

**THE WAR ON DRUGS, 'TOKHANG', AND CHILD RIGHTS  
'WAG TAYONG SUMUKO!'**

**Aileen May P. Mijares  
Joanna Paula Titic**

*One significant impact of the Drug War on communities is the fear sown by the Tokhang, heightened by the apparent impunity of the current administration, which considers minors as acceptable 'collateral damage'. We have a responsibility as engaged anthropologists to bear active witness and to write against state terror.*

“You destroy my country, I’ll kill you. And it’s a legitimate thing. If you destroy our young children, I will kill you. That is a very correct statement. There is nothing wrong in trying to preserve the interest of the next generation..... When you bomb a village you intend to kill the militants but you kill the children there... Why do you say it is collateral damage to the West and to us it is murder?”  
- President Rodrigo Duterte (October 2016)

“In a span of almost two years, the anti-drug campaign has become so deeply embedded at the grassroots level. In some cases, it has turned neighbor against neighbor, family against family...”  
- PCIJ Story Project (2018)

**Introduction: Children and the Philippines’ War on Drugs**

President Rodrigo Duterte’s War on Drugs known as Oplan *Tokhang* (‘knock-and-plead’) has resulted in thousands of deaths, including of minors

and children. This campaign has received international news coverage as it claimed the lives of thousands of mostly impoverished Filipinos. According to human rights groups, in 2017 the drug war resulted to an estimated total of 13,000 deaths (Al Jazeera 2017). The Philippine National Police however maintained only an estimate of 8000 'deaths under investigation' (DUIs) for the same year (Rappler Research Team 2017). Human rights advocates have condemned this spate of deaths dubbed as EJKs ('extrajudicial killings'), which "*tokhang*<sup>1</sup>" has become synonymous to in local parlance.

President Duterte has said that children killed in the Drug War are 'collateral damage', and that the police can kill hundreds of civilians without criminal liability (Holmes 2016). In 2017, news reports cited at least 54 children killed either by police operations or by vigilante style killings, of which 27 were males and 13 females (Gavilan 2017). In 2019, according to human rights advocates, the estimated number of deaths was 27,000 while PDEA's (Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency) casualty count was 5,526 (Tomacruz 2019).

Meanwhile, a figure of 20,584 child drug surrenderers during the first two months of the Philippine drug war is reported by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. From this number, nearly half (45.43%) of these child surrenderers were high school students; 43.34% were out of school; 8.22% elementary and 2.51% college students (Lucero 2016). In 2019, The Philippine National Police (PNP) figures meanwhile showed that from January 2017 to December 2018, the police have caught over 1,300 children aged 17 years and below for their alleged involvement in illegal drugs (Talabong 2019).

While the label "drug addict" usually conjures the image of a male (see Table 1), a serious look at the gender dimensions of the drug war – with its male targets and female survivors – is warranted. It is the *women* who become saddled with the effort for rehabilitation, or they become the widows who must now fend for the family alone. The term "war widows" has in fact been coined by a foreign wire agency (AFP 2017) to refer to the high number of widows resulting from Duterte's Drug War. "For every Tokhang victim, there is a woman wailing beside", said Neri Colmenares, congressman and human rights lawyer, during a forum on the impact of the Drug War on

---

<sup>1</sup> [The police Oplan Tokhang. Tokhang is a term blended from the Bisaya "*Toktok hangyo*", which means 'knock and plea'— law enforcers knock on a suspected drug trafficker or drug addict's home and persuade them to surrender.]

women.<sup>2</sup> "Out there are ten thousand mothers who have borne the personal brunt of the loss of a husband or a child", said Colmenares, who added that moreover, the women must take on themselves "the breadwinner mantle and teaching the children how to cope with grief and anger, with dignity and honor". An urban poor women leader speaking about the plight of women in the midst of the Drug War<sup>3</sup>, expressed how apart from the poverty endured by the urban poor, many fathers have been killed, many become orphaned. The Drug War has alarmingly become a woman's problem.

This article pieces together the case of a 17-year old surrenderer, as put together from his narrative together with the narratives of a parent, and two local government workers who are members of the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) who handled the case. The aim is to shed some light on the situation of minors that have been involved in drugs, and who are in the midst of the Drug War. We were permitted to join one part of a series of interviews done by a partner NGO, and helped out in the documentation. We relied on newspaper accounts, interviews, and testimonies from public fora for further data.

We explore this particular topic in advocacy of a morally engaged anthropology that does not turn a blind eye on blatant human rights violations in vulnerable sectors of society. Anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes have argued that cultural relativism, read as moral relativism, is no longer appropriate to the world in which we live. A politically committed and morally engaged anthropology cannot ignore massacres and disappearances and violations of the rights of vulnerable people that occur right in front of their eyes (Sluka 2000:12).

A growing number of anthropologists have passionately argued and have been working for the 'rethinking of the politics of anthropology' and how to "address and respond to the rampant injustice and terror in the late twentieth-century world" (Starn 1994:26). According to Scheper-Hughes, anthropologists should, at the least, serve as witnesses to and reporters of human rights abuses and the suffering of the poor and oppressed (Sluka 2000:12),

---

<sup>2</sup> Forum on March 7, 2018 held by Rise Up for Life and for Rights Philippines and #WomanLaban, and Launching of Mga Manananggol laban sa Extrajudicial Killings (Manlaban sa EJK),.

<sup>3</sup>During a Focus Group Discussion conducted among Zone One Tondo women leaders on April 7, 2018, by Aileen Mijares. This was to fulfill a requirement for a course in 'Politics and Governance in Southeast Asia' under Dr. Antoinette Raquiza.

As she eloquently puts it, it is the act of "witnessing" that lends our work its moral character; the methodology of participant-observation

"has a way of drawing ethnographers into spaces of human life where they might really prefer not to go at all and, once there, do not know how to escape except through writing, which willy-nilly draws others there as well, making them party to the witnessing." (Scheper-Hughes 1995:419)

Indifference on the part of the observer amounts to "a hostile act... (A)nthropology should exist 'on two fronts: as a field of knowledge (as a 'discipline') and as a field of action, a force field, or site of struggle'" (Sluka 2000:12, citing Scheper-Hughes 1995).

We do advocate for intensive ethnographic research on the important topic of child rights amid the drug war— following ethical guidelines as potential risks are presented by this type of research both for research subjects as well as for the researchers. Collaboration with an NGO was our strategy for pursuing data-gathering. For its part, the NGO can make use of the research to further its advocacies.

### **The 'Duterte effect' and the landscape of fear**

Hannah Arendt (1970) observed that terror atomizes people and renders them politically inert. Has the sense of community become eroded within a landscape of fear and anxiety over tokhang? Has tokhang perhaps strengthened it?

There is a body of literature on fear in the midst of escalating violence in marginal communities (see Auyero et al. 2015). Latin American scholars trace the processes whereby fear is socially constructed (Villarreal 2015:236). Ana Villarreal argues that "fear may both tear the social fabric and bring people together, both destroy public space and create new forms of social life" (2015). This observation on the impacts of fear on communities provides a good frame with which to view the current situation in the Philippines.

Listening to the case of 'Boy', a drug surrenderer, as well as other Tokhang survivor accounts, tells of the impacts on communities of the current Drug War. After surrendering for fear of being among those killed by vigilantes, Boy and his mother both voiced out a new fear over being in the drug list, with its implied threat to their lives.

During the interview, Boy’s mother, Aling Fe [not her real name], had shared her observation that the War on Drugs campaign led to positive change among people and families in their neighborhood. Those who were addicted to drugs were able to alter their unruly behavior. [“*Maganda naman na nandiyan si Duterte, nagbago ang mga tao, nasusubaybayan ang pamilya*”]. However she still expressed ambivalent feelings about “tokhang”. She averred that she was both glad and fearful (“*natutuwa na natatakot*”) at the same time— glad that her son was no longer involved in drugs, but fearful at the same time. Thus, she became continuously wary of what might possibly happen to Boy. The incident has made them more vigilant of any current developments concerning the Drug War [“*ngayon palagi na namin sinusubaybayan dahil kay Duterte*”]. Other people who knew about the situation told her that Boy’s surrender put his life in danger as his name is now on the list. [“*Sabi ng iba mas maganda pa na di nag surrender para walang pangalan at di babalik-balikan*”].]

This could also be the result of the grassroots surveillance program known as MASA MASID (*Mamamayang Ayaw sa Anomalya, Mamamayan Ayaw sa Ilegal na Droga*)<sup>4</sup>, launched by the DILG last September 2016. The program is aimed at using citizens to monitor and report drug, crime and terrorism-related activities.

Moreover, the practice of interrogating surrenderees about their ‘alleged drug networks’ is also a concern. Tokhang survivors point out how people tend to move to other places when a family member is killed for fear of retaliation by police especially when investigations are conducted<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the household and family of the victim knows they become a target and tend to disperse after a Tokhang operation.

How the emotional registers of ‘fear’ (*takot*) and ‘anxiety’ or ‘worry’ (*pangamba*) toward President Duterte and his Drug War are quite intense can also be gleaned from the reasons for surrendering in the case of ‘Boy’.

### **The case of Boy, drug surrenderer**

‘Boy’ [not his real name], was the lone drug surrenderer under the age of 18 in his barangay in 2017. He was then 17 years of age. As he narrated, his

---

<sup>4</sup> [‘Citizens Against Anomalies, Citizens Against Illegal Drugs’]

<sup>5</sup> Rise Up for Life and for Rights and #WomanLaban and launching of the *Mga Manananggol Laban sa Extrajudicial Killings*” (Manlaban sa EJK) at the UP College of Law on March 7, 2018,

godfather and his mother also advised him to surrender, as they did not want him to be the next target of the vigilantes, who were then known to leave drug users dead on the streets.

The second child and only son in the family, he had left home at the age of 15 due to 'family issues' and ended up at his godfather's place, located adjacent to the barangay where he lived. This place, however, enabled him to further indulge in his drug habit.

At age 13 when he was introduced to "*shabu*" [methamphetamine] by his *barkada* [peer group], he was a first year high school student. And after trying it once, it became a daily habit ("*Natikman ko lang, biglang nagtuluy-tuloy na...*"). Boy's is apparently a classic case. According to literature, initiation to drug use is usually brought about by various factors, including peer pressure (Caday 2017, Lasco 2017, Hechanova et al. 2018). Other factors include lack of parental love, guidance, and attention, conflict within the family (Caday 2017), and influence within the family (Hechanova et al. 2018), all of which were experienced by Boy.

Losing interest in his studies, Boy decided to work at a local market to earn in order to finance his drug use. While living with his godfather when he was 15, he was tasked to run "errands" in order to be able to continue staying there. Payment for doing these tasks sometimes came in the form of drugs, which allowed him to sustain his addiction.

Boy described how a typical drug transaction takes place: the "*source*" gives the "*item*" (drugs) to the "*runner*" (Boy) during the transaction. The runner then takes it to another middle man called the "*scorer*", who pays for the item and delivers it to the actual buyer or user. Every exchange also has a "*lookout*"<sup>6</sup> against barangay patrols. These lookouts facilitate efficiency of the transaction. Afterwards, the runner returns to the source to hand over payment. According to Boy, he would also play the role of the lookout especially when his godfather took charge of the transaction. The scorers are usually aged 13-15 years and are not necessarily drug users, they are tasked to pick up the item, maintaining the anonymity of the actual drug buyers.

At that time he surrendered, Boy was the sole drug surrenderer under 18 in his barangay. According to both him and his mother the decision to surrender came from Boy. Initially, he approached their Barangay Captain,

---

<sup>6</sup> The same terms also emerged in a study that interviewed methamphetamine users among 'underclass male youths' working in a Philippine port (Lasco 2014).

who had promised to help drug users who would surrender. The Barangay Captain accompanied him to the police precinct. There Boy was profiled, and had his photo and his fingerprints taken. He was also made to read a document. He was not given a copy of this but he recalled that it was thick and that it contained information about the War on Drugs. He was told to go home and that barangay officials will be assigned to visit him for follow ups. All the drug surrenders were required to attend rehabilitation programs.

### **Rehabilitation and the Philippine drug war**

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo in a press briefing held last January 2019, stated that the two-pronged approach in the Drug War not only involves arrest of persons involved in drugs, but also their rehabilitation. Pressed on a statement by the Psychological Association of the Philippines about the ineffectiveness of criminalizing drug users in stemming the drug problem, Panelo has adamantly cited the gains of the drug war (Roque 2019).

Psychologists and civil society groups have brought attention to the difficulty of addressing the trauma of survivors and the enormous resources needed for proper rehabilitation. Some civil society organizations have started their own programs to help families of Tokhang victims, conducting psycho-social support in rehabilitation camps to alleviate the psychological wounds of these families.

In 2016, experts anticipated problems that may arise with rehabilitation due to the staggering numbers of drug users, pegged at 1.8 million based on a 2015 survey by the Dangerous Drugs Board. This number of users seeking drug rehabilitation is just the tip of the iceberg according to psychiatrist Benita Sta. Ana-Ponio, a member of the Department of Health (DOH) and the World Health Organization's task force on drug rehabilitation, who said that despite the urgency of the drug problem, the DOH does not want a 'knee-jerk' reaction to the issue. She stated that programs to be implemented should be "evidence-based, culturally relevant and ethical" (Geronimo 2016).

The Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) has also warned then that no single intervention is applicable to all drug users. Appropriate intervention should require a drug dependency examination by a DOH-accredited physician who will determine the type of intervention— for an 'experimenter', a 'social recreational user', a 'habitual user', a 'drug abuser' and a 'drug dependent'. According to the DDB, a drug abuser and a drug dependent can be admitted to residential treatment and rehabilitation centers (TRCs), while an experimenter, a social recreational user or a habitual user can be treated in out-

patient centers or community-based ones (Geronimo 2016). According to Thorley's model of drug-related harm, "*dependency*" is the third among three patterns of drug use, the other two being "*intoxication*" and "*regular or excessive drug use*". Drug dependency occurs "after a period of regular use", with varying quantities, frequency of use, route of administration, individual vulnerability and drug use context (UNODC 2016). The WHO provides details on the definition and diagnoses of drug dependence syndrome.

However, in the Philippine Drug War, the implementation of local rehabilitation programs seems to be run along different lines altogether. In Boy's case, there was only one general rehabilitation program for all the Tokhang surrenderers in his barangay – minors or adults. Whether they had reached the level of 'drug dependence', was not diagnosed. There was no medical nor psychological assessment. Everything was based on the simple fact that Boy had voluntarily surrendered to his barangay.

All the drug surrenderers were required to attend the rehabilitation program. Boy, like the others, had to attend 22 sessions (on Saturdays), with each session lasting four hours. The participants were also given two kilos of rice as incentive/support. As narrated by Boy, the sessions consisted of a basketball match between the police and the surrenderers, participation in the barangay Zumba sessions, and Alternative Learning training on motorcycle repair under the auspices of the Vice-Mayor and Barangay Captain, launched by the TESDA [Technical Education and Skills Development Authority]. "*Therapy*" sessions included Bible study. Attendance was monitored. According to Boy, if he missed a session, the barangay captain or a barangay worker paid him a visit or reported it to his mother.

The counselling cum proselytization sessions do not take into consideration differences in religious beliefs or convictions. We may speculate that religious interventions such as this one might have been introduced due to the fact that the Philippines is a predominantly Christian [86% Roman Catholic] country. Still, sessions of spiritual counselling may not sit well with individuals who do not belong to the same Christian denomination or who are not Christians. For his case, Boy did not show any aversion towards the sessions. Curiously though, when asked about the 'priest', Boy mentioned that he is a "Pastor", and that the surrenderers were made to 'worship' and study the Bible.



### **The legal context for upholding children's rights**

In 1989, the United Nations promulgated the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC is a legally-binding international agreement that sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. Another important legal statute is The Universal Declaration of Human Rights that continues to safeguard children's entitlements and rights.

Out of the estimated 7.3 billion world population in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau 2017), around 32 million belong to the 0-14 age group in the Philippines (World Bank 2017). Together with pregnant women, the elderly, malnourished, and people who are ill, the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies children as a "vulnerable group". Vulnerable groups are those who are not able to cope when disaster strikes, with poverty further contributing to their vulnerability (WHO 2017).

Physical, sexual, mental, and negligent treatment are the forms of violence children may experience. According to a report published by the Child Rights Coalition Asia, in the past years, there were an estimated 714,600,000 children exposed to some form of violence in Asia (CRC-Asia 2016). Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) refers to

"anyone under 18 years of age who comes into contact with the justice system as a result of being suspected or accused of committing an offence" (UNICEF 2006).

In the Philippines, Republic Act 10630 states that "no one can be held responsible for an act carried out while under 15" (*R.A. 10630 2013:Sec.6*). Children aged older than 15 but younger than 18 can only be held responsible where they have "acted with discernment". According to the "Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act" (*R.A. 7610 1992*), the term "children" refers to persons below eighteen years of age or those over 18 but who are unable to fully take care of themselves nor protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination due to physical or mental conditions (*R.A. 7610 1992:Sec.3*). The said law also protects children against abuse and exploitation, penalizing the offending party with the penalty of *prision correccional* in its medium period to *reclusion perpetua* (*R.A. 7610 1992:Sec 10e*).

A child in conflict with the law is defined in The Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act as "a child or youth who is poor and highly exposed to adverse

childhood experiences and criminogenic environment” (R.A.9344 2006:Section 1). The children in conflict with the law are classified under the more general category of “Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances” (CEDC). Children whose most basic needs are not met are said to be more vulnerable as they experience risks to survival, development, protection, and participation (SunStar 2017).

Typically, the children who come into conflict with the law are Out-of-School-Youth, street children, children from ‘fragmented’ families, and from the lower classes. Boy fits the profile of a CEDC: he left home and, consequently, school due to disagreements with his family. As his mother said, Boy was “*problemado*” and hence sought ways to cope by ‘jamming’ with peers who were ‘*lulong sa bisyo*’.

***FAST FACTS:***

***CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW (CICL) IN THE PHILIPPINES***

- *More than 10,500 children were arrested and detained every year in 1995 to 2000.*
- *Children make up more than 5 per cent of total inmates in city and municipal jails.*
- *There are more boys than girls in jail.*
- *Over 4,500 children were imprisoned in the first quarter of 2003, 441 of them girls.*
- *Seven out of 10 children offenders are detained by police for one of these crimes: ‘petty theft’, sniffing solvent, ‘vagrancy’*
- *Children are frequently detained in the same cells or facilities as adults.*
- *Children are sometimes given prison sentences designed for adults.*
- *Many youth offenders have experienced torture and abuse while in prison. A study in Southern Mindanao found that more than half of juvenile delinquents, more often females than males, suffered sexual advances and psychological harm while in the custody of government authorities.*
- *Severe over-crowding and other conditions in jails typically violate international standards for the treatment of prisoners.*

*\*Compiled from: UNICEF (2006), Ancheta-Templa (2004)*

A lower age of criminal responsibility exposes more children to the possibility of receiving criminal sentences and to growing up in prisons (Barrete 2017). Globally, the age of criminal responsibility ranges from seven to 18 years of age (CRIN 2017). Current proposals in the Philippine legislature to lower the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility from 15 to 9 threaten the welfare of these particular children and the youth. Children coming in conflict with the law would be labeled as ‘criminals’; this could affect their identity formation and possibly lead to criminal behavior (Geronimo 2017). Since it has been established that most children in conflict with the law come from poor, dysfunctional families, then it follows that the bill has a bias against poor children.

Among the arguments for lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility that have been put forth by President Duterte and his allies in Congress, is the idea that children are being used by syndicates to commit crimes. However, though not discounting the veracity of syndicates using children, ultimately adults are still the ones responsible, and prosecution of these syndicates must be prioritized. As a social worker at an NGO-run holding center for children in conflict with the law told us, adults, as those who have influenced the children (to break the law), should be the ones punished, not the children. [*“Ang hahabulin yung matatanda hindi ang bata, kundi kung sino yung nag-influence, huwag bata ang parusahan”*]. (Rowelyn Acdog, personal communication, 2016).

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) warns of the culpability of some individuals when minors are caught participating in the drug trade. According to a news report,

PDEA emphasizes the important role of parents in keeping these kids off the streets. ... Once proven that they coerced, forced, or intimidated their children to be involved in illegal drug trafficking, or pushing, parents will also be held responsible under Section 10 (e) of *RA 7610*. (Caliwan 2019)

Minors caught are to be brought to Juvenile Centers for rehabilitation. But it has been observed that the congested juvenile detention centers are “crowded, unsanitary, and unhealthy environments” thus, “some youth centers fail to rehabilitate and transform child offenders” (Elemia 2016).

The “Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act” (*R.A.9344 2006*) was passed more than a decade ago. However a recent study conducted in Baguio City, Bacolod City and General Santos City found that “many LGUs are still not

very well-equipped to handle CICL and rely on NGOs to run diversion programs for CICL” (Labastilla 2017). A “Diversion Program” under the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 refers to a program that the child in conflict with the law is required to undergo after he/she is found responsible for an offense, without resorting to formal court proceedings. But in the case of Boy, who was 17 at the time, it was deemed appropriate by the authorities to handle him as an ‘adult’.

### **Marked by *tokhang***

Beyond rehabilitation, stigmatization is another concern. We have heard of the poignant story of a widow who, because of the stigma of Tokhang, bitterly wept when none among her kin and neighbors came to the wake of her husband for fear of being associated with a Tokhang victim (Mary Racelis, personal communication, 2017). Apart from moral support from condolers or *nakikiramay*, such ‘failure’ of the wake also means inability to raise much needed contributions of financial support (*abuloy*) for the family.

Children also suffer from having family that were touched by the drug campaign. A school principal shared how students from their school have been shamed and bullied by their peers when their parents or relatives were associated with *tokhang* (Peter Romerosa, personal communication, 24 October 2018). If being a child of an “addict” carries a stigma, what more if minors themselves are ‘tokhang surrenderers’? However we were unable to inquire into this aspect for Boy’s case.

Beyond social stigma, individuals that have been formally linked with drugs, are not only marked for life and often, for death, such labeling rendering them easily targets and potential future EJK victims. This is the root of the anxieties of Boy’s mother. Danger of retaliation from the groups or syndicates dealing in drugs is relevant as they are aware of the profiling of the drug surrenderers, where the names of drug pushers and users are elicited through interrogation. The vulnerability and fear of a surrenderer given such risks, especially potential effects on the mental and psychological well-being of a child, are unimaginable.

Though some individuals perceive the current drug war as a way to lessen the problem of drugs, often described as “*talamak*” (chronic), there is an accompanying sense of dread in the poor communities who are the target of Duterte’s drug war. They voiced their concern over the rampant killings they observed in their own neighborhood, where dead bodies were a ubiquitous sight during the first months of Tokhang. For them, the Drug War merely

compounds the vulnerability of the poor who are the target. Why not go straight to the source, and target the source of such drugs?

**Conclusion: toward morally engaged, insurgent scholarship**

Anthropology, if it is to be worth anything at all,  
must be ethically grounded.

– Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995:409)

In 2016, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) released a guide document on Community-based Treatment for those affected by drug use and dependence. This approach encourages accountability, awareness, and empowerment within the community. Outlining the principles for substance abuse treatment, community-based treatment and involvement was highlighted, saying that community change and the involvement of local stakeholders is important in this endeavor. It is important to note that despite treatment being community based, it is still essential that the approach is apt to the needs of, and problems experienced by the individual (UNODC 2016). The need for research and proper intervention design through the study of an area's context for a Community-based Treatment approach to reach its full potential has also been highlighted (Hechanova 2018).<sup>7</sup> Community-Based Treatment models have three major components: (1) drug user identification, screening, and education; (2) provision of primary health services in centers and hospitals; and (3) provision of education, vocational and skills training, income generation opportunities, and other related activities (UNODC 2016). Looking at Boy's responses, the third aspect has indeed been applied by their barangay, but there is more that could be done and improved on the first two components.

One significant impact of the Philippine Drug War on communities is the fear sown by the Tokhang. This is heightened by the apparent impunity of the current administration, which even outrightly considers minors as acceptable collateral damage to the ongoing Drug War. The situation has called the attention of various human rights groups. The Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), which acquired official documents of 29 tokhang cases, pointed to the 'cut-and-paste template' citing that victims were gunned down because they fought back, or '*nanlaban*' (Movido 2019).

---

<sup>7</sup> The article (Hechanova 2018) cites a few effective treatments such as the '12-Step Program', Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), and motivational interviewing.

Human rights lawyer Chel Diokno decried the identical phrasing used in the documentation of the cases, which raises questions on the specificity of each case. Some cases have been closed with the police officers involved absolved of any criminal and administrative liability.

Given the circumstances of many deaths, one cannot be certain of one's safety in surrendering to the process of Tokhang, given the way it has been implemented with many obvious lapses in the police procedures. The case of Kian de los Santos, who was the same age as Boy, is evidence of how minors can be brutally murdered by State authorities under the Drug War. Children as young as three years old have been killed. These are called 'isolated cases'. And yet there have been at least 54 such 'isolated cases'. The President's remark of the death of minors as mere 'collateral damage' is unacceptable and infuriating. The luckier ones who survive Tokhang operations can live to be rehabilitated. But rehabilitation programs need to be appropriate and effective. Dean Leonardo Estacio Jr of UP Manila, an anthropologist, has decried the "*Zumba o Tumba*" ('Zumba or Fall [Dead]') rehabilitation style in many barangays.

These and other areas need further investigation. Documentation of actual Tokhang cases can refute questionable police reports of 'nanlaban'. Ethnographic studies on drug use that have been conducted by anthropologists also reveal how drug use figures in the everyday economic lives of underclass male youths, demonstrating the problem of having a simplistic homogeneous label for drug users as 'addicts' and exposing the moral complexities of drug use (Lasco 2014).

We want to end this paper in a hopeful note. As duty-bearers, along with the State, we anthropologists have an obligation to stand up and continue fighting for the rights and welfare ("*kapakanan*") of children. "If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand up for much", a staunch advocate of children's rights reminds us (Edelman 1997). And we completely agree, we owe it to the children, the most vulnerable in our society. Let's go beyond idealistic '*sana*' to ensure the '*dapat*' or what is rightful, for every child's well-being. For social justice for the most vulnerable, let's respect, protect and fulfill their rights, build a real '*bahay ng pag-asa para sa 'pag-asa ng bayan*'; a home with hope for the 'hope of the nation'. Let's be actively involved to ensure that children live lives full of hope and dignity – "*buhay na may pag-asa.*"

Civil society organizations or NGOs can be crucial allies or partners, as well as critics, of the government when it comes to children's rights. Strong

children's rights lobby groups can work for laws, policies and programs geared towards the best interests of children, particularly the CICL, such as by ensuring provision of facilities and programs apt for children and lobbying against lowering the age of criminal responsibility.

We scholar-citizens need to be active 'witnesses' in the time of 'tokhang' in order to actively strengthen the 'sense of community' and seek an end to the banality of violence in these communities. Instead of standing by 'indifferently' in this regime of violence and fear, let us instead raise our voices and register our protest. We have a responsibility as engaged anthropologists to bear active witness and write against terror in these trying times. As the title of our paper urges, "*Wag tayong sumuko.*" Let us never give up. *Padayon!*<sup>8</sup>

---

### Acknowledgements and Ethics Statement

This paper was originally submitted for a course in 'Philippine Cultural Anthropology' under Professor Mary Racelis. Data-gathering in the field took place on October 21, 2018 with Ms. Melanie Llana of Child Rights Coalition-Asia who conducted the interviews. It was barangay officials who recommended the key informants to be invited for interview. Two barangay officers were interviewed together to ensure accuracy of information. The research participants were informed of the objectives of the study and gave consent verbally. All names and exact locations of the participants have been kept confidential.

### References

- AFP (Agence France-Presse). (2017, March 14). Enduring pain for drug war widows. *Inquirer.net*. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/880557/enduring-pain-for-drug-war-widows>.
- Al Jazeera. (2017, August 22). Thousands demand end to killings in Duterte's drug war. *Al Jazeera.com*, August 22, 2017. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/thousands-demand-killings-duterte-drug-war-170821124440845.html>.
- Ancheta-Templa, Mae Fe. (2004). Understanding Children in Conflict with the Law: Contradictions on victimization, survivor behavior and the

---

<sup>8</sup> [Keep going!]

- Philippines justice system. Save the Children. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/3146/pdf/3146.pdf>
- Arendt, Hannah. (1970). *On Violence*. Orlando/Austin/NY/San Diego/London: Harcourt, Inc.
- Auyero, Javier, Philippe Bourgois, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (eds.). (2015) *Violence at the Urban Margins*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Barrete, RJ. (2017, August 6). Children in Duterte's bloody war on drugs. *Rappler*. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/177816-children-duterte-war-on-drugs>.
- Caday, Freddie Bencio. (2017). Causes of Drug Abuse among College Students: The Philippine Experience. *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*. 4(4): 3430-3434.
- Caliwan, Christopher Lloyd. (2019, January 22). PDEA eyes raps vs. parents of kids rescued in Navotas drug den. *Philippine News Agency*. Available at: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1059726>.
- CRC-Asia (Child Rights Coalition Asia). (2016). *Violence Against Children in Southeast Asia*. Quezon City: Child Rights Coalition Asia. Available at: [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12234/pdf/crc\\_vacsasia\\_final.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12234/pdf/crc_vacsasia_final.pdf).
- CRIN (Child Rights International Network). (2017). Minimum Ages of Criminal Responsibility in Asia. [webpage]. *Child Rights International Network*. Available at: <https://archive.crin.org/en/home/ages/asia.html>.
- Edelman, Marian Wright. (1997). Standing for Children. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values. Delivered at University of California, San Francisco, April 11, 1997. Pdf available at: [https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/\\_documents/a-to-z/e/Edelman98.pdf](https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/e/Edelman98.pdf).
- Elemia, Camille. (2016, November 7). When 'Houses of Hope' fail children in conflict with the law. *Rappler.com*. [updated May 23, 2017]. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/151500-bahay-pag-asa-children-conflict-law-juvenile-justice>.
- Geronimo, Jee Y. (2016, August 18). War on Drugs: Rehabilitation should be more than a knee-jerk reaction. *Rappler.com*. [updated September 24, 2016]. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/143331-drug-rehabilitation-health-war-drugs>.



- Geronimo, Jee Y. (2017, February 18). Lower age of criminal liability? Here's why psychologists are against it. *Rappler.com*. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/161860-lower-age-criminal-responsibility-psychologists>.
- Hechanova, Ma. Regina, Arsenio S. Alianan, Mendiola T. Calleja, Isabel E. Melgar, Avegale Acosta, Angelique Villasanta, Kay Bunagan, Camille Yusay, Angelica Ang, Jane Flores, Nico Canoy, Ervina Espina, Gayle A. Gomez, Elena Samonte Hinckley, Antover P. Tuliao and Miriam P. Cue. (2018). The Development of a Community-Based Drug Intervention for Filipino Drug Users. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*. 12(12):1-10.
- Holmes, Oliver. (2016, October 17). Duterte says children killed in Philippines drug war are 'collateral damage'. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/17/duterte-says-children-killed-in-philippines-drug-war-are-collateral-damage>.
- Labastilla, Skilty. (2017). "The Role of Nongovernmental Organizations in Safeguarding the Rights of Children in Conflict with the Law and At-Risk Children". Paper presented at the 39th Ugnayang Pang-AghamTao Conference, Cagayan de Oro City, November 10, 2017. [MS].
- Lasco, Gideon. (2014). *Pampagilas: Methamphetamine in the everyday economic lives of underclass male youths in a Philippine port*. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 25:783-788.
- Lucero, Vino. (2016). Drug war lists 20,584 kids as 'users, pushers, runners'. *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*. Available at: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/09/21/16/drug-war-lists-20584-kids-as-users-pushers-runners>.
- Pasion, Patty. (2017, August 9). More rehab homes for child offenders to be built in 2018. *Rappler*. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/177689-rehabilitation-children-conflict-law-2018-dswd-budget>.
- PCIJ (Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism). (2017, June 8). Flawed, fuzzy numbers in the war on drugs. *PhilStar*. Available at: <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/06/08/1707985/flawed-fuzzy-numbers-war-drugs>.
- PCIJ Story Project. (2018, May 17). Barangay officials make tough choices in Duterte's drug war. *BusinessWorld*. Available at: <https://www.bworldonline.com/barangay-officials-make-tough-choices-in-dutertes-drug-war/>.

- Racelis, Mary. (2017). "Human Rights and Justice in the Philippines: What's a Sociologist to do?". Corazon Lamug Annual Lecture, November 14, 2017, CAS Annex Gallery UP Los Banos. [MS].
- Rappler Research Team. (2017, March 31). TIMELINE: The PNP's use of the term 'deaths under investigation'. *Rappler*. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/165534-timeline-philippines-pnp-deaths-under-investigation>.
- R.A. 7610 (1992)*. Republic Act No. 7610, "An act providing for stronger deterrence and special protection against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination, and for other purposes". Available at: <https://www.pcw.gov.ph/law/republic-act-7610>.
- R.A. 9344. (2006)*. Republic Act No. 9344, "Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006". Available at: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2006/04/28/republic-act-no-9344-s-2006/>.
- R.A. 10630. (2013)*. Republic Act No. 10630, An act strengthening the juvenile justice system in the Philippines, amending for the purpose Republic Act No. 9344, otherwise known as the "Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006" and appropriating funds therefor. Available at: [https://www.senate.gov.ph/republic\\_acts/ra%2010630.pdf](https://www.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%2010630.pdf).
- Roque, EJ. (2019, January 8). Drug war not limited to arrests but also rehab: Palace. *Philippine News Agency*. Available at: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1058252>.
- Santos, Jel. (2017, August 19). 'Tama na po. May test pa ako bukas'. *Manila Bulletin*. Available at: <https://news.mb.com.ph/2017/08/19/tama-na-po-may-test-pa-ako-bukas/>.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. (1995). The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. *Current Anthropology*, 36(3):409-440. Available at: <https://www.unl.edu/rhames/courses/current/hughes.pdf>.
- See, Aie Balagtas. (2016, December 25). Drug war's other victims: Orphans. *Inquirer.net*. Available at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/856376/drug-wars-other-victims-orphans>.
- Sluka, Jeffrey. (2000). *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- SunStar. (2017, February 2). Lowering age of criminal liability 'threatens children's well-being'. *sunstar.com.ph*. Available at:

- <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2017/02/02/lowering-age-criminal-liability-threatens-childrens-well-being-523483>.
- Talabong, Rambo. (2019, January 21). PNP: Over 1,300 children caught for drug violations since 2017. *Rappler.com*. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/221559-pnp-report-number-children-caught-drug-violations-since-2017>.
- Tomacruz, Sofia. (2019). Duterte gov't tally: Drug war deaths top 5,500 before SONA 2019. *Rappler.com*, July 18, 2019 [updated July 21, 2019]. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/235712-duterte-government-tally-drug-war-deaths-before-sona-2019>.
- Torres-Tupas, Tetch. (2017). Parents on son Kian's death: Dreams shattered in an instant. *Inquirer.net*, August 25, 2017. Available at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/925605/dreams-shattered-kian-delos-santos-saldy-delos-santos-lorenza-delos-santos-persida-rueda-acosta-anti-drug-operation-war-on-drugs-ejk>.
- UNICEF. (2006 May). Children in Conflict with the Law Child Protection Information Sheet. The United Nations Children's Fund. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/chinese/protection/files/Conflict\\_with\\_the\\_Law.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/chinese/protection/files/Conflict_with_the_Law.pdf)
- Villarreal, Ana. (2015). Fear and Spectacular Violence in Monterrey. In Auyero, J., Bourgois, P. and Scheper-Hughes, N. (eds.), *Violence at the Urban Margins*. NY: Oxford University Press. Pp.135-161.
- WHO (World Health Organization). (2017). Environmental Health in Emergencies: Vulnerable groups. *who.int*. Available at: [http://www.who.int/environmental\\_health\\_emergencies/vulnerable\\_groups/en/](http://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/vulnerable_groups/en/).
- World Bank. (2017). Population ages 0-14 (% of total). *data.worldbank.org*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.0014.TO.ZS>.
- Yee, Jovic. (2017). Lowering age of criminal liability antikids' rights. *inquirer.net*, March 6. Available at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/877712/lowering-age-of-criminal-liability-antikids-rights>.

---

*Aileen May P. Mijares is Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Sciences in University of the Philippines (UP) Los Baños. She is currently enrolled in PhD Philippine Studies at the UP Diliman.*

Email: [apmijares@gmail.com](mailto:apmijares@gmail.com)

*Joanna Paula Titic is an independent research consultant for development projects. She is currently taking up MA Anthropology in UP Diliman.*