



Food Security and Coping Strategies of Ata-Manobo Tribe: An Inquiry

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences and strategies of the Ata-Manobo tribe on food security. The study used a qualitative type of research, specifically a phenomenological approach. This was conducted at Feeder Road 5, Barangay Tibal-og, Santo Tomas, and Davao del Norte in the Philippines. It was confined to the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions of the fourteen Ata-Manobo adults. The findings of this study revealed that they were food insecure and mentally and emotionally unstable, and that this had affected them financially. However, the majority of them continued to utilize subsistence farming—crops that serve as both a food source and a source of nutrients. There were two limitations considered in this qualitative study: language barriers and financial barriers. First, there are language barriers since the participants of this study were from the Ata-Manobo tribe, and the terms being used need to be given meaning in layman's terms. The researchers had to provide the right definition and confirm the terms with the tribal chieftains and IPMRs. Secondly, financial barriers exist since the study needs to request a Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in order to comply with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) Law, and the researchers have to shoulder the expenses from the FPIC process up to the validation of the results. The insights generated in this study could lead to the development of effective outreach activities and a food security program.

Keywords: *Ata-manobo tribe, food security, subsistence farming, food insecurity, indigenous knowledge*

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Introduction

Root and tuber crops have become staple foods for the indigenous people in every parts of the world. Even up to this day, these crops played an important role in feeding their empty stomachs to save them from hunger due to the high inflation of foods available in the market. The food systems of the world's 476 million Indigenous Peoples are often branded as 'backward' or unproductive – but evidence shows they are highly productive, sustainable and equitable. These systems preserve rich biodiversity, provide nutritious food and are climate resilient and low carbon (Swiderska & Ryan, 2020). The UN emphasized the potential advantages of indigenous knowledge in achieving food security through the wise and sustainable exploitation of biocultural resources (Hunter et al., 2019).

In South Africa, Masekoameng and Molotja (2019) described indigenous foods are being eaten, and the rural South African households of the Sekhukhune District still consider indigenous knowledge to be a crucial resource for ensuring their own food security. Because they are knowledgeable about indigenous culture, the participants can recognize edible native fruits and vegetables in their surroundings. In order to grow, harvest, process, preserve, and cook indigenous foods, they also draw on their cultural knowledge. In the communities, native foods are sold, and the proceeds are used to help families maintain a secure supply of food.

Nevertheless, despite being a country with a major agricultural sector, the Philippines is the world's top importer of rice, according to a study by Buenavista et al. (2022). However, economic downturns and adversity from the natural world have made the issue of a constant lack of rice worse. The abundant agrobiodiversity and wild edible plants, however, are essential for the Higaonon tribe's food security and adaptability in Bukidnon Province, the Philippines, while rice production is difficult due to the province's rugged topography. The purpose of the ethnobotanical research was to record the variety, use, and biocultural refugia of both cultivated and wild food plants in order to learn more about the native edible plant knowledge of the Higaonon tribe. There were 76 edible plant species total, distributed among 62 genera and 36 botanical groups.

In this study, the Ata-Manobo tribe has a total population of 859 inhabitants in the barangay, and the Municipality of Santo Tomas is one of their ancestral domains. The

research gap that this study wants to investigate is the experiences of the Ata-Manobo Tribe in keeping their family food secure and to identify their coping strategies in times of food insecurity, be it in their indigenous food system or their food access resources. The insights generated in this study can lead to the development of effective outreach activities and food security programs.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design called descriptive phenomenology. According to Bonyadi (2023), phenomenology is a research method that can be used in educational settings to explore the essence of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of the one who has experienced it. This is because there is no single research approach that can capture the nature of multifaceted educational phenomena.

This study employs a focus group discussion (FGD) and an in-depth interview (IDI) for data collection. IDI is a one-to-one interview with the participant. Meanwhile, participating in FGD is a useful technique to learn more about how individuals see a particular phenomenon.

To collect the data, the researchers used two techniques. First, the researchers have asked the Ata-Manobo tribe to share their experiences with keeping their family food secure. Second, the researchers have conducted IDI and FGD with 14 adults from the Ata-Manobo tribe.

In order to comply with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) Law, the researchers requested a Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from the Provincial Office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The researchers also prepared the research documents to be forwarded to the regional office. After the FPIC, upon conducting the interview, the researchers handed them the consent letter.

Findings

When asked about their views on their experiences in maintaining a food-secure home, they honestly expressed their answers since all of them were able to experience a variety of difficulties. From the responses gathered, three (3) themes emerged, namely: (1) economic instability, (2) emotionally unstable, and (3) common experiences.

The participants in both the IDI and FGD were asked several questions about their coping strategies for dealing with food insecurity. The participants answered each question honestly, and from the responses gathered, three (3) essential themes arose, namely: (1) roots and tuber crops as alternative foods; (2) burial methods of preservation (kukulot) and wrapping food using banana leaves (linuput); and (3) financial management.

When asked about their views on their insights about food security, they honestly expressed their answers since all of them were able to experience a variety of difficulties. From the responses gathered, three (3) themes emerged: (1) food insecurity, (2) sources of nutrients, and (3) plant crops for subsistence.

Conclusion

In this study, one of the most important things to consider is the economic stability of the household. The most common factor that causes food insecurity is poverty, which causes the family to skip meals, adjust their eating patterns, and limit their spending and stress. The Ata-Manobo tribe encountered difficulties in maintaining a food-secure home, which led them to rely on their food system to provide food for their family. Root and tuber crops have been their staple foods since then. When they run out of food, roots and tuber crops have been their substitutes for rice since they also provide satiety, which mends hunger.

The Ata-Manobo Tribe was found to be food insecure in this study. This caused them to be mentally unstable because they worried about where their next meal would come from and what they would eat for dinner. They also acknowledged that food insecurity was a problem that affected every household regularly and that the management of their finances was focused solely on maintaining their daily budget. It was also discovered that, even though some Ata-Manobo members now reside in rural areas, the majority of them continued to use traditional agricultural methods, such as planting crops that serve as both a food source and a source of nutrients. Additionally, the method of food preservation taught by their ancestors is still practiced today. The informants in this study emphasized the value of industriousness and persistence to provide food for the family.

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