero minsan napapaisip ako, hanggang kailan kami aasa?"* ("We are happy because we have money to spend, but sometimes I wonder how long we will keep relying on it.")

This ambivalence reflects findings in qualitative welfare studies that describe the coexistence of appreciation and anxiety among beneficiaries (Navarro, 2018). Empowerment Theory suggests that while assistance reduces immediate hardship, uncertainty about long-term self-sufficiency may limit perceived control over one's future.

Theme 5: "Pangarap na May Kundisyon" — When Dreams Are Conditional

Learners described education as both motivating and anxiety-inducing due to the conditional nature of the program. One learner explained, *"Hindi kami pwedeng magkasakit. Kapag absent sa school, bawas agad ang ayuda."* ("We cannot afford to get sick. If we are absent from school, the assistance is immediately reduced.")

This finding supports previous research indicating that conditionality can intensify pressure among learners, particularly when academic participation directly affects household finances (Alipio, 2021). From a Social Identity perspective, learners internalized responsibility not only for their own academic outcomes but also for their family's economic security, shaping how educational aspirations were pursued under constraint.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that while the 4Ps program effectively supports school participation and basic needs, it also produces complex psychosocial outcomes. Financial assistance functioned as both support and obligation, shaping learners' identities and parents' perceptions of responsibility. Consistent with existing literature, the program contributed to educational access but also generated emotional stress linked to compliance, stigma, and uncertainty regarding sustainability (World Bank, 2019; Virola et al., 2018).

Conclusions

This study examined the lived experiences of learners and parents who were beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) at Ortega Integrated School. The findings indicate that the program provided essential financial support that enabled sustained school participation and improved access to basic needs. However,



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beneficiaries' experiences extended beyond material assistance to include psychosocial challenges related to conditionality, social stigma, and concerns about long-term security.

Learners and parents perceived education as both an opportunity and a responsibility closely tied to program compliance. While the program reinforced the value of schooling, it also introduced pressure and anxiety, particularly when educational performance was linked to household financial stability. These experiences reflect the intersection of human capital investment, social identity formation, and perceived empowerment.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the impact of 4Ps cannot be fully understood through compliance indicators alone. A comprehensive assessment requires attention to beneficiaries' educational, social, and emotional experiences within school and community contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations may be considered to enhance the holistic impact of the 4Ps program:

1. **Psychosocial Support**
Schools and partner agencies may integrate psychosocial support services, such as counseling or peer-support initiatives, to address compliance-related stress and stigma experienced by learners and parents.
2. **Anti-Stigma Interventions**
Community-based information campaigns may be strengthened to promote understanding of 4Ps as a human capital investment rather than a marker of dependency, particularly within school environments.
3. **Livelihood and Transition Programs**
Complementary livelihood training and skills development initiatives may be expanded to support beneficiary families' transition beyond program participation.
4. **Context-Sensitive Monitoring**
Program monitoring mechanisms may consider contextual factors such as health access and transportation challenges to reduce fear associated with minor non-compliance.
5. **Future Research**
Further qualitative studies may explore longitudinal experiences of beneficiaries after program exit to better understand long-term empowerment and sustainability outcomes.

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International Journal of Social Science Research and Policy Studies (INSORPS)

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