



## Family Life of an Urban Poor Household and the Benefits of becoming an NSTP Host Family

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**Abstract:** This qualitative study aims to describe in detail the family life, relationships and resource management strategies of an NSTP Host Family. Three (3) home visits cumulatively lasting eleven hours (11) were made to observe the family and interview the mother who served as the primary research participant. Results reveal that the host family had issues and challenges that hindered them from attaining a better quality of life. The lack of material and non-material resources and the negative family subsystem dynamics were seen as detrimental to the family's attainment of their goals. The family's involvement with the local organization's educational programs and activities affected the individual children who became tutees in the regular tutorial programs conducted in the barangay by the DLSU NSTP-CWTS students. The tutees obtained higher grades in school and gained more self-confidence through the help and inspiration given by their tutors. The partnership of the local organization and DLSU in addressing the need of indigent families for supplementary learning activities has been proven effective through the impact evaluation made by DLSU. However, interventions should still be constantly examined to ensure that they are enabling, sustainable, gender-sensitive and responsive to the specific needs of the beneficiaries in various family life stages and contexts.

**Key Words:** NSTP; Host Family Life; Community Immersion; Family Development

### 1. INTRODUCTION

De La Salle University has been implementing the National Service Training Program (NSTP) for almost nineteen years since the passing of the NSTP Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9163, 2001). The university's program consists of two courses with NSTP 1 and NSTP 2, depending on which component a student is taking. The first course generally focuses on student formation and project planning while the second course serves as the project implementation stage. During NSTP 1, students spend six hours cumulative time in the community for needs assessment and immersion. The six hours include the usual preliminaries and plenary programs prior to actual host family immersion. These visits are also conducted during Saturdays and may not fully reflect

the situation of the host families. This study intends to present a more in-depth description of the family life of an NSTP Family outside the usual visits of DLSU NSTP Students.

### 2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Research Method

This qualitative study aims to describe in detail the family life, relationships and resource management strategies of an NSTP Host Family. One family was chosen by a partner organization with which the researcher had prior interaction with as a facilitator [now Social Engagement Lecturer] for the National Service Training Program (NSTP) of De La Salle University (DLSU) in Taft, Manila. The family is one of the pioneer members of the organization and



has been actively involved in its educational programs for more than eight years.

### 2.3 Data Collection

Pertinent information were obtained through observation and interview in three instances from January to March 2014 with the mother as the main respondent. The total duration of the visits lasted eleven (13) hours including a trip to the public market to observe the mother's shopping routine and the Focused Group Discussion with the officers of the partner organization.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the collected information using various family theories namely social exchange theory (Nye, 1979), family life stages theory (Evelyn Millis Duvall, 1957) and gender socialization theory (Herold, 2016; James M. White et al., 2015).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Family Life

On a daily basis, Ching (the mother), usually gets up at 5:00am and retires to bed at 8:30pm. Similar to other housewives, her daily routine consists of child rearing and home management tasks.

**Table 3. Ching's Daily Routine**

Time	Activity
5:00 am	Ching prepares breakfast; Yam and Vico prepares for school.
5:30am	Yam and Vico will be off to school while Ching looks after Lance, the youngest child.
6:30am	Ching assists Sid in preparing for school.
7am – 12nn	Ching goes to the wet market while Jomar looks after Lance. Jomar brings Sid to school at 8 AM. While Ching prepares lunch, Jomar fetches Sid and brings Kim (niece) to school at around 11:30 AM.
12nn	At lunch time, Yam and Vico returns home from school while Jomar goes to nearby High School.
1pm – 4pm	Family Siesta, Ching looks after Lance.

4pm – 5pm	When necessary, Ching goes to the wet market again to buy food to cook for dinner.
5pm	Ching prepares dinner while the children start on their assignments.
5pm – 8:30pm	TV Viewing, Assignment-Making
8:30pm	Sleeping Time

Sometimes when they have enough budget, marketing is done only in the morning and the food that is cooked will be enough until dinner already. So that the viand will not spoil easily even up to the next day, the mother cooks either paksiw or adobo because they do not have a refrigerator to store leftovers. Laundry is done on Fridays and Saturdays only (Sunday- optional). On weekends, they do not wake up early. The tasks of washing the dishes and taking care of the youngest child are divided among older kids.

### 3.2 Family Values

**Value Education.** Ching reiterates the importance of education to her children, half-brother and niece by using her own family as example. Ching attributes the difficult economic situation her family is experiencing to the fact that she and her husband was unable to finish college and was thus unable to find high-paying jobs.

**Be Responsible.** Being responsible for Ching entails being human. When Ching was younger, she and her siblings experienced hardship early on because their father, an OFW, left them. "Maaga kaming natutong magbatak" [We learned hard work early on.], Ching said. Due to this experience, she also wants to train her children to be responsible by allowing them to experience hardship as well. She teaches her children to do household chores and gives them regular household responsibilities. When Ching was younger, although their father was working abroad, their mother gave them only ₱2.00 as school allowance.

**Nurture Relationships.** For Ching, the husband and wife relationship should be characterized by open and constant communication and intimacy. On fidelity, however, this was what Ching had to say about her husband, "Wag lang siya pahuhuli, wag ko lang mapatunayan." ["He should



just make sure I don't catch him and prove that he's cheating." About extended families, Ching believes that they should continue giving support and helping their relatives as much as they can. According to Ching's husband, money or the lack of it, should not be the cause of any rifts in the family.

### 3.3 Resource Management Strategies

The following are the resource management strategies employed by the household, particularly Ching who oversees managing the household while her husband, Roy, is away on his stay-in job as maintenance/janitorial staff in Makati during weekdays.

**Spending within a given budget.** "Mas gusto kong alam ko kung magkano ang budget ko at ako na ang bahala na mapagkasya iyon." ["I like it better if I know how much my budget is. I will be the one to make it suffice."] Ching uses whatever budget is given her for the family's daily food and non-food needs.

<b>INCOME</b>	
Salary	8,000.00
4P's *	1,400.00
Extra Jobs (Husband)**	2,000.00
Extra Job (Wife)	600.00
Jeric Allowance **	600.00
<b>GROSS MONTHLY INCOME</b>	<b>12,600.00</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
<b>Fixed Expenses</b>	
Husband's Allowance (1000/week)	4,000.00
Food and Groceries (1000/week)	4,000.00
<b>Variable Expenses</b>	
Water (P22/ 2 days)	330.00
Electricity (P15-18/ kwh)	700.00
Milk (P600-800/ 2 weeks)	1,600.00
Super Kalan (LPG refill)	280.00
Wood (P100/week)	400.00
School Allowance (P5/day x 20 kids x 20 days)	500.00
SSS Contribution (P600 quarterly)	200.00
Diaper (P48/ week)	192.00
Lotto (P25 twice a day)	1,500.00
<b>Occasional Expenses</b>	
Cash Advance Payments	1,000.00
Special Occasions (Birthday Party)	1,300.00
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>16,002.00</b>
<b>MONTHLY DEFICIT</b>	<b>(8,402.00)</b>
* every 2 months	
**irregular	

Figure 1. Family Income and Expenditures

During special occasions like the first birthday of their youngest child, she was given a budget of only ₱1,000 which she used to pull-off a simple party with enough food, drinks and party favors for her guests.

**Prioritization and budget allocation.** Every time there is available money, Ching prioritizes debt payment and stocking food and non-food supplies for the whole week. Her husband however questions where the money is spent in such a short period of time, worrying that there is not much disposable money left for the remaining days.

**Substituting preferred items with cheaper brands of similar quality.** Though Ching has preferred brands for food and non-food supplies, when the budget is inadequate, she substitutes the more expensive brands with the more economical ones with quite similar benefits. For items like shampoo, she chooses to buy the sachet-packed ones because they're easier to distribute and allocate for each member of the household. Ching has a good eye for bargains and uses effective bargaining skills in the wet market in order to maximize the minimal amount of money she has at her disposal.

**Utilizing available resources to meet needs.** "Kapag wala kaming makain, yung bunga ng puno ng saging ang siyang kinakain namin at nangangahoy kami ng panggatong kapag walang pambili ng kahoy." ["When we don't have anything to eat, we eat fruit from the banana tree and find wood for cooking if we don't have money to buy some."] The family is resourceful enough to utilize whatever is in their surroundings that can help meet their immediate needs.

**Cash advance, pawnshops, credit line when short on budget.** "Kapag kulang ang budget, nangungutang muna kami ng de-lata sa tindahan o frozen na leeg ng manok. Nung talagang wala nang ibang mautangan at kailangan na ng gatas ni Lance ay isinangla ko yung bracelet ni Yam sa halagang ₱150." ["When our budget is not enough, we borrow canned goods or frozen chicken neck from the village store."]

"One week before ng sweldo eh laging may bale sa opisina." ["One week before each pay day, we already have cash advances in the office."] In Ching's experience the household needs at least ₱1,000 per week to suffice for all their expenses. However, due to previous cash advances made in her husband's workplace, less than this amount is given to her as weekly budget. This forces her to incur debts from a nearby store for canned goods or frozen chicken with promise to pay come next payday. This credit line in



the store has a weekly limit, thus when the limit is already reached and there is still no money to spend, Ching pawns whatever valuables they have to buy food or milk especially for the youngest child.

**Working on alternative sources of income.**

Ching, though already burdened with multiple responsibilities, still tries to augment the household income by working part-time as a laundrywoman. She also sells snacks and collects empty mineral water bottles that can be sold to the junk shop. She also spends summer time in another city in NCR, where Ching's other siblings live, so they can earn extra income by repacking garlic and selling cooked viands on the street.

### 3.4 Family Relationships

**Household Management.** Ching acts as the overall manager of the household on weekdays. She takes charge of budgeting, household management, child-rearing, teaching her children, doing household chores, marketing, cooking, laundering, ironing of clothes and attending school activities. Roy, the husband, only steps in on some weekends by doing the budgeting and marketing when he doesn't have extra job commitments.

**Stressful and satisfying reunions.** Since Roy comes home on weekends only, they try to catch up on each other through 'one on one' bonding time or "inuman" [drinking session]. Ching however, does not drink too much alcohol because she needs to take care of the children the following day. Roy does not like to talk about his activities the whole week which oftentimes frustrates Ching who is eager to listen to his husband's stories. The reunion also becomes stressful to Ching because she cannot have her own way in the household when the husband is around. During the limited time they have with each other, they fight. Usually they walk out on each other and reconcile soon after Roy initiates the reconciliation.

**Gender assigned norms between husband and wife.** During one weekend, Yam the oldest child, showed stubbornness towards his father, Roy. In response, Roy blamed Ching for not teaching their children well. To this Ching complains: "Bakit kapag ang lalaki nagbigay na ng pera eh mabuting ama na siya, bakit ang babae kapag masama ang ugali ng mga anak o di kaya'y nagkasakit ang mga anak eh parang

pabaya na agad na nanay." ["Why are men considered good fathers just by giving money? Why are women considered negligent mothers when their children misbehave or get sick?"] Since Ching wanted to have extra money for the family's needs, she tried selling snacks on the streets in the barangay. When her husband found out about this, he got furious and told Ching to just stay at home and look after the children. Ching, in disappointment remarked: "tumutulong na nga eh, ayaw pa, kumita na sana ako at nabawi ang puhunan, nakakain pa ang mga anak ko, ayaw pa niya yun?" [I'm just trying to help, but he does not like it. I could have earned and got back our capital, made our children eat. Is that not okay with him?"]

Ching added, "Minsan dumating siya ng bahay, tiningnan ang mga anak ko mula ulo hanggang paa, tapos hinawakan ang ibabaw ng mga cabinet at sinabing 'hindi ka naglinis ano?' Nag-walk-out talaga ako at hindi ako natulog sa bahay nung gabing yun". ["One time he arrived at home, checked my children from head to foot. Then he touched the top of the cabinet and said, 'You didn't clean the house, right?' I really walked out and did not sleep at home that night."] Ching is no longer satisfied with their family's present socio-economic situation and wants to go abroad to work as OFW. Roy however would not allow her. Every time they talked about a better quality of life, Roy will say, "Anong magagawa ko eh ito lang ang kaya kong trabaho?" ["What can I do? This is the only job I can do."]

**High expectations on eldest daughter.** Ching openly expresses her disappointment towards her eldest daughter Yam and describes her as "tamad" [lazy] and "hindi maaasahan" [unreliable] compared to Jomar, her half-brother who has been such a big help to her. According to Ching, Yam is being spoiled by his father. She is also the husband's favorite child because it took them four years before they had her.

**Spending quality time.** Taking care of Lance, the youngest child, consumes much of Ching's time and energy. Thus, every time Lance is asleep, she grabs this opportunity to assist her other children in their schoolwork, particularly Yam who recently took the National Achievement Test (NAT). Yam, on the other hand helps her younger siblings in their assignments. On weekends, Roy, the father reads stories to the children. When he has extra jobs, he brings one of their children to work. Oftentimes, Roy's





officemates will give ₱100 for them to spend for Jollibee meals. As a special treat for the children, Ching brings them to the nearby SM Mall to play in the arcade using their "kupit" [unaccounted change] from the money Roy gives her for household expenses. In other instances, they just buy cheap pizza or fruits. Since Ching has no personal money, she disclosed that oftentimes she cheats on her husband by adding on ₱50 up to ₱200 to the real amount of a certain expense like school books or graduation fees.

**Different parenting styles.** Ching and her husband vary in their parenting style. Ching declares, "violent talaga ako, kung ayaw sumunod at masakit na lalamunan ko kakasaway, palo na talaga ang aabutin nila, pero ang tatay nila, gusto kakausapin lamang, eh ang ikli lang naman ng contact time nila, 2 days or 1 day lang sa isang linggo kaya sabi ko 'wag niya akong kwestyunin.'" ["I am really violent. If they don't want to obey and my throat already hurt scolding them, they will really get spanked. Their father on the other hand prefers talking to them when his contact time with them is merely 2 days or 1 day a week so I told him not to question the way I discipline them."]

**Reciprocity.** On reciprocity, Ching states this in reference to her daughter, Yam: "Dapat matuto silang tumanaw ng utang na loob. 'Di kasi ako na-aappreciate ng sarili kong anak, samantalang favourite tita ako ng mga pamangkin ko kasi 'cool' daw ako. Siguro natatakot sila sa akin, eh wag lang naman nila sasalubungin ang topak ko." ["They should learn how to be grateful. My own children don't appreciate me when I am the favorite aunt of my nieces / nephews because they think I'm cool. Maybe they're scared of me when all they have to do is avoid getting back at me when I get furious."] With regards to all her children, Ching declares, "Mag-aral lang silang mabuti, may SSS naman ako". ["They should just study well and not worry about me. I have social security pension.] Ching however demands her children to take care of her as well by helping in the household chores, especially that recently, she has been very sickly.

**Sibling-Sibling Relationship.** On weekdays, especially when there are lots of schoolwork, the siblings help each other. On weekends on the other hand, older kids have specific household assignments. They alternate in taking care of the youngest, Lance,

who just turned one year old during the visit month. Siblings also share food and other things to each other. The common reason for disagreement among the siblings is the TV, especially on weekends when they are all at home at the same time.

**Extended Families.** Jomar, Ching's half-brother assists her in almost all household chores. Kim, Ching's niece on the other hand, helps in looking after Lance. When Ching's mother got sick and was brought to their home, Jomar was left behind with Ching's stepfather. Concerned that Jomar will not be well taken care of in the province, Ching volunteered to take him in with the promise of financial assistance from their other siblings. The other relatives however irregularly send minimal amounts, thus Ching often shells out money to support Jomar's school and daily expenses. According to Ching, she felt pity towards her niece Kim because her own mother is not responsible enough to send her to school. At age 8, Kim is still in Grade 1. Because of the already tight budget of the household for the nuclear family alone, the expenses incurred to support Ching's half-brother and her niece often becomes a source of conflict between Ching and her husband.

### *3.5 Family Life Practices and Issues*

The family enjoys bonding time on weekends by playing indoor games such as puzzles and other learning activities. When outdoors, children usually play Filipino games such as patintero and tumbang-preso. If there is extra money, the boys rent bicycles for ₱5 per hour. The children are however not allowed to play computer games or use computers for Facebook. On Sundays, though they are Catholic, the family members join Bible studies conducted in their home. The family loves celebrating special occasions like birthdays, christenings, etc. Thus, oftentimes they make ways or "nagdi-dilihensya" [finding ways to earn] in order to have even a simple party.

**Gender assigned roles.** According to Ching, her husband disapproves of her snack selling on the street because he just wants her to stay at home and look after the children. Ching, though complaining that the money earned by her husband is insufficient for the growing needs of the household, tries to augment this deficit. Her husband does not recognize her efforts and confines her to domestic duties.



Regarding plans for the improvement of the family's economic situation, Ching's husband dismisses her ideas and states that he cannot do anything about it since working as a janitorial staff is the only job he knows.

**Budget for other important needs.** Ching relies on the money she receives from the government's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4P's) for her personal expenses, including her SSS quarterly contributions. Sometimes, she has to cheat her husband into giving her extra money or "kupit" so that she and the kids can have money for special treats and recreation. The husband on the other hand, gets his regular allowance of ₱1,000 a week, equivalent to the weekly budget of the entire household. The monthly salary of the husband is only enough for the husband's weekly allowance and for the household's weekly budget.

**Multiple responsibilities for the wife.** The bulk of household chores and responsibilities are shouldered by Ching. This include child-rearing and assisting in educational and learning needs of the school-aged children. Ching frequently reminds her children that they should also take care of her because she is sickly and if she does get sick, no one will be able to take care of them.

**Monthly deficits.** Due to the minimal income previous cash advances and loans made for various reasons, monthly budget deficits remain constant. Unless the family receives a lump sum enough to settle all obligations, they cannot start each month on a clean slate. Since the family values celebrating special occasions even with a minimal budget, deferring expenditures related to this may not be an acceptable option for them. Likewise, the more the family depends on credit line with the nearby store, the higher their expenditure on food becomes.

**Husband's lotto expenses.** In Table 3, a big bulk of the budget goes to the husband's lotto expenses. Rather than spending on educational needs which may not yield an immediate Return of Investment (ROI), investing on a scheme which may result to a huge ROI overnight is oftentimes more appealing.

### *3.6 Program Involvement and Benefits to the Family*

As DLSU's Partner Organization since 2003, the community partner provided students with necessary educational assistance through the deployment of over 150 DLSU NSTP-CWTS students in the area weekly, teaching more than a hundred local students per term.

The family has been involved for more than eight years with the partner's tutorial activities conducted by Lasallian students. Yam, the eldest daughter was a regular tutee except for the year when this study was made. The organization then decided to exclude Grade 3 and Grade 6 students. This is due to the fact that the Saturday tutorial sessions coincided with the math sessions offered by the Mathematical Teachers Association of the Philippines (MTAP) in the public schools for the specific grade levels.

The tutees from the family are: Vico (Ching's 2nd child), Nicole, (Ching's niece) and Jomar (Ching's half-brother). According to Ching, the children benefit from joining the tutorial programs and get higher grades in school because they are taught on subjects they are having difficulty with through one on one learning sessions. Ching also believes the Lasallian tutors are more effective in teaching because they know several techniques in teaching subjects especially Math and Science.

Though Ching cares much for her children, the presence of Lasallian students somehow gives her some sort of relief: "Mas gusto ko pang magtrabaho nang magtrabaho sa bahay kaysa mag-alaga ng mga bata kaya masaya ako kapag andyan yung mga taga La Salle." ["I prefer to keep working at home instead of taking care of the kids. That's why I am happy when the Lasallian students are here."]

In the impact evaluation of DLSU-COSCA's NSTP-CWTS program in 2009, it was stated that the "volunteers signified willingness to volunteer time and energy because they believe that the CWTS Program will be helpful to the children and community. Others volunteered because their children have also benefited from the tutorial sessions and it was their way of giving back" (Toquero, 2009, p. 36).



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In the same evaluation report, it was also stated that "in terms of community appreciation on the importance of education, mothers and people's organization members related that households have ceased from watching TV and playing the radio when children are having their tutorial sessions. Moreover, they reported an increase in the number of children passing the entrance exam at a nearby university and improvement in school performance among tutees" (Toquero, 2009, p. 36).

Also, through the tutorial program, most mothers of family beneficiaries eventually act as PO volunteers and later become leaders and officers in the organization and in the community, as was the case of all the PO officers present during the FGD.

In recent years, Ching eventually went overseas to work as a domestic helper. One of her sons was sent to the province to study.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The situation of an urban poor household, like the family in this study, is characterized by various issues and challenges that hinder them from attaining a better quality of life. Particularly prominent is the lack of material and non-material resources to ensure the well-being of all the family members who have varied needs and concerns. Other roadblocks identified are the negative dynamics in the different family subsystems which could be detrimental to the attainment of their goals. Improved performance in school through better grades may lessen the strain between mother-child dyads in the family.

The family's involvement with the local organization's educational programs and activities positively affected its family beneficiaries, particularly the individual children who become tutees in the regular tutorial programs conducted in the barangay by the DLSU NSTP-CWTS students. Tutees obtained higher grades in school and gained more self-confidence through the help and inspiration given by their tutors.

The partnership of the local organization and the academe in addressing the need of indigent families for supplementary learning activities has been proven effective through the impact evaluation

made by COSCA, the implementing DLSU Office for NSTP-CWTS. However, interventions should still be constantly examined to ensure that they are enabling, sustainable, gender-sensitive and responsive to the specific needs of the family beneficiaries in various life stages.

With a desire to provide more sustainable benefits to host families, COSCA adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals as framework for its curricular and co-curricular social engagement programs. Reflecting one the university's strengths, the center decided to focus NSTP projects into four key themes namely, social entrepreneurship, education, health and environmental sustainability.

In partnership with the now NSTP and Formation Office (NFO), ten (10) sections are now implementing a special social entrepreneurship track for NSTP – CWTS. Students and community partners undergo learning, ideation and business development sessions in order to develop an enterprise that addresses identified priority needs of the community.

Since community partners mobilized by COSCA also serve as partners for co-curricular social engagement by students and employees, a 'Partners Assessment Tool towards Institutionalization (PATIT)' instrument was developed to ensure that Lasallian projects contribute to the organizational development of the partners. COSCA coordinators also meet with the partner in formulating partner development plans based on the results of this assessment.

The university's hiring of the law-mandated Gender Officer would be a very good starting point in developing gender-sensitive social engagement initiatives in the university. Since many NSTP Host Families are also beneficiaries of DSWD's 4Ps program, integration of gender and development in the required family development sessions would be a worthwhile effort to pursue in partnership with the agency.

*\*All names, places and other identifying information were changed / withheld to protect the personal information of the respondents.*



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