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# Transformative Journey of 4Ps Beneficiaries: Lived Experiences in the Youth Development Sessions

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Nine (9) purposively selected youth beneficiaries from three secondary schools in Pili, Camarines Sur who participated in the Youth Development Sessions (YDS). Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do the 4Ps beneficiaries describe themselves before joining YDS? (2) What specific experiences during YDS do participants perceive as meaningful? (3) What challenges did the 4Ps beneficiaries face during YDS, and how did they overcome them? (4) How did YDS empower the 4Ps beneficiaries in their future plans? (5) What sustainability program may be proposed based on the results of the study?

Employing a descriptive phenomenological approach, the researcher aimed to explore the essence of empowerment derived from their participation Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted in participants' local dialects to ensure authentic, in-depth responses. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes emerging from the participants' narratives.

The findings revealed that prior to joining YDS, participants described themselves as shy, uncertain, lacking self-confidence, and experiencing various emotional and social vulnerabilities. During the sessions, they perceived experiential learning activities, opportunities for self-expression, confidence-building experiences, and supportive peer interactions as the most meaningful aspects of the program. Although participants encountered challenges such as communication anxiety, fear of public speaking, low self-confidence, and adjustment difficulties, they gradually overcame these through active participation, facilitator guidance, peer support, and personal determination. Their lived experiences in YDS contributed to increased self-confidence, strengthened leadership and communication skills, improved decision-making and life skills, enhanced educational motivation, clearer career aspirations, emotional resilience, and greater social responsibility. The essence of empowerment emerged as a transformative developmental process in which participants gained greater self-awareness, confidence, purpose, and readiness to become responsible and productive members of their families and communities.

**Keywords:** *Youth Development Sessions, 4Ps beneficiaries, youth empowerment, lived experiences, sustainability program*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background and Rationale

Youth development is essential in preparing young people to become confident, responsible, and productive members of society. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by changes in identity, emotional regulation, social relationships, and decision-making. However, young people from economically disadvantaged families may experience circumstances that influence their self-perception, confidence, educational motivation, and aspirations for the future (Steinberg, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). These circumstances highlight the importance of providing supportive environments that promote holistic development and empower young people to recognize their abilities and potential.

Youth development programs provide opportunities for adolescents to enhance their personal, social, emotional, and intellectual competencies. The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework emphasizes the importance of nurturing young people's competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring through meaningful participation and supportive relationships (Lerner et al., 2022). Similarly, structured social and emotional learning programs promote emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, responsible decision-making, and positive behavioral development among young people (Durlak et al., 2022). These perspectives underscore the importance of developmental interventions that enable adolescents to learn through experience, interact with peers, express themselves, and develop practical life skills.

In the Philippines, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) serves as a social protection initiative for eligible poor households. Complementing the program's objectives, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) implements Youth Development Sessions (YDS) to support the personal, social, emotional, educational, and career development of youth beneficiaries. Through group discussions, experiential learning, reflective exercises, and participatory activities, YDS provides opportunities for young people to develop self-awareness, communication skills, leadership, social responsibility, and future-planning competencies (Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD], 2023).

Despite these opportunities, participants may enter YDS with different personal circumstances, levels of confidence, and social experiences. Some may experience shyness, communication anxiety, uncertainty about their abilities, or fear of speaking in front of others. Through meaningful activities, supportive peer relationships, and facilitator guidance, they may gradually develop confidence and become more willing to participate. Understanding these experiences requires examining not only the activities conducted but also the meanings that participants attach to their involvement and the ways they perceive their personal development.

The researcher, drawing on her experience in the implementation of 4Ps, recognized the importance of understanding the experiences of youth beneficiaries beyond attendance and program completion. In particular, there was a need to explore how participants described themselves before joining YDS, which experiences they considered meaningful, how they

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encountered and overcame challenges, and how participation influenced their aspirations and future plans. Understanding these experiences may provide insights into the perceived contributions of YDS and identify opportunities to strengthen its implementation.

Thus, this study, entitled *"Transformative Journey of 4Ps Beneficiaries: Lived Experiences in the Youth Development Sessions,"* explored the lived experiences of selected 4Ps youth beneficiaries who participated in YDS in Pili, Camarines Sur. By examining their narratives, the study sought to understand the process of empowerment as experienced by the participants and to develop a proposed enhancement program responsive to their developmental needs.

### Statement of the Problem

This study explored the transformative journey of 4Ps beneficiaries through their lived experiences in the Youth Development Sessions. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do the 4Ps beneficiaries describe themselves before joining YDS?
2. What specific experiences during YDS do participants perceive as meaningful?
3. What challenges did the 4Ps beneficiaries face during YDS, and how did they overcome them?
4. How did YDS empower the 4Ps beneficiaries in their future plans?
5. What enhancement program may be proposed based on the results of the study?

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research method using a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) youth beneficiaries who participated in the Youth Development Sessions (YDS) in Pili, Camarines Sur. The phenomenological approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand the meanings participants attributed to their experiences rather than measure program outcomes or evaluate effectiveness. It focused on how participants described themselves before joining YDS, the experiences they considered meaningful, the challenges they encountered and overcame, and the perceived contributions of YDS to their empowerment and future aspirations. The study was guided by a Constructivist–Interpretivist worldview, which recognizes that individuals construct and interpret meanings through their personal experiences and social interactions.

### Participants

The participants consisted of nine (9) youth beneficiaries of 4Ps who had completed YDS in selected secondary schools in Pili, Camarines Sur. They were purposively selected from three batches of YDS completers representing School Years 2022–2023, 2023–2024, and 2024–2025, with three participants from each batch. At the time of the study, the participants were between 14 and 21 years old.

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The participants were selected based on the following criteria: they were officially registered 4Ps beneficiaries during their participation in YDS, had successfully completed the required sessions, were enrolled in school during their participation, resided in Pili, Camarines Sur, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Individuals who did not meet the inclusion criteria, could not be located, or declined participation were excluded. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who could provide detailed accounts relevant to the research objectives. Data saturation was reached after the ninth interview, when no new codes, categories, or themes emerged from the participants' narratives.

**Instruments**

The primary data-gathering instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed in accordance with the research questions and objectives. It consisted of seven sections covering participants' demographic information, experiences before and after YDS, personal and emotional development, intellectual and social development, family and community involvement, challenges and coping strategies, and perceived empowerment, future aspirations, and recommendations for program improvement.

The interview guide was refined through consultation with the thesis adviser, panelists, and a social worker from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Its Filipino translation was reviewed and adapted to ensure that the questions were clear and understandable to the participants. A pilot test involving five individuals with characteristics similar to those of the target participants, but who were not included in the actual study, was conducted to identify unclear questions and improve the instrument before data collection.

Additional materials included an audio-recording device, supplementary interview notes, and the Executive Summary Report and photo documentation of previous YDS activities. These materials helped the participants recall specific activities and describe their experiences more fully during the interviews.

**Procedure**

The researcher first secured permission from the Dean of the Graduate School of Universidad de Sta. Isabel de Naga, Inc. A formal request and supporting documents were subsequently submitted to the Regional Director of DSWD Field Office V through the Policy Development and Planning Section, in coordination with the Pantawid Division. The research request underwent review in accordance with the applicable DSWD research protocol. After approval, the researcher coordinated with the principals of the identified secondary schools and relevant YDS facilitators to verify records and identify potential participants.

The researcher contacted the qualified participants through school or home visits, explained the purpose and procedures of the study, and discussed their rights, including the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality of the information they would share. Written informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Parental or legal guardian consent

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and participant assent were also secured when applicable. Preliminary interactions were conducted to establish rapport and provide a comfortable interview environment.

Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were then conducted using open-ended questions and follow-up probes. The interviews were primarily conducted in Filipino to facilitate clear communication and allow participants to express their experiences comfortably. Each interview lasted at least 45 minutes. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, and supplementary notes were taken to document relevant observations and nonverbal cues.

After data collection, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked against the original audio to ensure accuracy and completeness. The transcripts and supplementary notes were organized and prepared for analysis. Participant identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms in the presentation of the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns and meanings in the participants' narratives. This method was appropriate for systematically examining the lived experiences of 4Ps youth beneficiaries while preserving the depth and context of their accounts.

The analysis involved six phases: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts and review of supplementary notes; (2) generation of initial codes from significant statements and relevant descriptions; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes and identifying recurring patterns; (4) reviewing themes to assess their coherence and alignment with the coded data and research questions; (5) defining and naming themes to clarify their central meanings; and (6) producing the final report through an interpretive presentation of the themes supported by relevant participant quotations.

The emerging themes were examined in relation to the study's research questions, particularly participants' self-perceptions before YDS, meaningful experiences during the sessions, challenges encountered and ways of overcoming them, and perceived empowerment in their future plans. The analysis provided the basis for developing a proposed YDS enhancement program grounded in the participants' lived experiences and expressed developmental needs.

## 3. RESULTS

*Description of 4Ps Beneficiaries Before Joining Youth Development Sessions (YDS)*

The findings revealed that before joining the Youth Development Sessions (YDS), the nine 4Ps youth beneficiaries experienced various personal, social, emotional, and practical challenges that influenced their self-perception, behavior, and interactions with others. Five interrelated themes emerged from their narratives: Social Inhibition, Identity Uncertainty, Communication Anxiety, Developing Life Skills, and Emotional Vulnerability. These themes illustrate the

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participants' diverse developmental experiences and the areas in which they needed further growth and support before participating in YDS.

Social inhibition was reflected in the participants' shyness, preference for being alone, and hesitation to initiate conversations or establish friendships. Some participants expressed discomfort when interacting with unfamiliar individuals because of their fear of being judged, misunderstood, or emotionally hurt. Although some were actively involved in school activities, they still experienced difficulty initiating informal conversations and expressing themselves in social situations. These experiences suggest that participation in organized activities did not necessarily mean that they were already confident in interpersonal communication. Meanwhile, identity uncertainty was manifested in their difficulty identifying personal goals, making independent decisions, and determining their educational and career pathways. Some participants expressed confusion about their future plans and relied on the opinions or actions of their peers when making decisions. This indicates that they were still exploring their interests, capabilities, and aspirations while developing confidence in their own judgment.

Communication anxiety further highlighted the participants' fear and nervousness when speaking in class, engaging in conversations, or participating in public speaking activities. Some chose to remain silent even when they knew the answers because they were afraid of making mistakes or being embarrassed in front of others. This hesitation limited their opportunities to express their ideas and participate confidently in different situations. In terms of developing life skills, the participants demonstrated varying levels of experience and familiarity with everyday responsibilities. While some were already involved in household chores and family activities, others acknowledged having limited knowledge or opportunities to learn particular tasks because they were focused on their studies or had not yet acquired the necessary skills. These experiences indicate that practical life skills developed differently among the participants, depending on their exposure, opportunities for practice, and involvement in daily responsibilities.

Lastly, emotional vulnerability was evident in the participants' difficulties managing emotional reactions, developing trust, and navigating interpersonal relationships. Some described becoming easily irritated or responding without considering the possible effects of their actions, while others expressed reluctance to open up to people because they feared being hurt or judged. These experiences reflected emotional and interpersonal challenges that influenced how they communicated, responded to others, and established relationships. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the participants entered YDS with different but interconnected developmental needs. Their experiences emphasized the importance of providing a supportive and inclusive environment where young people could gradually strengthen their self-confidence, communication abilities, decision-making skills, practical competencies, and emotional awareness. In this context, YDS serves as a developmental platform that provides opportunities for self-expression, social interaction, values formation, and personal growth, preparing beneficiaries to participate more confidently and responsibly in their families, schools, and communities.

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*Meaningful Experiences of 4Ps Beneficiaries During Youth Development Sessions (YDS)*

The findings revealed that the participation of the nine 4Ps youth beneficiaries in the Youth Development Sessions (YDS) provided meaningful experiences that contributed to their perceived personal, social, emotional, and developmental growth. Five interconnected themes emerged from the participants' narratives: Experiential Learning, Safe Space for Self-Expression, Confidence-Building through Participation, Values Formation, and Emotional Coping. These themes demonstrate that the significance of YDS extended beyond the acquisition of knowledge, as the sessions provided opportunities for participants to practice practical skills, express their thoughts and feelings, interact with others, reflect on their values, and develop constructive ways of responding to personal challenges. Their experiences revealed that YDS served as a supportive learning environment where they could explore their capabilities, recognize their strengths, and apply the lessons they learned to their everyday lives.

Under Experiential Learning, participants highlighted the importance of practical activities, such as mock job interviews, résumé writing, application letter preparation, career planning, and communication exercises. These activities allowed them to experience situations that they might encounter in their future educational and occupational pursuits. Through these hands-on learning opportunities, participants gained a better understanding of employment requirements, explored their future aspirations, and practiced skills that they considered useful beyond the sessions. Some participants also shared that the lessons remained relevant even after completing YDS, particularly as they continued their education and prepared for future employment. Meanwhile, Safe Space for Self-Expression emerged from participants' experiences of sharing their personal concerns, feelings, and experiences in an environment where they felt understood and accepted. Through open discussions, group sharing, and interactions with fellow participants, they recognized the importance of communicating their feelings rather than keeping their concerns to themselves. These experiences helped them appreciate the value of listening, understanding different perspectives, and building more positive relationships with their peers and family members.

The theme Confidence-Building through Participation further demonstrated how active involvement in YDS activities provided participants with opportunities to overcome their hesitation and become more comfortable expressing themselves. Through public speaking, recitation, role-playing, mock interviews, group discussions, and other interactive activities, some participants reported becoming more willing to speak in front of others, share their opinions, initiate conversations, and interact with students outside their immediate social circles. Their narratives also reflected perceived improvements in independence, school participation, and their ability to engage in different social situations. These experiences suggest that active participation gave the youth opportunities to practice communication and recognize their capabilities. Similarly, Values Formation highlighted the participants' growing awareness of responsibility, self-discipline, thoughtful decision-making, and the importance of considering the consequences of their actions. The lessons and discussions encouraged them to reflect on their personal choices, resist negative peer influences, seek guidance from trusted individuals, and remain committed to their educational goals. Some participants described becoming more careful in making decisions and recognizing the importance of choosing actions that supported their

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future aspirations. These experiences demonstrate how YDS provided opportunities for reflection on personal values and their application to everyday decisions.

Lastly, Emotional Coping emerged as a meaningful aspect of the participants' experiences, particularly in recognizing their emotions, managing stress, and responding to difficulties at home and in school. Participants described different ways of coping, including taking time to reflect, finding a quiet place to think, engaging in physical activities such as walking, maintaining a positive perspective, seeking solutions to problems, and sharing their feelings with trusted friends or family members. Their narratives also revealed the importance of seeking emotional support rather than facing difficulties alone. For some participants, becoming more open with their parents and friends helped them communicate their concerns and feel better understood. These accounts suggest that emotional coping involved not only regulating emotional responses but also recognizing the value of supportive relationships and constructive problem-solving. Taken together, the findings indicate that the meaningful experiences of 4Ps youth beneficiaries during YDS encompassed practical learning, self-expression, confidence development, values clarification, and emotional coping. Although the experiences and perceived changes varied among participants, their narratives collectively illustrate how YDS provided opportunities for learning, reflection, interaction, and personal development. These findings highlight the importance of sustaining participatory, inclusive, and supportive youth development activities that respond to the diverse needs of beneficiaries and help them apply the knowledge, skills, and insights gained during the sessions to their educational, family, social, and future occupational experiences.

*Challenges Encountered and Overcoming of 4Ps Beneficiaries During YDS*

The findings revealed that the nine 4Ps youth beneficiaries encountered various personal, social, and emotional challenges during their participation in the Youth Development Sessions (YDS). Based on the thematic analysis of their narratives, six interconnected themes emerged: Fear of Public Speaking, Social Hesitation, Performance Anxiety, Self-Doubt, Encouragement and Support, and Personal Growth. These themes illustrate that participation in YDS was not always an easy experience, as participants initially struggled with expressing themselves, interacting with unfamiliar individuals, performing in front of others, and believing in their own abilities. However, their experiences also revealed how personal determination, repeated participation, and support from significant individuals helped them navigate these difficulties. The findings suggest that the challenges encountered during YDS were important aspects of the participants' learning experiences, providing opportunities to recognize their limitations, practice unfamiliar skills, and gradually develop greater confidence in participating in different activities.

The first theme, Fear of Public Speaking, reflected the participants' nervousness and hesitation when speaking in front of others, reciting, sharing personal experiences, or expressing their ideas during group activities. Some participants preferred to remain silent even when they had something to share because they feared making mistakes, being judged, or embarrassing themselves. These difficulties were particularly noticeable during the initial sessions, when participants were still adjusting to the learning environment and becoming familiar with their co-participants. Nevertheless, their narratives revealed that they gradually learned to face these fears

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through repeated participation, attentive listening, cooperation with facilitators, and encouragement from their classmates. The second theme, Social Hesitation, highlighted the difficulties participants experienced when initiating conversations, interacting with unfamiliar peers, and sharing their personal thoughts during group discussions. Some participants were uncertain about how to approach others and preferred to listen rather than actively contribute. The quiet atmosphere of the group sometimes reinforced their hesitation, as participants waited for someone else to initiate the conversation. Despite these challenges, continued interaction through YDS activities provided opportunities for participants to become more comfortable communicating and socializing with others. Their experiences suggest that social adjustment was a gradual process that required familiarity, opportunities for interaction, and an environment where participants felt accepted and respected.

The third theme, Performance Anxiety, described the nervousness and self-consciousness participants experienced during activities that required acting, interviews, personal sharing, and performing before an audience. Participants expressed concerns about making mistakes, being embarrassed, or receiving negative reactions from others. These feelings sometimes caused them to hesitate before participating, even when they were willing to try the activities. However, their narratives also indicated that continued exposure to performance-based tasks helped them become more accustomed to unfamiliar situations. By choosing to participate despite feeling nervous, some participants reported becoming more comfortable and confident when facing others. The fourth theme, Self-Doubt, reflected participants' uncertainty about their abilities and their fear of failure or rejection. Some questioned whether they could perform activities successfully, communicate effectively, or gain acceptance from their peers. These doubts sometimes led them to remain silent or avoid situations that could provide opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities. Nevertheless, through participation, interaction, and opportunities to practice new skills, participants described gradually learning to trust themselves and become more willing to express their ideas. These experiences indicate that fear, hesitation, and self-doubt were interconnected challenges that influenced participants' willingness to engage in YDS activities, but they also provided opportunities to recognize and develop their abilities.

The fifth theme, Encouragement and Support, emphasized the importance of positive relationships in helping participants cope with the challenges they encountered. Participants identified their parents, classmates, and peers as important sources of motivation, reassurance, and guidance. Encouragement from their mothers and classmates helped some participants step outside their comfort zones, participate in group activities, share their ideas, and confront their fear of public speaking. Supportive interactions also helped them feel more accepted and less apprehensive about making mistakes or being judged. These narratives demonstrate that overcoming challenges was not solely an individual effort but was also influenced by the presence of people who provided emotional reassurance and positive reinforcement. The sixth theme, Personal Growth, reflected the changes participants perceived in themselves as they continued engaging in YDS activities and responding to the challenges they encountered. Their accounts described increased self-confidence, improved communication and social interaction, greater independence, enhanced responsibility, and a stronger willingness to participate in academic and social activities. Some also reported developing practical skills, becoming more motivated to pursue their education, and applying the lessons learned during YDS to their

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everyday experiences. These accounts suggest that personal growth involved recognizing individual strengths, becoming more comfortable with unfamiliar situations, and applying newly acquired knowledge and skills beyond the sessions.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the challenges encountered by 4Ps youth beneficiaries during YDS were interconnected experiences involving communication, social interaction, performance, and self-confidence. While fear of public speaking, social hesitation, performance anxiety, and self-doubt initially created barriers to active participation, encouragement and support, together with opportunities for personal growth, were reflected in the ways participants described responding to these difficulties. Their narratives indicate that overcoming challenges was a gradual process shaped by personal effort, repeated engagement, supportive relationships, and opportunities to practice new skills. Although the experiences and perceived changes varied among participants, their accounts collectively highlight the importance of providing a safe, inclusive, and encouraging environment where young people can learn at their own pace, express themselves without fear of ridicule, and develop confidence through meaningful participation. Therefore, YDS serves as a valuable developmental platform for providing opportunities for 4Ps youth beneficiaries to confront personal challenges, strengthen interpersonal competencies, and recognize their potential for continued growth. The findings further emphasize the importance of sustaining youth development activities that integrate practical learning, collaborative participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and guided reflection to help young people apply their learning in their families, schools, and communities.

*Empowerment of 4Ps Beneficiaries in Their Future Plans*

The findings of the study revealed that participation in the Youth Development Sessions (YDS) provided meaningful experiences that the 4Ps youth beneficiaries associated with their future aspirations, educational goals, career plans, and personal responsibilities. Thematic analysis of the participants' narratives generated five major themes: Career Direction, Self-Efficacy, Responsible Decision-Making, Educational Aspiration, and Family Commitment. These themes illustrate the different ways participants understood and applied the lessons they gained from YDS in preparing for their future. Their experiences reflected a growing awareness of their personal interests and abilities, greater confidence in pursuing opportunities, increased consideration of the consequences of their decisions, stronger motivation to continue their education, and a deeper desire to support their families and communities. The findings suggest that empowerment was not limited to personal development but also involved developing a clearer sense of direction, recognizing individual capabilities, and identifying meaningful steps toward achieving long-term goals.

The first theme, Career Direction, highlighted how participants became more aware of their interests, abilities, and possible occupational pathways. Through activities such as self-discovery, goal setting, résumé writing, mock job interviews, and career exploration, they gained opportunities to consider how their present skills and educational choices could contribute to their future careers. Art, for instance, shared that his experience during the YDS mock interview helped him prepare for an actual employment interview when he applied for the Department of

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Agriculture Summer Youth Internship Program. Similarly, Vic described reassessing his educational pathway and transferring from Agricultural Engineering to Criminology because he recognized its closer alignment with his aspiration to become a soldier. May also discovered her interest in drawing, which influenced her decision to consider becoming an architect or an artist rather than pursuing her earlier ambition of becoming a police officer. These experiences demonstrate that career direction involved not only identifying a desired profession but also exploring personal interests, evaluating available opportunities, and making educational and occupational choices that reflected individual aspirations.

The second theme, Self-Efficacy, reflected the participants' growing belief in their ability to perform tasks, overcome challenges, and pursue their goals. Their narratives described increased confidence in public speaking, social interaction, classroom participation, and extracurricular activities. Some participants also reported becoming more independent, accepting leadership responsibilities, and feeling more comfortable in situations that previously caused uncertainty. Art, for example, shared that the feedback he received during YDS encouraged him to step outside his comfort zone, eventually becoming more active in college organizations and assuming a leadership position. Vic described becoming more confident in speaking before other people, while Charm emphasized learning to make decisions independently and trust her own abilities. These accounts suggest that opportunities to participate, practice new skills, receive feedback, and interact with others were important experiences through which participants recognized their capabilities. Their narratives indicate that increased confidence was associated with a greater willingness to explore opportunities and take on responsibilities related to their education, relationships, and future careers.

The third theme, Responsible Decision-Making, emphasized the importance of thoughtful judgment, self-awareness, and accountability in making choices. Participants described learning to think carefully before acting, consider possible consequences, evaluate alternatives, and seek advice from trusted individuals when necessary. Vic explained how reflecting on his long-term career aspiration influenced his decision to shift to a college course that he considered more appropriate for his goals. Jane and Jeza emphasized the importance of consulting their parents and considering whether their decisions were appropriate before taking action. Ghie, meanwhile, described resisting peer pressure when classmates encouraged her to skip classes, recognizing that doing so would not support her educational priorities. These experiences demonstrate that responsible decision-making involved more than choosing between alternatives; it also required considering personal values, long-term aspirations, and the possible effects of one's actions. The findings further suggest that developing responsible judgment can coexist with seeking appropriate guidance from parents and other trusted individuals, particularly when young people face unfamiliar situations or important decisions.

The fourth theme, Educational Aspiration, highlighted the participants' determination to continue their studies, complete their education, and pursue opportunities that could improve their future circumstances. Their narratives revealed that education was regarded as an important pathway toward achieving career goals, obtaining meaningful employment, and contributing to family well-being. Art and Vic shared that their experiences in YDS reinforced their determination to finish their studies, while Charm explained that she continued to apply the

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lessons she had learned even after entering college. Jane expressed her aspiration to become a doctor so that she could help people who were sick and support her family in the future. Jeza, despite experiencing financial difficulties such as occasionally having no allowance, described continuing to attend school and work hard in her studies. May also explained that she became more determined to improve her academic performance as she worked toward her career aspirations. These accounts indicate that educational aspiration involved not only the desire to obtain a diploma or degree but also the commitment to persevere despite challenges, identify meaningful educational goals, and recognize the relationship between education and future opportunities. The participants' experiences also suggest that family encouragement, personal interests, and practical career preparation contributed to the ways they understood the importance of continuing their education.

The fifth theme, Family Commitment, demonstrated how participants connected their personal achievements and future aspirations with their desire to support their families and contribute to their communities. Their accounts reflected a growing sense of responsibility through household participation, caring for younger siblings, appreciation of parental sacrifices, and efforts to pursue education and employment. Art described working toward obtaining a scholarship so he could contribute to household expenses without compromising his studies. Vic shared his participation in community clean-up drives and his desire to help others without expecting anything in return. Jane described taking the initiative to assist her mother with household chores and expressed her aspiration to help her parents after completing her education. Similarly, Charm and May emphasized their desire to use their future employment and professional opportunities to benefit their families and other people. These narratives indicate that participants viewed future success not solely as an individual accomplishment but also as an opportunity to give back to those who had supported them. Family commitment was therefore reflected in both present responsibilities and future-oriented intentions, connecting personal development with gratitude, service, and concern for the well-being of others.

Taken together, the five themes demonstrate that the empowerment of 4Ps youth beneficiaries encompassed interconnected personal, educational, occupational, and social dimensions. Career Direction reflected their awareness of possible career pathways; Self-Efficacy represented their belief in their capabilities; Responsible Decision-Making highlighted thoughtful and accountable choices; Educational Aspiration emphasized their determination to pursue and complete their studies; and Family Commitment expressed their desire to use their achievements to support their families and communities. Although the participants described different experiences and aspirations, their narratives shared a common pattern of becoming more intentional about their future and recognizing the importance of preparing for the opportunities and responsibilities ahead. The findings suggest that YDS served as a supportive context in which participants could reflect on their goals, recognize their strengths, and relate their personal development to their future plans. However, their accounts do not establish that YDS alone caused these developments, as family support, school experiences, individual interests, and access to educational and employment opportunities may also have influenced their perspectives.

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Overall, the findings highlight the importance of sustaining youth development initiatives that integrate career exploration, goal setting, decision-making activities, life skills development, educational planning, leadership opportunities, and community participation. Such activities may provide young people with opportunities to explore their interests, strengthen their confidence, consider the consequences of their choices, and identify practical steps toward their aspirations. The participants' experiences also emphasize that empowerment involves more than dreaming of a better future; it includes developing the awareness, confidence, judgment, motivation, and sense of responsibility needed to work toward it. As reflected in the integrated framework presented in Figure 5, "YDS empowered us to dream, prepare, and take action for a better future." This central message captures the relationship among career direction, self-efficacy, responsible decision-making, educational aspiration, and family commitment as interconnected dimensions of empowerment that help explain how the participants understood their experiences in YDS in relation to their future plans and responsibilities

## 4. DISCUSSION

### Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that the Youth Development Sessions (YDS) provided meaningful developmental experiences for the nine 4Ps youth beneficiaries interviewed in Pili, Camarines Sur. Their narratives reflected a progression from initial difficulties in self-expression, social interaction, and personal decision-making toward greater confidence, awareness of their abilities, and consideration of their future goals. These experiences should be understood as the participants' perceptions of their development rather than as definitive proof of the program's causal effectiveness.

Before joining YDS, participants described experiences characterized by social inhibition, identity uncertainty, communication anxiety, developing life skills, and emotional vulnerability. These interconnected themes indicate that some participants entered the program while still developing their confidence, interpersonal abilities, emotional management, and sense of direction. Their experiences highlight the importance of recognizing the varied developmental needs of adolescents, particularly those who may have limited opportunities to practice communication, decision-making, and self-expression in supportive settings.

During YDS, participants identified experiential learning, a safe space for self-expression, confidence-building through participation, values formation, and emotional coping as meaningful experiences. Activities such as mock job interviews, résumé writing, application preparation, group discussions, and reporting allowed participants to connect session content with practical situations. These experiences suggest that learning becomes more meaningful when young people are given opportunities to participate actively, practice skills, and reflect on how lessons apply to their lives.

The findings also indicate that challenges such as fear of public speaking, social hesitation, performance anxiety, and self-doubt remained important aspects of the participants' experiences. However, encouragement and support, together with continued participation, were associated

with personal growth. This suggests that youth development programs should not assume that all participants will immediately feel comfortable participating. Instead, facilitators need to provide gradual, inclusive, and supportive opportunities for engagement.

In terms of empowerment, participants' narratives reflected five dimensions: career direction, self-efficacy, responsible decision-making, educational aspiration, and family commitment. These dimensions indicate that participants associated their YDS experiences not only with personal confidence but also with the ability to reflect on their future, pursue educational goals, and recognize their responsibilities toward their families and communities. The findings therefore portray empowerment as a multidimensional process involving personal agency, practical competencies, social relationships, and future-oriented decision-making.

Taken together, the findings suggest that YDS may serve as a supportive platform for holistic youth development when its activities are relevant to participants' experiences, provide opportunities for meaningful participation, and respond to their emotional and social needs.

## 4. CONCLUSION

**Conclusion 1**

The findings of the study identified five themes describing the experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries before joining the Youth Development Sessions (YDS): Social Inhibition, Identity Uncertainty, Communication Anxiety, Developing Life Skills, and Emotional Vulnerability. These themes represented the participants' initial personal, social, and emotional experiences prior to their involvement in the sessions.

**Conclusion 2**

The findings of the study identified five themes describing the meaningful experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries during the Youth Development Sessions (YDS): Experiential Learning, Safe Space for Self-Expression, Confidence-Building through Participation, Values Formation, and Emotional Coping.

**Conclusion 3**

The findings of the study identified six themes concerning the challenges encountered and the ways these were overcome by 4Ps beneficiaries during the Youth Development Sessions (YDS): Fear of Public Speaking, Social Hesitation, Performance Anxiety, Self-Doubt, Encouragement and Support, and Personal Growth.

**Conclusion 4**

The findings of the study identified five themes describing how the Youth Development Sessions (YDS) empowered 4Ps beneficiaries in their future plans: Career Direction, Self-Efficacy, Responsible Decision-Making, Educational Aspiration, and Family Commitment.

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**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **For the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD):** Strengthen YDS content by providing continuing activities on communication, self-awareness, emotional coping, leadership, responsible decision-making, educational planning, and career readiness. The proposed ELEVATE–YDS program may be considered for pilot implementation, subject to program review and available resources.
- **For social workers and YDS facilitators:** Use participatory and experiential learning strategies, including small-group discussions, guided reflection, role-playing, collaborative tasks, and gradual public-speaking activities. These approaches may help create a supportive environment where participants can practice skills and express themselves comfortably.
- **For families, schools, and community stakeholders:** Strengthen collaboration to provide consistent encouragement, mentoring, educational guidance, and opportunities for youth participation. Former YDS participants may also be considered as peer mentors or youth volunteers, where appropriate.
- **For program implementers and local government units:** Establish regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess participation, implementation quality, and the perceived sustainability of developmental gains. Participant feedback, reflection activities, interviews, and appropriate assessment tools may inform program improvements.
- **For future researchers:** Conduct studies involving a larger and more diverse sample of 4Ps youth beneficiaries from different municipalities and regions. Future research may include participants who did not complete YDS, as well as the perspectives of parents, facilitators, teachers, and program implementers. Longitudinal or mixed-methods studies may also examine whether perceived changes are sustained over time and assess program outcomes using appropriate measures.

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