



# Adapting to Adversity: Survival Mechanisms of Badjao Migrants in Mambaling, Cebu City, Philippines

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## Abstract

This study explored the survival mechanisms of Badjao migrants in Mambaling, Cebu City. It also examined how they respond to the different challenges they encounter in their daily lives, specifically the perceived discrimination from society, and how the government and other private sectors have helped them improve their lives. This research utilized a naturalistic inquiry method and purposive snowball sampling to identify and understand the survival mechanisms of Badjao migrants. The study involved 10 key informants who were asked to answer a questionnaire and participate in interviews. The results revealed that their survival mechanisms include fulfilling physiological needs, security, love and belongingness, esteem needs, and self-actualization. These mechanisms have evolved over time due to migration. Their lives in the city have provided them with various survival strategies to thrive despite their limitations and the social discrimination they have faced. Additionally, the support from local government units and various private organizations has helped them gain better opportunities in life. In conclusion, migration has had a major influence on the lives of the Badjao migrants in Mambaling. As a result of these influences, they have developed alternative strategies and survival mechanisms to support their daily existence. However, life remains a struggle for them. While they maintain a strong sense of community, fulfilling all their needs is not easy.

## Subject Areas

Anthropology

## Keywords

Badjaos, Migration, Social Discrimination, Moklo

## 1. Introduction

In the Philippine archipelago, there are more than 40 different ethnic groups. Several of these ethnic groups can be distinguished as “tribal groups” or the native people. Badjaos are one of the most widespread indigenous people in the country. The Badjao migrants in Mambaling, Cebu City are also the native Badjaos who have been dispersed from their instinctive origin in Southern part of the Philippines. They are found in the coastal area near South Road Property, Cebu City. Amongst themselves, they are known as Sama Laus (Sea Sama) and are found living on houseboats where they make their livelihood solely on the sea as expert fishermen, deep sea divers, and navigators (Ethnic Groups of the Philippines, 2011). Many Badjaos still practice that same lifestyle, which explains why they are still commonly called “sea gypsies” [1].

[2] revealed that during a short period of time, many Badjaos have transferred from being dwelling sea nomads to an urban minority, with limited knowledge about city life. In social setting, the native badjaos, would eventually have a hard time in dealing with employment and occupation in the city. Provided that they are nomads, they don’t have a permanent settlement, quality education and stable jobs. Because of their insufficiency in life, they are more prone to social discrimination and are hardly recognized by public benefit centers. Despite all the adversities they have been through in life, they still find ways to cope with their own survival mechanisms [3].

Consequently, survival mechanisms are psychological, emotional, biological, and behavioral patterns evolutionarily selected and reinforced because of their contribution to the survival of the physical unit. Survival mechanisms may be best understood by considering them to be software programs coded into the genetic material. The programs are coded as a result of experience and accessed via associative pathways [3]. The Badjaos are inhabited with different necessities that reflect on what they are in the society that they live in. Moreover, with their capabilities, they would have various ways to supplement their basic needs despite of social identity. In Maslow’s Humanistic Theory of Hierarchy of Needs, the deficiency, or basic needs are said to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the need to fulfill such needs will become stronger the longer they are denied. For example, the longer a person goes without food the hungrier they will become [4].

In the official gazette of the Philippines, through Republic Act 8371, also known as the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997, claimed in Section 2 that the Philippine Government authorized the protection, recognition and promotion of the rights of indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples, creating a national commission on indigenous peoples, establishing implementing mechanisms and appropriation funds.

Thus, the State recognizes its obligations for the Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous people in rendering services to the needs and desires of these communities [5]. In line with it, Republic Act 8425, also known as Social Reform

and Poverty Alleviation Act, has been visualizing in institutionalizing the social reform and poverty alleviation programs. National Anti-poverty Commission is created to coordinate and serve as an advisory body for the implementation of the Social Reform Agenda. As stated in Section 3 of the Act, given that Badjaos are considered to be indigenous cultural communities/indigenous people, it made them as beneficiaries of such act. However, the Mendicancy Law of 1978 is an ordinance that forbids the public from giving alms to beggars. As provided, it complicates the living condition of these Badjaos as one of the group of people that has this kind of living.

With all these provisions stated, Badjaos in Mambaling haven't had received enough support from the government. Meanwhile, with the social status in society that they have, people perceive them as informal settlers, uneducated and outcast. However, they still have their various strategies in thriving for survival in day to day living despite of being in the low-level status in the society.

This study gives awareness not only to the community that they live in but also to the different organizations of both government and non-government agencies. With prior knowledge about the Badjao community in Mambaling, Cebu City and in their survival predicaments, then this aids for avoidance of social discrimination. In addition, this study would also help them to claim their social rights thereby building their social identity.

## **2. Research Methods**

To achieve the purpose of this investigation, the researcher opted to use naturalistic qualitative inquiry to clearly and fully understand the lived experiences of the Badjao migrants, specifically their survival mechanisms in their everyday life in Mambaling, Cebu City, using observations and interview guide wherein the researcher was allowed to ask broad questions that permitted the informants to answer in their own words. Also, the researcher used purposive snowball sampling in which a group of people were recommended as potential informants in this study. Purposive snowball sampling were used to ease data collection by asking a participant to suggest someone else who might be willing or appropriate for the study. Badjao settlers were the primary informants in this study. Ten key informants were interviewed using the researcher's interview guide that aided in gathering relevant data. Observations were recorded duly. A video camera and still camera were used to capture their movements, and a voice recorder to record interviews. Still camera was used to take pictures of these things or events that the video camera missed.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This study sought to identify and understand the survival mechanisms of Badjao migrants in Mambaling, Cebu City. The researchers determine the following themes to further explain the phenomenology of their survival.

### 3.1. Physiological Needs

Physiological needs are the primary basic needs for survival. These include breathing, food, water sex, sleep, air, and shelter [6]. One of the natures of the physiological need is that it is a recurring need. However, even if recurring, this can be stabilized. From the results, they were not able to satisfactorily attain their primary basic needs for food and physiology. Given that they work under harsh conditions, they were not able to sustain for their nutritional daily requirements for work and survival.

(B1) have said, (*Kaduha ra mi mokaon buntag ug gabe-i*) “We only eat twice a day during in the morning and in the evening”.

“(Usahay buntag ug gabe.i walay paniudto usahay),” “We only eat in the morning and in the evening, sometimes we won’t take our lunch”, (B8) added.

Most of them take their meal twice a day and buy water supply outside their social firm.

(B6) and (B10) revealed, (*Ang tindahan ra among source palit mi bugas gawas*) “The store outside is our source of food where we can buy rice”.

(B6). (*Magpalit mi og tubig, uling paras lung-ag ug uban pa*) “We buy water outside and coal for cooking etc.” (B10).

Most of the time, they buy ready-to-eat food outside in their community. They usually consider fish as their primary food. Worse case is when they resort to pleading food and picking sources from unhygienic areas that could negatively affect their health. In desperate conditions of them not being able to feed the family for the day lead them to make hasty decisions like asking food from other sources. One respondent said that sometimes, their food came from the leftovers of the fish market. They usually pick it up around, wash and cook for the day.

(B9) said, (*Mamunit mi og isda amu hugasan luto-un unya kan-on*) “We pick fish, wash it, cook it and eat it after”.

In some instances, the unavailability of food and source lead them to ask food from the relatives. However ironically, they allocate accordingly their income largely for food alone. It goes to show that even if they allocate a large portion of their money on food, the quality and quantity of food is not sufficient to stabilize their needs and survival. Although foods are made to be attained at a certain level, there is instability in maintaining the provisions of food.

Shelter is an institution that provides temporary housing for homeless people. The Badjaos are now residing in near the coastal area of Mambaling, Cebu City. Their shelter is made up with concrete materials and woods as well. It appeared that six out of ten were found living in a wooden-made shelter than concrete one. Only limited registered benefactors of their community enjoyed the housing assistance from the different Local and International Non-Government and Church Organizations like Aboitiz Foundation, Qualfon Incorporated, etc.

(B4) claimed, (*Aboitiz foundation ang nag tukod ani*) “The Aboitiz foundation constructed our house”.

(B6) also added (*Aboitiz, and the government, Nano Nagle INC., Americans ang nagtinabangay jud ug tukod ani*) “Aboitiz, the government, Nano Nagle Inc. and the americans work hand in hand in constructing our houses”.

Four families out of ten respondents have been provided a concrete house while some of them were living in a wooden house near the coastal areas. Their wooden houses were built with the used of light materials like plywood, logs, nails etc. Most of their materials are excess construction materials that they found around the area while some bought them from some construction shops outside their community.

(B2) have said (*Nang gamit mi og kahoy, mamalit ra mi og kahoy*) “We only used woods, we bought it”.

(*Mupalit mi og kahoy sa filnet like dos por dos*) “We bought woods from some filnet shops outside”, (B8) added.

As observed, their shelters could not accommodate the whole family of 15 to 20 members. This implies also that the need for shelter is not met satisfactorily. As a physiological need, the shelter may not be a healthy place for them to stay as they may be too crowded in their own homes. Although they can consider it as a home, the requirements of a home as a structure may not be met. The fact that not all were able to benefit from the housing assistance means that not all infrastructures are stable enough to provide them secured homes.

### 3.2. Security/Safety Needs

Safety needs talks about the protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear [6]. According to Maslow, security needs are not always fully met because truly we are not safe. While individuals can impose mechanisms to protect themselves, the source of danger is always unpredictable.

Most of the respondents came from Zamboanga City they had to migrate to escape chaos, wars, bombing that happened in their place. As what

(B6) and (B8) revealed, (*Naa mi diri kay among mga bana tulison sa mga pirata kung mangisda unya pamatyon sila*) “We migrated here because everytime our husband will go fishing there are pirates who will kill them and steal their properties from their boats”.

Most of them believed that they feel secure and safe here in the city. One of the reasons why they left Zamboanga was because when they fish, they were being captured by pirates. They also found a perfect place near the coastal areas in Mambaling for their subsistence fishing as their primary livelihood.

(*Diri mi kita sa Cebu ug nindot ug panagatan*) “We find Cebu a good place for fishing” (B4) responded.

Aside from fishing they also have other strategies to survive, they sell different

items and products like fruits, vegetables, fishes and sometimes they also purchase towels and sell it in the city. In their revelations:

(B1) “Before I was begging along the city but after a while I went to carbon market to get fruits and sell it in order to survive”.

(B9) (*Usahay mamaligya og isda kung nay puhunan*) “If I can earn source for capital, I will sell fishes”.

(B10) (*Vendor ra ko, namaligya ug labakara sa carbon*) “I’m just a vendor selling towels in Carbon”.

These survival strategies had helped them to provide their daily needs. Although given this opportunity for livelihood and financial security, these opportunities are not vast enough for their economic development. Some of the respondents did not choose to study but they continued the livelihood their fathers have taught them.

(B4) claimed (*Nangisda na lang ko, nakaskwela ko pero 3rd year high school ra kay walay makaon ineg uli nako niundang na lang ko*) “I reached 3rd year high school but I had to stop because everytime I went home, there is no food to eat that’s why I chose to become a fisherman”.

However, during heavy rains and other types of calamities, some of the Badjao folks consider their houses as safe. They only seek help from other people or from the LGU’s if it is not safe to anymore to stay. Some of them would just stay at home and would evacuate if there’s a very heavy typhoon, earthquake, tsunami etc.

(B7) said (*Ok ra mi sa among balay, komportable ra mi ug safe kayo*) “We feel safe and comfortable in our houses”.

(B10) also added, (*Pang kuha-on mis barangay ug kusog kaayong bagyo, hangin ug lain ang panahon*) “The barangay officials would accompany and help us when the typhoon got worst”.

While it is true that their migration has been an outcome of a security issue in Zamboanga, the Badjaos are now confronted with new security issues. One of these issues is stealing, some of the respondents have said that there a lot of robbers outside their community. Some of their private properties are being stolen since their homes are not securely protected.

(B2) have said, (*Naay mangawat ug kaldero balde mga branded shirts*) “There were robbers who stole our casseroles, pales and our branded shirts”.

### 3.3. Love and Belongingness

Love and Belongingness entail the family, love and friendship [6]. In this study, Badjaos have large population, it also expands every year. One of the respondents said that they have 23 members in one family in one squad. Regarding in their line of kinship, they see to it that they equally allocate the basic necessities to their

family. The same thing happens in their Badjao community where every individual that is part of their community is being loved and cared for—that even if they are not accepted from the Cebuano society; they can still feel the love and value from one another. Even in their civic involvement, a cultural group headed by their chieftain is established in their community. But as one of the indigenous people, they cannot avoid the discrimination from the society. They feel offended when they are called “Moklo”, because as for them “Moklo” word is degrading to their part and because they are aware of their rights they reacted by voicing out their feelings. In their responses:

(B2) said, (*Tawgon mi og Moklo*) “They call us ‘Moklo’”.

(B4) also said (*Kanang Moklo bugal-bugal mana*) “The term ‘Moklo’ is used for mocking”.

(B7) added, (*Bullihon mis mga Cristiano, kayang badjao tapolan kuno og hugaw pero kugihan baya sad mi, manglimpyo sad*) “*Christians bullied us because they perceived us as dirty and lazy but they didn’t know that we are also industrious and knows how to clean*”.

Later on, some of them will just ignore it and pretend that they didn’t hear anything so they can’t create chaos.

(B10) explained (*Pero wala na lang na mo ilang gepanulti, di na lang mi mangita og gubot*) “We will just forget what they said to avoid conflicts with them”.

Moreover, their family ties value the kinship as they comfortably declare themselves as badjaos. They consider their community as one community. With this, it can be implied that there is a harmonious relationship in the badjao community. In essence, they survive because they value the sense of community within them.

### 3.4. Esteem Needs

Esteem Needs are the demand for respect and affection [6]. Here, human desire to be accepted and valued by others. Given the idea that they cannot attain their primary basic needs, it is then impossible that they can build self-esteem within their selves. People use to mock them as dirty, lazy and uneducated. It is because they cannot afford nor choose to go to school, learn proper sanitation and establish within their selves the sense of self-determination. At times, people label them as “Moklo” which the word itself doesn’t have any ethnographical meaning. As a response, they would clarify that they are badjaos and not a moklo. As what (B9) responded,

(*Mutubag mi nadili mi Moklo badjao mi*) “We will tell them that we are not Moklo, we are badjaos”.

Most of the times, they would also fight back and speak out but sometimes they would ignore it.

(B6) said (*Biay biayon mi mga badjao ang uban musukol ang uban muhilom*

*na lang*) “We, badjaos are being mocked, some will fight back but some will just keep silent and ignore them”.

One respondent even said that she will just even pray for the people who keep on criticizing her. Thus, a great discrimination has been felt by the Badjaos within the society that they live in. With all these rejections, they fail to work productively that is why they settle their selves into low-income jobs. On the other hand, badjao students usually are being bullied in their school that leads them to feel inferior.

(B8) said “I was discriminated in school some students will say that badjao is a street dweller and crazy”.

(B5) also said, (*discrimination in school kay ingnon mi nila boang dili kahi-baw*) “There are discriminations in school, they call us crazy and even said we know nothing”.

Despite of all these societal predicaments, they still choose to dwell on sustaining basic needs than to holistically drag their selves into the wilderness of poverty. Every day in their lives is a struggle to break the social stigma against them. But when every badjao is confronted with criticism and discrimination, the struggle to keep their esteem alive can be difficult.

### 3.5. Self-Actualization

Self-actualization is the idea of realizing fully one’s potential or self-fulfillment [6]. Before, they had a simple living but due to different challenges and experiences they have encountered when they migrated in the city, these influenced them in terms of their ways and views in life. It appeared that most of them would rather choose to settle with stable jobs than to send themselves to school.

(B7) and (B10) claimed, (*Gusto unta ko bisan og unsa nga trabaho*) “I would like to have a job, any job will do”.

(B7) also added, (*Oo, ganahan jud ko og trabaho nga permanente*) “Yes, I really wanted to have a permanent job”.

With all the perceived discriminations they have experienced from the society, they were still motivated to strive hard and prove to other people that they can still do better in their lives. All the respondents affirmed that through good education all their children will lead them to a sustainable and better future. Most of them would really want to finish schooling but due to financial problems they have not fulfill their dreams and goals in life.

(B6) explained, (*Gusto ko mokuha ug maestro lang pero wala ika afford mag uma na lang*) “I wanted to be a teacher but I can’t afford it so I settled in being a farmer”.

With the help of private sectors some of their children were supported in school, they have given full scholarship and school supplies. Their assistance gave

them hopes to work hard for their children. Even if most of them have not achieved what they wanted to be but the eagerness and willingness were still in their hearts.

As what (B9) said, (*Gusto nako akong mga anak maka eskwela aron makatrabaho ug nindot*) “I wanted to send my children to school so that they can get a good job in the future”.

They will do everything to at least send their children to school in order to get a stable job or a degree maybe.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This study highlights how the migration of the Badjao people to Mambaling, Cebu City has significantly impacted their lives, providing them with better fishing opportunities, a new living environment, and alternative lifestyle strategies. However, despite these positive influences, their daily lives remain a constant struggle. They face challenges such as the absence of stable housing, lack of social welfare benefits, and limited economic opportunities. While the Badjao community in Mambaling has developed a strong sense of togetherness, meeting their basic needs remains difficult.

Similarly, indigenous communities like the Badjaos should be fully aware of their rights to safeguard their survival, dignity, and well-being. This awareness is crucial not only for the protection of their land and culture but also for asserting their autonomy in shaping their futures. Advocacy for education, legal support, and the recognition of indigenous rights are essential steps in achieving this awareness. By empowering themselves with knowledge, indigenous groups can better preserve their unique heritage and ensure their voices are heard in the ongoing discussions about rights and development.

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#### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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