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Avenues for development of cross-cultural bioethics given the changes to the established global order

- *Darryl R.J. Macer, Ph.D., Hon.D.*
President, American University of Sovereign Nations, Director, Eubios Ethics Institute, New Zealand & Japan; Secretary, Asian Bioethics Association; Former UNESCO Regional Adviser for Asia and the Pacific
Email: darryl@eubios.info
https://ausovereignnations.org
https://www.eubios.info

Changes to our global order

I can think of no better city to deliver these this lecture than Istanbul, Türkiye. Today on 10 April 2026 at BETIM, we gather seven years after the LBD10 forum. As cross roads between civilizations of Asia, Europe, and Africa, this space of Istanbul has seen empires come and go. As I wrote some of this under the wall of Constantinople, there is hope for developing sustainable cross-cultural bioethics through the dialogues of civilization that we have witnessed here over millennia.

Like me, I think many of you have had troubles sleeping over the past several years as bloody wars all across our planet, several genocides are ongoing, and many norms of diplomacy have been broken. I will offer some historical and cross-cultural reflections, and have some words of hope of how we can explore avenues for development of cross-cultural bioethics, in spite of what appears to be impossible challenges to live together. Can we ever rebuild rose-colored glasses that optimists among us try to use?

Consequences of insufficient bioethics

Is President Trump the natural outcome of American bioethics? In short, I believe the answer is yes. Too much emphasis on autonomy and self-love has been a focus of the past fifty years of bioethics in the USA. There are many others of course that seem to often misbalance the principles of ethics, and all of us do at times.

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We can compare several examples over history to see that actually the behavior of President Trump in launching a war on Iran, or the behavior of President Putin in launching a war on Ukraine, are sadly not isolated events in world history. As I reflect on the opinions of President Trump to have the ambition of acquiring Greenland, it is not so unusual in a history of behaviour of the USA, nor all other colonial powers in the past. How can we respond?

We can remember the gunboat diplomacy with the arrival of four U.S. naval ships into Tokyo Bay to insist that Japan opens itself to United States. In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of USA sailed into Tokyo Bay to force open Japan to trade. This woodblock print the circulated in 1854 is a witness of how the warships were viewed by Japan who had limited formal Western influence to the island of Dejima in Nagasaki harbor for the prior three hundred years.

In the twentieth century there are many conspiracy theories about the power of the military-industrial complex, which in his final speech as President, President General Dwight Eisenhower, warned the US public, was going to control the U.S. government to fight wars to make profits. In hindsight, it appears that the fears of a growing influence of the military-industrial complex was correct.

The book the *Day of Deceit* argues that American lives were sacrificed in Pearl Harbor in order to allow our United States to enter World War II, a deceitful myth that is perpetuated still today (Stinnet, 1999). The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 3 months after Japan requested surrender, continue to haunt the conscience of many persons today, yet it still seems very hard to cultivate a culture of peace (Macer and Saad-Zoy, 2010).

Other countries who point their finger at those who use gunboats, and bombs and missiles, should reflect at their own methods of economic slavery of much of the world. You can oppress people through economic exploitation while appearing to be "moral" or "civilized".

The pursuit of a good-life (eu-bios) and bioethics

In response to these issues, bioethics is a bridge to breaking boundaries between peoples and species. Bioethics is a broad term that encompasses the environmental, ethical, legal and social implications of agriculture, life sciences and medicine. The word "bioethics" comes to us from Fritz Jahr (1927) in a paper, "The bioethical responsibilities of human beings to plants and animals", and from Van R. Potter (1971) used the term again as the title in the book *Bioethics, Bridge to the Future* in 1970, yet the concept comes from human heritage thousands of years old (Macer, 1994; 1998).

Macer (1990) coined the term "eubios" from the Greek words for good "eu" and life "bios" in 1990 after spending some years reading about the popular topics of eugenics (good genes) and euthanasia (good death) which dominated bioethics discourse. Both these terms tend to be used in a reductionist manner.

The pursuit of a good life is a goal that all persons can hope for. A good life should be understood in a holistic sense, and is clearly more than just a contented life, free of want and fear. At the international level this is what the United Nations was established to help provide. This is also the duty of all governments to provide to their citizens, and those with the abilities to provide to those in need.

The first article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is: *"All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their*

political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

For bioethicists there are principles that can help resolve dilemmas such as autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence. I proposed the alternative principles, self-love, love of others, loving life and loving good in *Bioethics is Love of Life* (Macer, 1998). Thus, bioethics can be defined as the love of life which is also overlapping with the concept of a good life. Love of life is a common ethic across different cultures

Harmony

However these principles, even with others such as dignity and integrity, are not sufficient to achieve well being. Harmony is critical to feeling a sense of a good life and well-being, and to be at one with those places we live.

During my life in Japan, one of the additional principles of Bioethics to the United States model is harmony. I believe "harmony" offers hope as a guiding principle of bioethics (Macer, 1994) beyond the traditional mantra of autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence (Beauchamp & Childress, 1974).

If we need to preserve harmony with others, we will not be invading other countries, we will not be using offensive language, and we will be seeking to build a consensus, both domestically and internationally.

Brushing aside real differences doesn't always mean that we have real harmony because individuals have their own ways to think. Research reveals universal diversity in their values and way that they make by difficult decisions.

However there is harmony if we tolerate the differences between each of us. We respect our fellow travelers in life when they make a different decision. If you say no to my question, I respect this. I don't need to convince you to say yes to what I want. We are on our journey, which is together, including the respect for decisions of others and different pathways.

Our sense of belonging depends on harmony with many those around me and freedom from discrimination. What happens when we disagree? We could, for example:

1. Respectfully disagree
2. Try to convert others to your point of view
3. Fight a War
4. Ignore
5. Dialogue with an open mind
6. Use the opportunity to create a more truthful harmony

Ethics offers us space for reflection on the future we want and questions such as:

1. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders;
2. The "needs" and "desires" of modernity;
3. Definitions of "development";
4. What is "sustainability"?

Law and prescriptive ethics

Descriptive ethics is the way people view life, their moral interactions and responsibilities with living organisms in their life. We need less emphasis on prescriptive ethics, which is to tell others what is ethically good or bad, or what principles are most important in making such decisions. It may also be to say something or someone has rights, and others have duties to them.

An independent judiciary is critical to the translation of a philosophical idea of how many among others and ourselves, when we have differences of opinion, and where some individuals feel that they should break the law. The wise judge will try to make a decision in which each party and a conflict accepts the outcome as a way to move forward to resolve the dispute. Even in gross violations of people involving the loss of life, a judge will seek to understand why this occurred, and how the people might move forward justly to not repeat the action, and two seek affair judgment.

The judiciary in most countries is tasked with interpretation of the existing laws and regulations, and just and fair adjudication of disputes, however, only in some countries do we see a truly independent judiciary. Several countries such as India have also given their Supreme Court powers for proactive action, and we have seen them demand environmental protection laws, and human rights education across the whole country when it would've been impossible to have a consensus among different states and provinces that have divided politics.

Through time and space we can see the situations where what appears from the outside to be too much power on one branch of government has bad consequences. If the judiciary is given too much power, they can remove elected and popular politicians from their office, if they lose their sense of moral decency to know when they should resign…

The modern nation state attempts to have checks and balances to avoid excess power and potential abuse by different branches of the governance system, and to control excessive power.

If a nation legislates a powerful executive branch, such as a President, who must take responsibility on behalf of the nation state for often very difficult, moral choices, there needs to be institutional checks and balances to avoid abuse.

The people of a nation include all elements of civil society, including experts and lay people, people living with disabilities, youth, senior citizens, corporations who may have large financial or material resources that can save lives, transportation systems, and various non-government organizations (NGOs) each promoting their own agenda. Bioethics does need to help reinforce and construct such ethical checks and balances.

Please join ongoing dialogues

I invite all to ongoing dialogues on cross-cultural bioethics, and to reflect on how it is our responsibility to help our societies, ourselves and all people cope with a changing global order, and maintain ethics. Eubios Ethics Institute has held dozens of regular cross cultural bioethics roundtables, since 1992, and since cofounding American University of Sovereign Nations in 2013, we also grant degrees and offer an alternative platform for scholarship.

History tells us at times of change like these, there are dangers that we must be careful of to avoid violations of human rights. For example, around 400 BCE, the selection on Egyptian prisoners by some of the fathers of anatomy could occur more easily because of a transition from Egyptian value systems to Greek value systems and the turmoil at this time. These physicians could convince the pharaoh to give them prisoners to do live serial sectioning of vertebrae to explore what is the function of the nervous system is. One irony is that this knowledge was lost for a millennia afterwards.

In the 16th century onwards many countries were guilty of colonization, treating indigenous people and people of different skin colors as non-human. I do believe if we truly love life and value our journey together with less emphasis on autonomy and on defining who is a moral agent and who is not in our moral universe, our world will be safer for everyone.

We saw through the 20th century examples of gross human rights abuse such as the Holocaust in Germany, which had developed sophisticated medical ethics structures, and a good history of philosophical reflection. We saw this also continue with the eugenic programs across many countries during the 20th century (Macer, 1990).

Despite the atrocities that kill other people from other people who can really suffer include that perpetuators who lose their soul in abusing others.

What future do "we" want?

How do we form a loving and mature society full of well informed and balanced persons? Bioethically mature means a person, or a society that can balance the benefits and risks of alternative options, and make well-considered decisions, talk about it, and love! Through interactive bioethics and dialogue together!

Coming back to the changing times, as Thomas Kuhn talked about in his book., the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* revolutions of thinking come more easily at times of crisis. Hence I hope that we can build harmony and respect for diversity, through the love of life. It is up to every one of us to be the change in the world that we want to see, as Gandhi said.

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Navigating Adversity During COVID-19: A Qualitative Study of Resilience Among Marginalized Communities on the Streets of Dhaka

- Nazneen Akhter, Founder & MD
- Maksudul Shadat Akash, Former Associate Program & Research
- Umme Suriea, Manager (Program & Research)
- Sabrina Afrin Soha, Sr. Associate Program & Research
- Mahdyea Zaman, Program and Legal Associate
- Odissey Kabir Hridy, Former Associate Program & Research
VAALO avant-garde Ltd, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email addresses:
nazneenakhter317@gmail.com
hridykabir1997@gmail.com
shadatmaksudul@gmail.com
suriea.vavgl@gmail.com
soha.vavgl@gmail.com
mahdyea@vaalo-avgl.com
ORCID ID: Nazneen Akhter: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8326-9042
ORCID ID: Maksudul Shadat Akash : https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6917-951X
ORCID ID: Umme Suriea: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0724-7386
ORCID ID: Sabrina Afrin Soha: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3641-0170

Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected marginalized communities in Dhaka, Bangladesh, worsening existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. This qualitative study examines the experiences of these communities in the face of adversity, highlighting health disparities and the resilience strategies they employ. By sharing personal stories, the study aims to shed light on their resilience and coping mechanisms. Ultimately, it advocates for comprehensive support systems tailored to their specific needs, promoting health equity. Understanding their struggles will help inform more inclusive public health responses in future crises of a similar nature.

Methods: This qualitative study uses a narrative analysis framework to explore the experiences of marginalized communities in Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected through an open-ended exploratory approach of storytelling sessions with a diverse group of marginalized participants. A total of 14 narratives were gathered in a supportive environment that promoted genuine sharing. Ethical considerations were prioritized by ensuring participant anonymity with pseudonyms, obtaining informed consent, and providing resources for emotional support.

Results: This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of marginalized communities in Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing profound socio-economic and emotional challenges. Participants reported financial instability, disrupted education, and heightened mental distress, particularly among children and members of the third-gender community. Through compelling narratives, the study highlights resilience in the face of adversity while emphasizing the need for immediate targeted interventions. The absence of support and prevailing social stigma exacerbated their vulnerabilities, calling attention to systemic inequities. Ultimately, the findings underscore the urgent necessity for inclusive policies to empower these marginalized populations and promote equitable access to resources.

Discussion: The discussion reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified vulnerabilities among marginalized communities in Dhaka, highlighting exacerbated vulnerabilities and remarkable resilience amid systemic inequities, and is a true reflection of global trends

of urban inequality. The storyline and facts revealed that the disrupted access to education, food, mental health care, and systemic barriers have disproportionately impacted children and gender minorities. The resilience strategies developed by these communities highlight the importance of localized support systems.

Conclusion: There was a profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized communities in Dhaka, which underscores the urgent need for inclusive policies that address education, healthcare, and livelihood security. The study emphasizes the urgent need for inclusive policies that address structural inequities, ensuring equitable access to essential resources for marginalized populations. Ultimately, the research advocates for comprehensive interventions to promote equitable access to resources and build resilience for future epidemic and pandemic challenges**.**

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic ; Marginalized; Navigating ; Resilience ; Vulnerabilities; Structural Inequities; Systemic barriers*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted societies worldwide. Marginalized people were the most affected community of this pandemic. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, a city marked by dense population exhibiting significant socio-economic disparities, the pandemic has intensified existing vulnerabilities among low-income groups, migrants, and other marginalized populations. This qualitative study seeks to investigate the lived experiences of low-income groups, migrants, and other marginalized populations within the city during the pandemic. By delving into their narratives, the study aims to illuminate the multifaceted challenges they encountered and the diverse coping mechanisms they employed to navigate and overcome this pandemic-driven crisis period. (Akter, & Ashadujjaman, 2022).

This qualitative study aims to offer valuable insights into the intricate relationship between social inequality and resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. By concentrating this research on these marginalized populations, we aim to illuminate their specific adversities and explore the adaptive strategies they employ amidst such extreme difficulties. This study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how the distressed communities on the street are resilient in navigating crises, especially the marginalized communities in Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's focus is grounded in the understanding that the impacts of pandemics are not uniformly distributed across different social groups.

Research indicates that marginalized populations, particularly those with lower socioeconomic status, encounter significant disparities during crises, exhibiting higher levels of health inequities, restricted access to healthcare, and heightened economic vulnerability (Khanijahani et al., 2021). The individuals from marginalized backgrounds frequently experience exacerbated negative effects during the pandemic, underscoring the urgent need to comprehend their unique challenges and the resilience strategies they deploy (Khanijahani et al., 2021). Syed et al (2021), in their "study on migrant workers, migrants, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees – the silent sufferers of the covid-19 pandemic" emphasize that migrant workers and internally displaced persons face particularly acute vulnerabilities, suffering from increased risks of unemployment, food insecurity, and mental health challenges.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of mental health, as many individuals in marginalized communities have reported increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress because of the socio-economic fallout of the crisis (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). The intersection of economic hardship and mental health challenges underscores the need for targeted interventions that address both immediate and long-term needs of these populations. (Chowdhury et.al., 2022). The mental health impacts of the pandemic have been significant, particularly among those already facing socio-economic disadvantages (Czeisler et al., 2020).

The qualitative nature of this study allows for an in-depth exploration of personal narratives, which can provide valuable insights into the resilience and coping strategies employed by marginalized individuals in Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic. By capturing their stories, this research aims to contribute to a more

nuanced understanding of the pandemic's impact on social inequalities and inform future public health responses that are fair and inclusive. (Bambra et.al., 2020). This study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of marginalized communities in Dhaka, highlighting the urgent necessity for robust support systems that address the distinctive challenges confronting these populations (Mofijur, 2020). By prioritizing real experiences and resilience, this study provides a nuanced understanding that highlights a critical need for policy and community support. Through a deeper understanding of their struggles and resilience, we can better advocate for policies that promote health equity and social justice in the wake of this global crisis.

Methodology

This qualitative research study employs a narrative analysis framework to deeply explore the lived experiences of marginalized communities in Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic. By centering on a purposive and respondent-driven sampling to count on the first-person contact to reach other distressed individuals, this work aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of individual struggles, coping mechanisms, and resilience strategies that emerged in response to the pandemic-driven crisis. Data were meticulously collected through open-ended discussion and storytelling sessions conducted throughout the pandemic period.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure a diverse representation of participants on the street, including low-income workers, migrants, displaced individuals, and highly marginalized young individuals. Narratives were gathered in a deep-ended conversational format, fostering a safe and comforting environment that encouraged participants to share their experiences with freedom, trust, and confidence.

A total of 14 real-life case stories were collected and deeply narrated in the social landscape. Each story fact is intricately woven into the social fabric of marginalized communities, with a particular focus on pandemic-associated vulnerabilities. This methodology not only amplifies marginalized voices but adheres strictly to ethical principles, contributing valuable insights into the pandemic's devastating impact on vulnerable communities in Dhaka.

Table 1: Source Analysis (The storylines that voiced their feelings and facts revealed in pseudonyms) :

No	Source	Key Insight
01	Babu's Story	Impact of lockdown on child labor and educational disruptions
02	Sufia's Story	Gendered constraints on education and labor; financial precarity
03	Bulbul's Story	Financial losses and resilience among informal workers
04	Ruksana's Story	Role of lockdown in aggravating urban poverty among women
05	Bashir's Story	The pandemic's impact on small business owners
06	Monirul Story	Social stigma and resilience in third-gender individuals
07	Khorshed's Story	Economic hardships in child labor amid lockdowns
08	Jannat's Story	Struggles of single mothers and teenage workers
09	Siam's Story	Child labor's precarities and resilience
10	Shamima's Story	Young children in labor and familial neglect
11	Sohel's Story	Loss of education and dreams amidst economic strain
12	Jibon's Story	Single mothers' struggles and children's role in livelihood
13	Rahmat ‘story	Police violence and deprivation faced by child workers
14	Ruma's Story	Social exclusion and systemic violence against third-gender individuals

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were rigorously upheld throughout the study to protect vulnerable populations. Anonymity was ensured by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and removing personal identifiers during transcription. Informed consent was prioritized, with participants fully briefed on the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures taken to maintain confidentiality.

Sensitivity was paramount, especially when discussing traumatic experiences. Resources for emotional support were readily offered to participants as needed, allowing them to share their stories in a supportive environment.

Results

The narratives derived from marginalized individuals who were mostly engaged in different micro-entrepreneurship and activities on the streets of Dhaka during the COVID-19 period, and the stories drawn from them, vividly illustrate the substantial socio-economic and emotional hardship, including other ramifications of the consequences during the pandemic period. Participants conveyed shared experiences of financial instability, disrupted education, social exclusion, and heightened mental distress, including various social insecurity. Among those who were interviewed were children engaged in selling flowers, chewing gums, stickers, water bottles, and candies, and young women and men who were engaged in book selling, rickshaw pulling, having a tea stall, as well as members of the third-gender community. Irrespective of the diversity of age, gender, and micro-entrepreneurship engagement, all groups that faced exacerbated hardships due to lockdown measures, which have significantly limited their capacity to secure daily sustenance. This article attempted to capture some of the narrative highlights of those storylines that reveal the deeper perspective of each of their life lyrics and a more zoomed-out picture of the social and emotional realities and other consequences faced by them during this pandemic crisis.

The story of Babu (Story 1), a 10-year-old flower seller, struggles to balance his responsibilities and dreams amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, longing for a chance to focus on his education and serve his country in the Army. Despite facing hardships and discouraging encounters, he remains resilient in his pursuit of a better future.

Jibon, (Story 12) an eight-year-old boy working at a tea stall, embodies resilience as he navigates life in a slum while his single mother struggles to support their family amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Filled with hope, he dreams of returning to school and lifting his family's burdens, believing that better days will come.

Individuals like Jannat (Story 8) and Bashir (Story 5) epitomized resilience in the face of adversity, grappling with severe challenges such as single motherhood and near-total financial depletion. In contrast, children such as Babu (Story 1), Sufia (Story 2), and Siam(Story 9) experienced their educational aspirations being dashed, often being compelled into child labor to contribute to their families' survival. *"I never thought of begging in my life. Never ever! But this Corona compelled me to do so", said Siam, a 12-year-old boy who sells candies on roads.* Others, such as Khorshed (Story 7) and Jibon, expressed a waning interest in education, viewing it as an unattainable luxury amidst their immediate struggle for survival. (Biggs et.al., 2021)

Ruksana (Story 4), a street bookseller and mother of three, faces immense challenges due to the pandemic, balancing her desire to educate her children with the struggle to provide for her family. As lockdowns worsen her financial situation, she hopes for a return to normalcy and a chance for her children to lead better lives. Bashir, (Story 5) a bhelpuriwala, struggles to maintain his livelihood and support his family due to the severe impact of the pandemic, which has drastically lowered his income. Despite the challenges, he dreams of expanding his business and providing a better education for his daughter, ensuring she escapes the cycle of poverty.

Monirul, (Story 6) a 25-year-old flower seller, grapples with harsh bullying and discrimination due to his gender identity, causing deep emotional pain and economic struggles. He dreams of undergoing a gender exchange operation and living freely without the fear of judgment or disrespect from society. The absence of consistent public or private support further intensified these vulnerabilities. Participants like Monirul and Ruma (Story 14) recounted episodes of social stigma and exclusion that deepened their struggles.

Members of the third-gender community reported facing heightened abuse and severely limited livelihood options. To cite the story of Ruma, a graduate from a third gender community, who faces societal rejection and economic hardship as she navigates life in Old Dhaka,

striving to survive through compassion rather than confrontation. In a reality of enormous discrimination and stigma around the gender diverse identity, one respondent, Ruma, shared her emotion that *"I don't know whether you will believe it or not, I am a graduate. I completed my graduation from National University. But in this society, the certificate of my graduation is null and void".* Despite her struggles, she holds on to hope for a better future, yearning for a world where she can live freely and authentically like everyone else.

While children like Shamima (Story 10) encountered police violence simply for trying to sustain their families. Understanding of COVID-19 varied among participants; while most grasped the fundamental transmission mechanisms of the virus, the urgency for income often took precedence over adherence to hygiene protocols. Widespread criticism of lockdown measures was voiced by individuals like Bulbul (Story 3) and Rahmat (Story 13), who highlighted how such policies perpetuated cycles of hunger and financial instability, undermining any health benefits they were meant to provide. Amid these challenges, however, the narratives underscored a remarkable spirit of resilience and hope. (Bhuiyan et.al., 2020).

Sohel, (Story 11), a spirited sticker seller from a slum in Mohakhali, dreams of overcoming the hardships brought on by the pandemic to create a colorful sticker factory and provide a better life for his parents. Despite his financial struggles and disrupted education, his unwavering optimism and desire for a brighter future shine through. Aspirations of Sohel to be an entrepreneur and Jannat's (Story 8) fervent desire for her child's educational success exemplify a collective yearning for empowerment and stability in the face of adversity.

This study shines a critical light on the glaring inequities present within health, education, and economic systems, accentuating the urgent need for inclusive policies that address the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities in Dhaka. The experiences shared by participants not only call for immediate and targeted interventions to alleviate these disparities but also highlight the necessity for structural changes that foster equitable access to essential resources.

Discussion

The findings from this study illuminate how the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing vulnerabilities among marginalized communities in Dhaka, aligning with global research on urban poverty and the inequities exacerbated by the crisis. Like the participants in this study, marginalized groups across the world—including precarious workers and informal settlers—encountered significant disruptions in their daily livelihoods due to lockdown measures. This trend is evident in diverse contexts, such as Latin America and Canada, where urban inequalities were magnified during the pandemic (Poirier et al., 2024).

A critical challenge highlighted in this study is the disruption of access to education, which carries profound long-term implications for intergenerational mobility. Children like Babu and Shamima were forced into labor, a phenomenon reflected in international research that identifies education as one of the sectors most adversely impacted for marginalized populations (Pattanasri et al., 2022).

Moreover, the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on women and gender minorities—illustrated by the experiences of Jannat, a single mother, and Ruma, a member of the third-gender community—underscore the intersectionality of social stigmas and economic hardships during crises. These observations align with findings from other urban environments, which similarly document the vulnerabilities faced by these groups (Tenerowicz, G., & Wellman, E. I. 2024).

The participants' limited access to governmental and NGO support echoes challenges observed globally, particularly in countries such as Brazil and South Africa, where systemic barriers often preclude marginalized groups from receiving essential relief (Schnittfinke et al., 2024). Additionally, the interplay of structural inequities, such as the digital divide, further exacerbates vulnerabilities by restricting access to vital information, a concern similarly noted in slum communities in Thailand (Pattanasri et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, this study also sheds light on the resilience strategies employed by participants, including the development of robust social networks, entrepreneurial adaptability, and

persistent aspirations for a better future. The narratives of individuals such as Jannat and Ruma underscore the critical importance of localized and inclusive support systems.

Looking forward, policymakers must address systemic inequities, ensuring the implementation of inclusive economic policies and equitable access to education, healthcare, and social protections. Furthermore, fostering community-based resilience mechanisms will be essential in mitigating the impacts of future crises on marginalized populations.

Conclusions

This study explored and narrated the profound socio-economic and emotional toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted on marginalized communities in Dhaka, revealing how existing vulnerabilities were exacerbated by lockdowns, income loss, and disrupted education (Rabby & Naher, 2023). The narratives vividly portray the resilience and aspirations of individuals despite systemic inequities and inadequate institutional support. From single mothers and child laborers to the social exclusion faced by third-gender individuals, the findings highlight the multidimensional impacts of the pandemic on those already on society's periphery.

Participants demonstrated remarkable adaptability through informal support systems and entrepreneurial initiatives; however, the pandemic exposed an urgent need for more inclusive policies that address education, healthcare, and livelihood security (Ruszczyk et al., 2020). The widespread perception of lockdowns as a financial burden rather than a necessary health measure underscores a disconnect between public health strategies and the realities of the urban poor. Moreover, significant inequities in access to relief services emphasize the necessity for targeted interventions that prioritize marginalized groups.

This study supports calls for a holistic recovery approach that strengthens social safety nets, ensures equitable access to education and healthcare, and fosters inclusive economic opportunities. As Dhaka's most vulnerable populations dream of brighter futures amid ongoing hardships, this research reinforces the imperative for policies that not only mitigate the immediate impacts of crises but also address structural inequities, thereby building resilience against future challenges. By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the pandemic's enduring effects and highlights the path forward toward a more equitable society.

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Ethics in the Rubble: Disaster Governance, Corruption, and the Moral Cost of Calamities in the Philippines

- Marlon Patrick P. Lofredo. PhD
Professor, St. Paul University Quezon City, Philippines
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1471-3485
Email: mpplofredo@spuqc.edu.ph

Abstract
In the Philippines, natural disasters often expose not only environmental vulnerabilities but also deep ethical failures in governance. This paper examines the moral dimensions of disaster response through the lens of the 2023–2025 flood control scandal, which involved thousands of substandard or fictitious infrastructure projects. Drawing on testimonies, Senate inquiries, and Filipino ethical concepts such as loob and pakikipagkapwa, the study argues that corruption in disaster governance constitutes a "secondary disaster"—a man-made crisis that compounds suffering, erodes public trust, and violates principles of justice and human dignity. The analysis situates corruption as both a structural and moral failure, revealing how disaster profiteering undermines resilience and deepens inequality. By integrating indigenous moral frameworks with global disaster ethics, the paper offers a culturally grounded critique of governance and proposes reforms centered on ethical leadership, transparency, and community-based resilience. Ultimately, the study reframes disaster response not merely as a logistical challenge but as a moral imperative, calling for a transformation in how public service is understood and practiced in times of crisis.

Keywords: *Disaster Ethics, Corruption, Philippines, Moral Accountability, Governance*

The Philippines' Vulnerability to Natural Disasters

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire and within the typhoon belt. The country ranked first on the WorldRiskIndex 2025 as the most disaster-prone nation globally, due to its high exposure to floods, typhoons, and other natural hazards (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft / IFHV, 2025). It experiences an average of 20 tropical cyclones annually, with about five causing significant damage (Statista, 2025). Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and flooding are also frequent, affecting millions of Filipinos each year (World Population Review, 2025). The country's archipelagic geography, coupled with socio-economic vulnerabilities, makes disaster preparedness and response a critical national concern. However, the recurring nature of these disasters has not always led to improved resilience; instead, it has often exposed systemic weaknesses in governance and infrastructure (Manila Bulletin, 2025).

Figure 1: Top 10 Riskiest countries in the world

Rank	Country	Risk
1.	Philippines	46.56
2.	India	40.73
3.	Indonesia	39.80
4.	Colombia	39.26
5.	Mexico	38.96
6.	Myanmar	36.91
7.	Mozambique	34.39
8.	Russian Federation	31.22
9.	China	30.62
10.	Pakistan	26.82

Source: WorldRiskReport (2025)

Corruption as an Ethical Failure in Disaster Governance

While natural disasters are unavoidable, the suffering they cause is often magnified by human-made failures—chief among them, corruption. In the Philippines, corruption in disaster governance manifests in various forms, including the misallocation of relief funds, ghost infrastructure projects, politicized aid distribution, and a lack of transparency in procurement. These practices not only delay recovery but also violate the ethical principles of justice, dignity, and accountability. The recent scandal involving over 5,500 flood control projects—many of which were substandard or nonexistent—highlights how corruption compounds disasters into moral crises. This paper argues that such corruption is not merely a governance issue but a profound ethical failure that demands reflective scrutiny.

Objectives of the Paper

This study critically examines the ethical dimensions of corruption in disaster governance in the Philippines, highlighting how institutional failures during crises violate fundamental principles of justice, dignity, and moral responsibility. Using the 2023–2025 flood control scandal as a case study, the paper examines how over 5,500 substandard or fictitious infrastructure projects—commissioned in flood-prone regions such as Bulacan and Pampanga—constitute not only a governance breakdown but a profound moral failure in public service. To evaluate and improve disaster response, the analysis draws on Filipino ethical concepts such as loob (moral will) and pakikipagkapwa (shared humanity), which emphasize relational integrity, empathy, and communal accountability. These indigenous frameworks are further expanded through Ka-Loob Ethics, a culturally grounded moral system that integrates values like hiya, dangal, and utang na loob to guide ethical leadership and reciprocal care. Ultimately, the study proposes reforms that embed ethical accountability and resilience-building into disaster governance, advocating for transparency, community-based monitoring, and moral education rooted in Filipino values.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine the ethical dimensions of corruption in disaster governance in the Philippines, with a particular focus on the 2023–2025 flood control scandal. The analysis was guided by disaster ethics and Filipino moral philosophy, using a combination of document analysis, media content review, and thematic interpretation.

Data Sources and Selection

Primary data were drawn from publicly available Senate inquiry transcripts, investigative journalism reports, watchdog publications, and official government documents related to disaster infrastructure projects. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the flood control scandal, credibility, and accessibility. Supplementary materials included academic literature on disaster ethics, Filipino ethical concepts, and governance studies.

Analytical Framework

The data were analyzed thematically, with particular attention to patterns of corruption, ethical violations, and community impact. Filipino moral concepts—loob (moral will), pakikipagkapwa (shared humanity), and katarungan (justice)—served as interpretive lenses to assess the moral implications of governance failures. These were juxtaposed with principles of global disaster ethics, such as justice, dignity, and accountability.

Interpretation and Reflexivity

Interpretation emphasized the lived experiences of affected communities and the moral narratives embedded in public discourse. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis to ensure cultural sensitivity and ethical coherence, particularly when engaging with indigenous and local moral frameworks.

Significance of the Study in the Context of Disaster Ethics

This study contributes to the growing discourse on disaster ethics by foregrounding the moral implications of corruption in disaster-prone societies. It offers a culturally specific lens for understanding ethical failures in governance, drawing on Filipino philosophical traditions. By treating corruption as a "secondary disaster," the paper reframes the conversation around disaster response—not just as a logistical challenge, but as a moral imperative. The insights generated here are intended to inform both academic debates and practical reforms in policy, education, and community engagement.

Scope and Limitations

This study primarily focuses on the 2023–2025 flood control scandal in the Philippines as a case study of ethical failure in disaster governance. It examines the moral implications of corruption in disaster infrastructure, drawing on Filipino ethical concepts (loob, pakikipagkapwa, katarungan) and global frameworks of disaster ethics. The analysis centers on qualitative data from Senate inquiries, media reports, and community testimonies related to the scandal, with emphasis on ethical violations, distributive injustice, and erosion of public trust.

Other disaster-related corruption cases—such as the mismanagement of Typhoon Yolanda relief, misuse of the PhilHealth fund, and the Pharmally procurement scandal—are referenced for comparative context. These cases help illustrate the systemic and recurring nature of corruption in Philippine disaster governance but are not explored in equal depth.

The study does not include quantitative modeling of economic losses or predictive assessments of future disaster resilience. It also does not conduct fieldwork or primary interviews; instead, it relies on publicly available sources. While the ethical analysis is culturally grounded, it may not capture the full diversity of indigenous moral frameworks across all Philippine regions.

Theoretical Framework

Overview of Disaster Ethics: Global Perspectives

Disaster ethics is an emerging field that examines the moral dimensions of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation in the face of natural and human-made disasters. Globally, scholars and humanitarian frameworks have emphasized principles such as justice, equity, dignity, and responsibility in disaster governance (Council of Europe, 2023; Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Institute [HADRI], 2025). Ethical frameworks often draw from humanitarian principles, emphasizing the protection of vulnerable populations, the fair distribution of aid, and the accountability of institutions (UNHCR, 2024). In contexts where disasters intersect with poverty, inequality, and political instability, ethical analysis becomes crucial in evaluating not just what is done, but how and why it is done (HADRI, 2025). The field also examines the moral obligations of governments, NGOs, and international actors, particularly when failures in response result in preventable suffering (Council of Europe, 2023).

Filipino Ethical Concepts: Loob, Pakikipagkapwa, Katarungan

Filipino ethical thought offers rich resources for understanding moral responsibility in disaster contexts. The concept of loob (inner self or moral will) emphasizes sincerity, integrity, and moral intention in interpersonal and institutional relationships. Pakikipagkapwa (shared humanity or solidarity) calls for empathy and mutual care, especially in times of crisis. It challenges the individualistic tendencies of bureaucratic systems and promotes a relational ethic rooted in community. Katarungan (justice) reflects both distributive and restorative dimensions, demanding fairness in the allocation of resources and accountability for wrongdoing. These concepts provide a culturally grounded lens through which to critique corruption and promote ethical governance in disaster response.

Ka-Loob Ethics and the Moral Architecture of Disaster Governance

While loob and pakikipagkapwa provide foundational insights into Filipino moral sensibilities, the framework of Ka-Loob Ethics (Lofredo, 2018) offers a more comprehensive and culturally embedded system for evaluating ethical behavior in governance. It looks to the other as an extension of oneself. Developed through ethnographic, philosophical, and linguistic reflection, Ka-Loob Ethics centers on the Filipino's inner moral core (loob) and its relational expression toward the kapwa—the fellow human being.

Ka-Loob Ethics is not merely a virtue-based system; it is a reciprocal moral architecture that demands ethical action rooted in kagandahang-loob (kind-heartedness), hiya (moral sensitivity), dangal (dignity), and utang na loob (reciprocal justice). In this framework, the public servant is expected to act with magandang kalooban (good inner will), treating others as ka-loob—a shared moral self—whose dignity must be upheld.

In the context of disaster governance, Ka-Loob Ethics reframes corruption not just as a legal or procedural failure, but as a violation of moral personhood and human relationships. Ghost projects, misallocated funds, and neglect of vulnerable communities represent a betrayal of pakikipagkapwa-loob—the ethical imperative to care for others as one would care for oneself. Such acts erode dangal, distort hiya, and rupture the moral fabric of public service.

By integrating Ka-Loob Ethics into disaster policy and education, the state can move toward a governance model that is not only efficient but ethically resonant—one that honors Filipino values and restores trust through moral leadership.

Comparative Ethical Perspectives: Filipino and Western Frameworks

While Filipino moral concepts such as loob, pakikipagkapwa, and katarungan offer culturally resonant foundations for ethical disaster governance, their philosophical richness can be further illuminated through comparison with Western ethical theories.

Rawlsian Justice emphasizes fairness through the "veil of ignorance," advocating for institutional arrangements that protect the least advantaged. This aligns with katarungan's (justice) distributive and restorative dimensions, yet Rawls's framework is more procedural and abstract, whereas katarungan is relational and embedded in lived experience.

Utilitarianism, rooted in the principle of maximizing overall happiness, often guides cost-benefit analyses in disaster response. However, Filipino ethics challenge its impersonal calculus. Pakikipagkapwa foregrounds empathy and shared humanity, resisting the reduction of moral worth to utility and emphasizing care for the vulnerable, even when it is not "efficient."

Virtue Ethics, particularly Aristotelian virtue ethics, focuses on character and moral cultivation. This resonates with loob, which reflects sincerity, moral will, and integrity. Yet loob is not merely individual—it is relational, shaped by community expectations and spiritual depth, offering a more holistic view of moral agency.

By engaging these traditions in dialogue, the paper affirms that ethical disaster governance must balance universal principles with culturally grounded moral sensibilities.

Corruption as a Moral and Structural Failure

Corruption in disaster governance is not merely a breach of law—it is a profound ethical failure. It undermines trust, violates the dignity of affected populations, and distorts the moral purpose of public service. Structurally, corruption reflects entrenched systems of patronage, opacity, and impunity. Morally, it represents a failure of loob—a lack of integrity and moral will—and a betrayal of pakikipagkapwa, as it prioritizes self-interest over communal well-being. In the context of disaster ethics, corruption becomes a "secondary disaster," exacerbating the harm caused by natural events and prolonging the recovery process.

Addressing this requires not only legal reform but a reawakening of ethical consciousness among public officials and institutions.

Background and Context

Historical Overview of Disaster Response

The Philippines has long grappled with the challenges of disaster response, shaped by its geographic exposure to typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and floods. Historically, disaster management was reactive and fragmented, often relying on ad hoc relief efforts coordinated by local government units and civil society. The establishment of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) in 2010 marked a shift toward a more institutionalized and proactive approach.

However, despite policy reforms and international support, implementation has remained uneven. Local governments often lack the capacity, resources, and coordination mechanisms to respond effectively, and national agencies are frequently criticized for bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies.

Patterns of Corruption in Infrastructure and Relief Efforts

Introduction to the 2023–2025 Flood Control Scandal

The most recent and alarming example of corruption in disaster infrastructure is the 2023–2025 flood control scandal. Over 5,500 flood control projects were commissioned across the country, particularly in flood-prone areas such as Bulacan and Pampanga (Department of Public Works and Highways, 2025). Investigations revealed that many of these projects were either substandard, incomplete, or entirely fictitious (Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2025; Commission on Audit, 2025). The estimated economic loss ranges from $755 million to $2.12 billion USD, with watchdog groups warning that the total plunder in climate-related infrastructure could reach $17.86 billion USD (Transparency International Philippines, 2025; ABS-CBN News, 2025). Senate inquiries uncovered a web of collusion involving contractors, local officials, and national agencies, highlighting the structural entrenchment of corruption (Senate of the Philippines, 2025; The Manila Times, 2025). This scandal not only undermines disaster preparedness but also constitutes a grave ethical violation, turning public infrastructure into a site of moral failure (BusinessWorld Online, 2025).

Case Study: The Flood Control Scandal

Scope of the Scandal: 5,500 Projects, Substandard or Ghost Infrastructure

As mentioned and shown above, between 2023 and 2025, the Philippine government commissioned over 5,500 flood control projects across various regions, particularly in flood-prone provinces such as Bulacan, Pampanga, and parts of Metro Manila. These projects were designed to mitigate the increasing frequency and severity of flooding caused by climate change. However, investigations revealed that a significant number of these projects were either substandard, incomplete, or entirely fictitious—commonly referred to as "ghost projects." Many lacked proper documentation, failed quality inspections, or were found to exist only on paper. The scale of the scandal reflects not only administrative negligence but also a deeply entrenched system of collusion between contractors, local officials, and national agencies.

Economic Cost: $755 Million to $2.12 Billion USD; Potential Losses Up to $17.86 Billion USD

The financial implications of the scandal are staggering. Initial estimates place the confirmed losses between $755 million and $2.12 billion USD, based on documented irregularities and incomplete projects. However, watchdog organizations and independent audits suggest that the total potential losses—including unaccounted funds in climate-related infrastructure—could reach up to $17.86 billion USD. These figures represent not only wasted public resources but also lost opportunities for genuine disaster mitigation, job creation, and economic growth. The misuse of funds has deprived communities of critical infrastructure and undermined national efforts to build climate resilience.

Table 1: *Comparative table of disaster-related corruption scandals in the Philippines from Typhoon Yolanda (2013) onward, including the national budget for each year and the percentage of the budget lost to corruption*

Scandal Name	Year\s	Estimated Amount Lost (PHP)	Estimated Amount Lost (USD)	Type of Disaster/Aid	National Budget (PHP)	% of National Budget Lost
Typhoon Yolanda Relief Mismanagement	2013–2014	₱7,000,000,000	$125,000,000.00	Typhoon relief and housing aid	₱2,006,000,000,000	0.35%
Pork Barrel Scam (PDAF)	2013	₱10,000,000,000	$178,571,428.57	General infrastructure, including disaster-related allocations	₱2,006,000,000,000	0.50%
AFP Slush Fund Scandal	2011–2014	₱1,500,000,000	$26,785,714.29	Military logistics and emergency response	₱2,006,000,000,000	0.07%
PhilHealth COVID-19 Fund Misuse	2020	₱15,000,000,000	$267,857,142.86	Pandemic response and health infrastructure	₱4,100,000,000,000	0.37%
Pharmally Pandemic Procurement Scandal	2021	₱8,600,000,000	$153,571,428.57	COVID-19 emergency procurement	₱4,500,000,000,000	0.19%
Flood Control Projects Scandal	2023–2025	₱1,089,000,000,000	$19,446,428,571.43	Flood control and climate infrastructure	₱6,326,000,000,000	17.21%

Note: Data compiled from publicly available reports and investigations by the Commission on Audit (2014, 2025), Senate of the Philippines (2025), Transparency International Philippines (2025), ABS-CBN News (2025), Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (2021, 2025), Rappler (2020), Philstar.com (2025), and The Manila Times (2025). Figures on national budgets and estimated losses are based on official government publications and watchdog estimates. All USD conversions are approximate and based on prevailing exchange rates during the respective years.

Table 1 highlights how the flood control scandal alone accounted for over 17.21% of the national budget, a staggering figure compared to previous cases. We can deduce the following from the data above:

Corruption is a Persistent and Systemic Issue in Disaster Governance: The recurrence of scandals across administrations and disaster types—typhoons, pandemics, and climate infrastructure—reveals that corruption is not isolated but deeply embedded in governance structures. This undermines not only disaster response but also long-term resilience and development.

The Scale of Corruption Has Grown Over Time. While earlier scandals involved billions of pesos, the Flood Control Projects Scandal (2023–2025) alone accounted for ₱1.089 trillion, or 17.21% of the national budget—a staggering figure that dwarfs previous cases. This suggests that corruption has become more sophisticated and expansive, especially in large-scale infrastructure projects.

Corruption Diverts Resources from the Most Vulnerable. Disaster-related funds are meant to protect and support communities in crisis. When these are misused, the poorest and most vulnerable suffer the most—through delayed relief, unsafe infrastructure, and prolonged recovery. This is not just a governance failure but a moral violation of distributive justice and human dignity.

Ethical Leadership and Accountability Are Urgently Needed. The data underscores the need for ethical governance, where transparency, integrity, and public accountability are prioritized. Without moral leadership, even well-funded disaster programs can become vehicles for exploitation rather than protection.

Repeated Failures erode Public Trust. Each scandal chips away at citizens' trust in institutions. When corruption becomes normalized in disaster response, it fosters cynicism, disengagement, and resistance to future government initiatives—regardless of their well-intentioned nature.

Budgetary Oversight Must Be Strengthened. The percentage of the national budget lost to corruption—especially in recent years—highlights the need for robust financial oversight, independent audits, and citizen participation in monitoring public spending. Large allocations must be matched with strong accountability mechanisms.

Cultural and Ethical Frameworks Can Guide Reform. Filipino moral concepts like pakikipagkapwa (shared humanity) and katarungan (justice) offer culturally resonant foundations for ethical disaster governance. Integrating these into policy and training can help reorient public service toward compassion and accountability.

The cost of corruption in disaster response in the Philippines can be understood in both economic and ethical terms. Based on the comparative data from 2013 to 2025, based on data, the following observations are made:

1. Economic Cost: From the major scandals documented, The Total Estimated Loss (PHP) is over ₱1.131 trillion, over $19.9 billion. This includes:

- ₱7 billion from Typhoon Yolanda relief mismanagement
- ₱10 billion from the Pork Barrel Scam
- ₱1.5 billion from the AFP Slush Fund
- ₱15 billion from PhilHealth COVID-19 fund misuse
- ₱8.6 billion from the Pharmally procurement scandal
- ₱1.089 trillion from the Flood Control Projects scandal

2. Share of National Budget: In some cases, corruption consumed a significant portion of the national budget. The Flood Control Projects Scandal alone accounted for 17.21% of the national budget in 2023–2025. Other scandals ranged from 0.07% to 0.50%, which still represent billions of pesos diverted from essential services.

3. Ethical and Social Cost: Beyond financial losses, corruption in disaster response:

- Delays aid and infrastructure meant to protect lives.
- Increases vulnerability of already at-risk communities.
- Erodes public trust in institutions.
- Violates human dignity and the moral obligation of care during crises.

The cost of corruption in disaster response is not just measured in pesos or dollars—it is measured in lost lives, broken trust, and prolonged suffering. Addressing requires not only financial oversight but a moral transformation in governance. Corruption persists in the Philippines due to a complex interplay of historical, structural, cultural, and institutional factors, some of which are:

Weak Institutional Accountability. Many government agencies lack robust systems for transparency, auditing, and enforcement. Oversight bodies may be underfunded, politicized, or lack independence, making it difficult to detect and effectively punish corruption.

Patronage Politics and Dynastic Power. Political power in the Philippines is often concentrated in families and networks that rely on patronage systems. This creates environments where loyalty and personal connections take precedence over merit and legality, allowing corruption to flourish with impunity.

Over time, corruption has become normalized in public perception. Many citizens view it as an inevitable part of governance, which weakens civic pressure for reform and accountability. This cultural resignation can discourage whistleblowing and public outrage.

Lack of Ethical Leadership. While laws exist, ethical leadership is often lacking. Public officials may prioritize personal gain over public service, especially in high-stakes situations, such as disaster response, where large budgets and urgent timelines create opportunities for misuse.

Limited Civic Engagement and Education. Many communities lack access to information or platforms to hold leaders accountable. Civic education on governance, ethics, and rights is limited, which reduces public participation in oversight and decision-making.

Ineffective Legal Enforcement. Even when corruption is exposed, legal proceedings are often slow, politicized, or inconclusive. High-profile cases may drag on for years, and convictions are rare, reinforcing a culture of impunity.

Crisis as Opportunity. Disasters create urgency, which can bypass normal checks and balances. Emergency procurement, fast-tracked projects, and large-scale aid distribution are vulnerable to exploitation, especially when oversight is relaxed.

Impact on Communities: Delayed Relief, Increased Vulnerability, Erosion of Trust

The human cost of the scandal is equally severe. Communities that were promised flood protection

continue to suffer from seasonal inundation, displacement, and property loss. The absence or failure of infrastructure has led to delayed relief operations, increased vulnerability, and prolonged recovery periods. Moreover, the scandal has contributed to a growing erosion of public trust in government institutions. Citizens express frustration and disillusionment, particularly in areas repeatedly affected by flooding despite budget allocations and project announcements. The ethical breach is not abstract—it is felt in the daily lives of those who must navigate the consequences of both natural and man-made disasters.

Senate Inquiries and Public Response

The scandal has prompted multiple Senate inquiries, with testimonies from whistleblowers, engineers, and community leaders revealing systemic corruption and a lack of oversight (Senate of the Philippines, 2025; The Manila Times, 2025). Lawmakers have called for criminal investigations, procurement reforms, and stricter oversight of infrastructure projects (Pangilinan, 2025). Civil society organizations, media outlets, and academic institutions have also mobilized to demand transparency and accountability (PEP.ph, 2025; ABS-CBN News, 2025). While these responses signal a potential shift toward reform, they also highlight the depth of institutional failure and the urgent need for ethical governance. The public discourse surrounding the scandal has reignited debates on moral leadership, civic responsibility, and the role of ethics in disaster management (BusinessWorld Online, 2025; Time, 2025).

Ethical Analysis

Moral Obligations of Government During Disasters

Governments bear a profound moral responsibility during disasters—not only to protect life and property but to uphold justice, dignity, and the common good. These obligations include ensuring the timely and equitable distribution of aid, maintaining transparency in resource allocation, and prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable populations. In the Philippine context, where disasters are frequent and often devastating, the ethical burden on public officials is especially heavy. Failure to meet these obligations is not merely administrative—it constitutes a moral breach that undermines the very purpose of governance.

Corruption as a "Secondary Disaster"

Corruption in disaster governance functions as a "secondary disaster"—an artificial catastrophe that compounds the suffering caused by natural events. When infrastructure funds are misused, when relief goods are diverted, or when projects exist only on paper, the consequences are not abstract. They manifest in flooded homes, delayed evacuations, and prolonged displacement. This secondary disaster is insidious because it erodes public trust, weakens institutional legitimacy, and perpetuates cycles of vulnerability. Ethically, it represents a betrayal of the social contract and a failure to honor the moral imperative of care during a crisis.

A secondary disaster refers to a human-made crisis that emerges in the aftermath—or in the shadow—of a natural calamity. Unlike the primary disaster, which is caused by environmental forces (e.g., typhoons, earthquakes, floods), the secondary disaster is rooted in systemic failures of governance, corruption, and moral negligence. It is not an inevitable consequence of nature, but a preventable outcome of human action—or inaction.

Characteristics of Secondary Disasters

In the Philippine context, the 2023–2025 flood control scandal exemplifies a secondary disaster. While typhoons and floods are natural hazards, the widespread corruption in infrastructure projects—ghost dikes, substandard levees, and misallocated funds—transformed what could have been mitigated suffering into prolonged and preventable harm (ABS-CBN News, 2025; Gera, 2025). Senate hearings revealed collusion among contractors and officials, turning public infrastructure into a site of moral failure (Lacson, 2025; The Manila Times, 2025). Civil society groups and academic institutions have framed this corruption as a "secondary disaster," emphasizing its ethical gravity and institutional betrayal (Makati Business Club, 2025; InsiderPH, 2025). Ethically, it violates pakikipagkapwa and loob, eroding trust and deepening vulnerability. Recognizing corruption as a secondary disaster reframes disaster governance as a moral imperative rather than merely a technical challenge (Philstar.com, 2025; Time, 2025).

Ethical Dimensions of Secondary Disaster

- Breach of Moral Duty: Secondary disasters represent a failure to uphold the moral obligations of care, justice, and protection, especially toward the most vulnerable.
- Violation of Trust: They erode public confidence in institutions, creating a moral vacuum where cynicism replaces civic engagement.
- Amplification of Harm: They compound the effects of the primary disaster, turning temporary crises into chronic conditions of vulnerability and injustice.

Filipino Ethical Lens

From a Filipino moral perspective, a secondary disaster is a betrayal of pakikipagkapwa—a failure to recognize the shared humanity of those affected. It also reflects a collapse of loob—the moral will and sincerity expected of public servants. In this sense, the secondary disaster is not just a policy failure; it is a

spiritual and cultural rupture that demands ethical reckoning.

Policy Implication

Recognizing corruption and misgovernance as secondary disasters reframes disaster response as a moral enterprise rather than just a logistical one. It calls for:

- Ethical audits alongside financial audits
- Civic participation in monitoring and planning
- Moral education for public officials
- Restorative justice for communities harmed by institutional betrayal
- Violations of Distributive Justice and Human Dignity

Corruption in disaster response undermines the principle of distributive justice, which requires that resources be allocated fairly, particularly in times of scarcity and need. When aid is politicized or infrastructure is compromised, the poor and marginalized suffer disproportionately. The violation of human dignity compounds this injustice—the foundational ethical principle that every person deserves respect, protection, and compassion. In the Philippine flood control scandal, the denial of promised infrastructure and the exposure of communities to preventable harm reflect a systemic disregard for these ethical values.

Ethical Implications of Disaster Profiteering

Disaster profiteering—the exploitation of crises for personal or political gain—is one of the most egregious ethical violations in governance. It transforms suffering into opportunity, turning public service into a marketplace of influence and enrichment. In the context of the flood control scandal, profiteering took the form of inflated contracts, ghost projects, and collusion among officials and contractors. Such practices not only undermine the integrity of disaster response but also distort the moral landscape of governance, where self-interest replaces solidarity and accountability. Addressing this requires not only legal reform but a cultural shift toward ethical leadership and civic responsibility.

Corruption in disaster prevention and relief is a double jeopardy—it not only misuses public funds but also amplifies human suffering during crises. Several key ethical principles are gravely violated, such as:

Justice (Distributive Justice): Corruption distorts the fair allocation of resources. Instead of reaching those most in need, aid and infrastructure are diverted for personal gain. This violates the principle that benefits and burdens should be distributed equitably, especially in times of crisis.

Beneficence: Governments and public officials have a moral duty to act in ways that promote the well-being of citizens. Corruption in disaster response directly undermines this duty by causing harm, delaying relief, and increasing vulnerability.

Non-Maleficence: This principle—"do not harm"—is central to ethical governance. Corruption in disaster contexts causes avoidable harm, such as preventable deaths, displacement, and prolonged suffering. It turns what should be protective measures into sources of danger.

Fidelity and Trust: Public officials are entrusted with resources and responsibilities. Corruption breaks this trust, violating the ethical obligation to act with integrity and loyalty to the public good. It erodes confidence in institutions and undermines democratic governance.

Accountability: Ethical governance requires that actions be transparent and answerable. Corruption thrives in opacity and impunity, violating the principle that those in power must be held responsible for their decisions and their consequences.

Respect for Human Dignity: Disaster victims are often at their most vulnerable. Corruption that exploits their suffering is a direct affront to their dignity. It treats people as obstacles or opportunities rather than as individuals deserving care and respect.

Solidarity (Pakikipagkapwa): In Filipino ethics, pakikipagkapwa emphasizes shared humanity and mutual responsibility. Corruption in disaster response betrays this value, replacing empathy with exploitation and communal care with self-interest.

Corruption in disaster governance is not just a policy failure—it is a moral crisis. It demands not only legal reform but a reawakening of ethical consciousness in public service, rooted in justice, compassion, and accountability.

Filipino Moral Sensibilities in Disaster Response

Filipino culture is deeply rooted in relational ethics, where moral responsibility is understood not only in terms of individual duty but also in the context of community and shared experience. In times of disaster, this manifests through spontaneous acts of bayanihan (communal solidarity), neighborly care, and grassroots mobilization. These responses reflect a moral sensibility that prioritizes empathy, reciprocity, and collective well-being. However, when governance fails to embody these values—especially through corruption and neglect—it creates a moral dissonance between the people's ethical expectations and the state's actions. This gap calls for a re-centering of Filipino moral values in disaster response institutions.

The Role of Pakikipagkapwa in Ethical Governance

At the heart of Filipino ethics is pakikipagkapwa, a concept that goes beyond mere social interaction to imply a deep recognition of the other as a fellow human being (kapwa). In governance, pakikipagkapwa demands that public officials act with compassion, integrity, and solidarity—especially during crises. It

challenges the impersonal, transactional nature of bureaucratic systems, calling for a more humane, responsive form of leadership. In the context of disaster ethics, pakikipagkapwa can serve as a guiding principle for ethical decision-making, ensuring that policies and actions are grounded in empathy and respect for human dignity.

Integrating Indigenous and Local Ethical Frameworks into Policy

Indigenous communities in the Philippines possess rich ethical traditions that emphasize harmony with nature, communal stewardship, and spiritual responsibility. Concepts such as paninindigan (moral conviction), pagkalinga (care), and katutubo (indigenous identity) offer alternative models of ethical governance that are holistic and context sensitive. Integrating these frameworks into disaster policy can enhance cultural relevance, foster community ownership, and promote ethical resilience. This requires not only consultation with indigenous leaders but also a shift in policy-making that values lived experience and ancestral wisdom as legitimate sources of moral insight.

Policy and Ethical Recommendations

Strengthening Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

To address the ethical failures exposed by the flood control scandal, it is imperative to reinforce transparency and accountability in disaster governance. This includes implementing open data platforms for tracking project implementation, mandating public disclosure of procurement processes, and establishing independent audit bodies. Digital tools such as blockchain-based tracking systems and geotagged project monitoring can help prevent ghost infrastructure and ensure that funds are used as intended. Legal reforms should also include stricter penalties for corruption in disaster-related projects, recognizing the heightened moral stakes involved.

Ethical Training for Public Officials and Disaster Responders

Ethical competence must be cultivated alongside technical expertise. Public officials and disaster responders should undergo regular training in disaster ethics, emphasizing moral responsibility, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. These programs can be integrated into civil service development curricula and disaster preparedness workshops. Drawing from Filipino values such as pakikipagkapwa and loob, ethical training should encourage reflection on the human impact of governance decisions and promote a service-oriented mindset rooted in solidarity and justice.

Community-Based Monitoring and Resilience Strategies

Empowering communities to participate in disaster governance is essential for ethical accountability. Local stakeholders should be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects. Community-based monitoring systems—such as citizen report cards, participatory budgeting, and local disaster councils—can serve as checks against corruption and inefficiency. Moreover, resilience strategies should be tailored to local contexts, integrating indigenous knowledge and grassroots initiatives that reflect the lived experiences of those most affected by disasters.

Role of Civil Society and Academia in Ethical Disaster Governance

Civil society organizations and academic institutions play a critical role in promoting ethical governance. NGOs can serve as watchdogs, advocates, and partners in transparency initiatives, while universities can contribute through research, policy analysis, and public education. Collaborative platforms that bring together government, civil society, and academia can foster a culture of ethical dialogue and innovation. Philosophy departments, in particular, can help shape ethical discourse on disaster response by offering frameworks that bridge theory and practice.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the ethical dimensions of disaster governance in the Philippines, using the 2023–2025 flood control scandal as a case study of moral and structural failure. It has demonstrated that corruption in disaster response—manifested through ghost projects, misallocated funds, and substandard infrastructure—is not merely a legal or administrative lapse but a profound ethical violation. By framing corruption as a "secondary disaster," the analysis underscores how institutional betrayal compounds human suffering, erodes public trust, and undermines national resilience.

Drawing on Filipino moral concepts such as loob, pakikipagkapwa, and katarungan, the study offers a culturally grounded critique of governance that challenges technocratic, impersonal approaches to disaster management. It contributes to the growing field of disaster ethics by bridging indigenous moral frameworks with global ethical discourse and by proposing actionable reforms rooted in transparency, moral leadership, and community empowerment.

Ethical disaster governance is not optional—it is a moral imperative. In a world increasingly shaped by climate crises and social vulnerability, the future of public policy and education must be grounded in integrity, solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to protecting human dignity in times of crisis.

Summary of Findings

This paper has examined the ethical dimensions of disaster governance in the Philippines, focusing on the 2023–2025 flood control scandal as a case study of moral and structural failure. It has shown how corruption in disaster response—manifested through ghost projects, misallocated funds, and substandard infrastructure—constitutes a "secondary disaster" that deepens the suffering of vulnerable communities. Drawing from Filipino ethical concepts such as loob, pakikipagkapwa, and katarungan, the analysis has highlighted the disconnect between cultural moral sensibilities and institutional practices. The estimated economic losses, ranging from $755 million to $17.86 billion USD, underscore the scale of the ethical breach and its impact on national resilience.

Reaffirming the Ethical Imperative in Disaster Governance

Disaster governance must be more than a technical or logistical endeavor—it must be a moral commitment to justice, dignity, and solidarity. The ethical imperative demands that public officials act not only with competence but with compassion and integrity. In societies like the Philippines, where disasters are frequent and communities are resilient, governance must reflect the moral values embedded in the culture. Ethical leadership is not optional; it is essential to rebuild trust and ensure that disaster response serves the common good.

Call to Action: Rebuilding Trust Through Moral Leadership

The path forward requires a collective effort to restore ethical integrity in disaster governance. This includes strengthening transparency mechanisms, investing in ethical education for public servants, and empowering communities to hold institutions accountable. Civil society and academia must continue to play a critical role in shaping public discourse and policy. Above all, moral leadership must be cultivated—a leadership that recognizes the human face of disaster, honors the dignity of every citizen, and upholds the ethical foundations of public service. Only then can the Philippines move from vulnerability to resilience, not just in infrastructure, but in its moral core.

Recommendations

To address persistent corruption, the Philippines needs not only legal reforms but a cultural and ethical transformation—one that re-centers governance on pakikipagkapwa, katarungan, and loob. Strengthening institutions, empowering communities, and cultivating moral leadership are essential steps toward lasting change.

Corrupt officials are rarely prosecuted in the Philippines—especially in cases involving disaster funds—due to a combination of systemic, structural, and political barriers. Here's a breakdown of the key reasons:

Despite frequent exposure of corruption in the Philippines, enforcement remains weak and riddled with legal loopholes. High-profile cases such as the NBN-ZTE deal, the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) scam, and the Pharmally procurement scandal often result in acquittals, indefinite delays, or procedural dismissals. Judicial bodies like the Sandiganbayan have been criticized for dismissing cases on grounds of "insufficiency of evidence," even when investigative journalism and public outrage point to clear patterns of wrongdoing. These outcomes reflect systemic issues in prosecutorial capacity and judicial independence. Perpetual delays, generous bail grants, and selective prosecution diminish the deterrent effect of anti-corruption laws, allowing impunity to persist and undermining public trust in legal institutions.

Corruption in the Philippines is deeply entrenched in patronage politics, where loyalty, personal favors, and political alliances often override legal accountability. Political dynasties and elite families wield significant influence, enabling them to shield allies from prosecution and maintain control over both local and national resources. This concentration of power fosters a culture of mutual protection among officials, where whistleblowing is discouraged and prosecution becomes exceedingly difficult. The normalization of elite capture undermines institutional checks and balances, distorts democratic processes, and perpetuates systemic impunity, making anti-corruption efforts vulnerable to politicization and selective enforcement.

The persistence of corruption in the Philippines is exacerbated by a low perceived risk of detection and punishment, which fosters a culture of impunity. Scholars and watchdog organizations have observed that even presidents who campaign on anti-corruption platforms often fall short of their promises due to weak institutional support, politicized enforcement, and entrenched patronage networks. Agencies such as the Office of the Ombudsman, while constitutionally mandated to investigate and prosecute corrupt officials, often lack the independence, resources, and political backing necessary to effectively pursue powerful figures. This institutional fragility undermines the credibility of anti-corruption efforts and signals to public officials that accountability is negotiable rather than guaranteed.

Disaster situations often create conditions that heighten the risk of corruption, particularly in countries with weak institutional safeguards. The urgency to disburse aid and implement emergency measures frequently leads to the relaxation of standard controls and oversight mechanisms, making systems vulnerable to abuse. The sheer volume of humanitarian and reconstruction aid can overwhelm

government agencies, especially at the local level, where administrative capacity is often limited. This overload creates fertile ground for fraud, misallocation of resources, and ghost projects. Moreover, poor coordination between national and local governments allows local officials to exercise near-total discretion over aid distribution, which is frequently exploited for personal or political gain. In such contexts, the absence of transparency and accountability mechanisms not only undermines the effectiveness of disaster response but also erodes public trust in institutions.

And the repeated exposure of corruption scandals in the Philippines—often without meaningful consequences—has led to widespread public fatigue and cynicism. Despite the efforts of civil society organizations and investigative media to uncover wrongdoing, the lack of sustained accountability and institutional follow-through has desensitized many citizens to ethical violations. Over time, public outrage tends to dissipate, especially when high-profile cases result in acquittals, delays, or selective prosecution. This erosion of civic trust undermines democratic engagement and weakens the moral pressure needed to sustain reform. In such a climate, ethical governance becomes not only a legal challenge but a cultural imperative to restore public confidence and reinvigorate civic responsibility.

To overcome the entrenched barriers to ethical disaster governance in the Philippines, a multi-pronged reform agenda is recommended. Strengthening institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman and the Sandiganbayan is essential to ensure independent, well-resourced, and timely prosecution of corruption cases. Enhancing transparency in procurement processes and disaster aid tracking—through digital platforms, open data initiatives, and third-party audits—can reduce opportunities for fraud and misallocation. Empowering civil society organizations and media outlets to sustain pressure on public officials is equally vital, especially in maintaining momentum after scandals break. Finally, reforming political structures to curb dynastic control and incentivize merit-based leadership would help dismantle patronage networks and foster a culture of accountability. These measures, rooted in both institutional design and civic engagement, are critical to restoring public trust and building ethical resilience in disaster governance.

When government officials are involved in corruption of disaster funds—such as in the recent Philippine flood control scandal—several legal, institutional, and civic actions can and should be taken to ensure accountability and justice. Some of these are presented below:

To address systemic corruption in disaster governance, the Philippines relies on a combination of legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, civic engagement, and investigative action. Key laws such as Republic Act No. 3019 (Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act), Republic Act No. 7080 (Plunder Law), Republic Act No. 6713 (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards), Presidential Decree No. 46, and the Revised Penal Code provide the statutory basis for penalizing bribery, misuse of public funds, and unethical conduct. Republic Act No. 6770 further empowers the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate and prosecute cases of corruption. Institutions such as the Ombudsman, the Sandiganbayan, the Commission on Audit (COA), the Civil Service Commission (CSC), the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and the Philippine National Police (PNP) play critical roles in enforcement and oversight. In response to the ₱100 billion flood control scandal, massive public protests have erupted, with citizens, civil society groups, and celebrities demanding the removal and imprisonment of corrupt officials, the return of stolen funds, transparency in procurement, and the abolition of pork barrel and confidential funds. Investigations led by the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee have uncovered ghost projects, contractor monopolies, bribery attempts—including a ₱3.1 million bribe in Batangas—substandard construction failures, and license renting schemes. The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) has frozen suspect bank accounts to prevent further dissipation of public funds. Citizens are also encouraged to file corruption complaints through formal channels, including the Ombudsman's online portal, local COA offices, and civil society watchdogs, reinforcing the role of participatory governance in ethical accountability.

To strengthen ethical disaster governance in the Philippines, a comprehensive reform agenda must address institutional, cultural, civic, and political dimensions. First, institutional reform should focus on enhancing the independence and capacity of oversight bodies, such as the Office of the Ombudsman, the Commission on Audit (COA), and the Sandiganbayan, by increasing budgets, staffing, and protection from political interference. Key laws—including RA 3019, RA 7080, and RA 6713—must be amended to close loopholes, streamline prosecution timelines, and impose stricter penalties for corruption related to disasters. Real-time transparency in procurement should be mandated via digital platforms that track contracts, suppliers, and fund flows, while ethical audits should be institutionalized alongside financial audits to assess moral integrity in disaster response. Second, ethical governance must be culturally grounded by embedding Ka-Loob Ethics into public service training, emphasizing loob, pakikipagkapwa, hiya, and dangal as moral anchors.

A national code of disaster ethics should be developed, and community-based ethics councils established to monitor local projects and promote participatory accountability. Third, civic engagement

and media empowerment are vital: investigative journalism and watchdog groups must be supported through legal protections and funding, while public education campaigns should promote whistleblower protection and citizen oversight.

Feedback mechanisms such as SMS hotlines and mobile apps can facilitate real-time reporting of corruption. Finally, political reform must enforce anti-dynasty provisions and promote merit-based appointments in disaster-related agencies and LGUs. Officials managing disaster funds should be required to submit SALNs and obtain bank secrecy waivers, with automatic public disclosure in the event of an emergency. A national disaster integrity scorecard should be established to rank LGUs and agencies based on transparency, ethical conduct, and citizen trust, thereby institutionalizing accountability and restoring public confidence.

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Parenting: Are we raising an ethically dignified generation? A Critical Review from a Humanitarian Perspective

- *Rudmila Mahbub*
Senior Lecturer, School of General Education , BRAC University, Bangladesh
Email: rudmila.bracu@gmail.com

Abstract:
This paper examines the role of ethics in parenting as a mode of instruction in Bangladesh in the 21st century. Nowadays, the number of depressions, anxiety, suicide, sex-based violence, and other social disorders is remarkably increasing. This raises a few ethical questions about parenting style, as the family is the primary source for developing human psychology. Drawing on evidence from newspapers, news portals, social media, websites, and books, this study demonstrates that parenting involves ethical supervision, knowledge of gender, and empathetic behavior. It argues that breaking the communication gap between parents and children and teaching them to strike a balance in life are crucial for children's further development. It also considers the biotic community in its overall growth.
Keywords: ethics, gender, parenting, care, men and women.

Introduction

Today's children are the future of tomorrow. Therefore, we need to give careful supervision to raise them properly. In this case, parenting plays a vital role that can be considered the most challenging 24/7 job without any remuneration. It is a huge responsibility that has its means without any ends. How parents raise their children is making a significant impact on their future. Though biological parents are considered the major concern, other social institutions like the state, education, and religion play a vital role alongside the family to create child's psychology that eventually develops their personality. However, the question is, are parent on the right track to raise their children? Do caregivers possess sufficient knowledge in raising children? Is there any role of ethics and gender in raising children? Do they consider the concept of gender equality, equity, and gender roles while raising them? Or are they consciously or subconsciously inputting the concept of masculinity, gender bias, and stereotypes into them? How do parents practice power relationships within the family? Are we raising our children with or without pressure? Haven't men faced violence and unrealistic expectations from the family? These questions are crucial to deal with the real-life challenges that men and women are facing everywhere in the world.

This paper will discuss the societal perception of gender, the role of ethics and gender in raising children, define different terms of gender, and show the role of those terminologies in shaping children's psychology.

Gender, sex, and personality/ behavioral development:
Firstly, we need to know the difference between gender and sex. Generally, gender is considered a socio-cultural construction that is created by the society and culture of an individual. However, sex is the biological identity of individuals. Therefore, how we will be judged based on our physical structure can be determined by the gender idea our society possesses. For instance, in a patriarchal society, men uphold the position of authority and power, and

women are subordinate to them; in this aspect, women are oppressed by men socially, politically, and economically, but in a matriarchal society, it's the opposite.

Different philosophies consider gender in various forms. In Chinese philosophy, gender is regarded as an interconnected aspect of Yin and Yang. According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'The concept of gender is foundational to the general approach of Chinese thinkers. Yin and Yang, core elements of Chinese cosmogony, involve correlative aspects of "dark and light," "female and male," and "soft and hard." (D'Ambrosio et al., 2015)

In this perspective, male is considered strong, independent, and providers, whereas female is considered weak, subordinate, and takers. Aristotle considers men as rational beings, whereas women lack rational capacity, particularly the virtue of prudence. "In his view, the biological inferiority of women makes her inferior also in her capacities, her ability to reason, and her ability to make decisions" (Lerner, 1986).' (Guy-Evans, 2024)

Though Gerda Lerner in her book, "The Creation of Patriarchy" mentioned that this practice of patriarchy was developing over almost 2500 years, approximately from 3100 BC to 600 BC, unfortunately, this thought about men and women has been provoking the human race and creating a dominating group over women.

Research shows that apart from the hormonal factors, women mostly face anxiety issues due to societal pressures, biological differences, life experiences, overloaded roles, relationship stressors, safety, security, and health issues. Browne(2024) stated, "Around 30% of anxiety issues are linked to genetics, making women with anxious parents more vulnerable. The remaining 70% stems from environmental influences, such as life experiences and learning anxious behaviors from caregivers. A systematic review, including 44 studies, found that "masculinity may be a protective factor for anxiety development, while femininity can be a risk factor."

Sigmund Freud thinks that in the third stage of personality development, an individual understands their social role and personality on the basis of similar body analysis and their relationship with parents. This means that the personality of an individual is determined by his own physical experience and how he sees the same and opposite sex that is acting upon him. In this case, the environment around the child plays a vital role in developing psychology. Jr (1982) said, "Biology is necessary to set the sexual attraction to the opposite sex parent to play, but after that the child learns how to be a "man" or a "woman" through modeling, identification with, and observing of, his or her same sex parent."

His psychosexual theory claims that the personality of an individual develops through different stages, and any unresolved issues in these stages create personality disorders in adulthood. Prior research shows that the parents' behavior makes a difference in the attitude of children. In this case, different types of parenting create different types of impact on the attitudes of children. For example, "mindful parenting can set in motion a cascade leading to meaningful reductions in child behavior problems over time. Specifically, when parents engage in more mindful parenting practices, they tend to communicate more effectively with their children, modeling constructive communication." (Guy-Evans, 2024a)

Different research shows, "Parenting styles, such as authoritative (warm but firm) and authoritarian (strict with little warmth), can significantly impact children's language skills and reading comprehension. Authoritative parenting often promotes better academic outcomes, while authoritarian parenting may hinder development. Understanding these relationships is crucial for developing effective educational strategies and family interventions." (Guy-Evans, 2024b).

The other types of parenting, named enmeshed parenting, show that due to the diffuse boundaries between parent and children, children lose their self-identity and often feel ungrateful or selfish to their parents for wanting simple independence as an individual. This stiffness makes it a challenge in the development of decision-making skills, as they are always in fear of disappointment.

Bowlby's attachment theory shows the effect of early childhood attachment between the caregiver and the baby on their future development of the sense of security and relationship. It shows how the emotional and social development of a child is closely connected to the early caregivers and how it develops different mechanisms as a survival strategy.

Though Freud and other behavioral theories think that attachment between a baby and a caregiver is closely connected due to the oral or feeding relationship, "Bowlby observed that feedings did not diminish separation anxiety. Instead, he found that attachment was characterized by clear behavioral and motivation patterns. When children are frightened, they seek proximity from their primary caregiver in order to receive both comfort and care……. The central theme of attachment theory is that primary caregivers who are available and responsive to an infant's needs allow the child to develop a sense of security. The infant learns that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world." (Cherry, 2023)

He coined the term "Affection-less psychology" to show that children who are abandoned by their primary caregivers, particularly their mother, are most likely to develop delinquent behavior later in their lives. 'Instead of aligning with the stance that emotional problems can be attributed solely to

internal processes, he postulated that such issues arise from how the child interacts with their environment in their early years.' (Project, n.d.)

Out of all the aforementioned statements, it can be deduced that parenting and society have a significant impact on a child's later life. How do the children see their environment and how do they experience it, and create their personality in the future. That's why it's important to raise our children ethically so that they will be able to break the stereotype and develop as moral beings. Particularly, in a patriarchal society, it is crucial to bring up our children in an environment where they can think autonomously to break the gender discrimination against women. The next part of this article will discuss the book "Letters to My Son" to share some thoughts of a mother on how to train our children ethically, so that they become value-driven individuals, and learn to respect human dignity.

Letters to My Son, ethics and gender

In the book "Letters to My Son", the author is trying to give some lifelong lessons to her growing child, and shares guidelines on parenting, gender equality, equity, stereotypes, and other thoughts on the basis of some real-life experiences. This paper will discuss some of those letters with real-life examples that are closely related to parenting and the relationship between children and parents.

Traditionally, as parents, we have a mindset that children will always learn from us. Undoubtedly, parents are the primary role models for the child. It is expected that parents will always teach them good lessons. One of the major concerns of those letters is that not only children but also parents can learn from their child. They can be a team player where everyone will learn from each other. Since, effective learning requires an interactive mindset, where both learners and instructors share their experiences and thoughts for better understanding. This interactive learning will develop the parents' children's relationships and build mutual respect and benefit for each other. Growing in such an environment, children will learn synergies, develop a win-win mindset, and eventually become better team players. In this letter, the author shared her experiences about how she taught his son to choose the good out of the evil. She explained both good and bad aspects of everything in a manner that shows more positivity to the good thing and negativity to the evil, and later let her son choose. In this experiment, she found that the son mostly chose the good things after acknowledging the rewards of good action and the bad consequences of evil action. Parenting in this way, boosts the children's decision-making skills and increases confidence.

Later parts of the letter demonstrate that in a patriarchal society, women are considered a second gender and face different types of gender discrimination, challenges, and dilemmas. The most common challenge for a woman is becoming a mother. The first letter focuses on the societal trauma and stress that a married woman is facing, who is trying to conceive. In our society, we consider that women are meant to be mothers. In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir mentions, 'Woman? Very simple, say those who like simple answers: She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her.' (Beauvoir, 2010 (Original work published 1949))

In a society like Bangladesh, there is a belief that, without being a mother, a woman's life is not fulfilled. There are cases where women experience divorce, domestic violence by in-laws and husbands for not having a baby. One of the reports of The Daily Star, a Bangladeshi English-language based newspaper, titled 'Infertility: The unseen battle of Bangladeshi women' published on 6 April, 2025 states that 'According to a study "Infertility and Assisted Reproduction as Violent Experiences for Women in Bangladesh: Arts-based Intervention to Address GBV (Arts for I-ARTs)" by Dr Papreen Nahar and Farhana Alam, infertile women in Bangladesh often experience a form of social exile, where they are treated as incomplete, inadequate, facing emotional abuse, experiencing violence or even cursed.' (Anika, 2025)

The first letter suggests that motherhood is one of the most precious journeys of a woman, but not the only precious one. Even though a woman cannot be a mother, she can fulfill her life by achieving her goals and flourishing over time. She can be acknowledged for her individuality and autonomy as a woman, and be grateful for what she has and what she doesn't have, because everything is invaluable within itself. Parents are requested to guide their girls in a way, so that they will never feel inferior if they face this type of crisis in life.

Superstition is another concern that is mentioned in the book and the impact of it in our society and individual life is discussed. In patriarchal society, 'crying' is considered as a symbol of weakness and vulnerability that is practiced by women. The belief is that, as women are physically vulnerable to men, they use crying as a weapon to deal with difficult situations. The second letter suggests that in parenting it is important to break this superstition, because, like smiling or being happy, sad, angry, or fearful, crying is one of the essential human expressions that need to be addressed as a part of emotion, and it's important to know how to express our emotions. Research shows that suppression of emotions is not only harmful for our mental health, but also for physical health and relationships. As illustrated:

"Emotions have energy that pushes up for expression, and to tamp them down, our minds and bodies use creative tactics—including muscular constriction and holding our breath. Symptoms like anxiety and depression, which are on the rise in the U.S., can stem from the way we deal with these

underlying, automatic, hard-wired survival emotions, which are biological forces that should not be ignored. When the mind thwarts the flow of emotions because they are too overwhelming or too conflicting, it puts stress on the mind and the body, creating psychological distress and symptoms. Emotional stress, like that from blocked emotions, has not only been linked to mental ills, but also to physical problems like heart disease, intestinal problems, headaches, insomnia and autoimmune disorders.'" (Hendel, 2018)

Therefore, the author suggests to break the superstition and to do that parents must teach their children, an individual should not be abused or mistreated because of their emotions. Rather, learn how to deal with it.

Another part of the letter shows that the importance of education is no more than life. It suggests that education is important to lead a life, but human life is more valuable than education. In Asian culture, there is a practice of putting pressure on children to an extent that sometimes students commit suicide because they become unable to handle the situation. Corporal punishment, social abandonment, criticism by family, and destroying the self-stem are the consequences for not being able to reach the desired result or institutions for study. There are more than dozens of news stories every time in newspapers about the death of students after failing to pass the admission test in Bangladesh. One of the reports of Aachol Foundation stated that 513 students had died by suicide in 2023. Out of them, 227 students were school students, meaning that this extremely young demographic accounted for approximately 44% of all student suicides…. A study jointly conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and UNICEF titled Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 found that for children aged from 1 to 14 years, 89% had suffered from corporal punishment.' (Rahman, 2024)

'According to NCRB Data, in 2020, 12,526 students died by suicide, while in 2021, the number rose to 13,089…….it says 864 out of 10,732 youngsters under the age of 18 years took their lives due to a 'failure in an examination'.' (Gupta, 2022)

One of the reports of Dhaka Tribune says that nearly half of the students suicide in 2024 were most of them school-going children. It states that 'According to the study, 14% of students who died by suicide cited an inability to cope with academic pressure as the primary reason. Among these, 59% were school students, 30% were college students, and 9% were university students'. (UNB, 2025)

By observing the severity of the situation regarding educational pressure among students, the author suggests that trying is the best thing that our children could do, and we, as parents, can encourage them rather than giving them pressure about education. Even for their mistake or failure we need to inspire them to try harder than the previous time and be supportive to them. This psychological support from the parents, gradually increase children's self-motivation for future development and help them to find their area of improvements, and eventually they learn, how to deal with the challenging situation rather than giving up.

The next letter talks about the impact of social media on our lives and urges that the necessity of physical attachment and human interaction is more powerful than a device-based lifestyle. It encourages taking challenges in life because that is how a person can sharpen their potential and develop themselves. It also focuses on the necessity of spiritual development rather than only focusing on materialistic goals and considers that spiritual growth and development are crucial to flourish in life. The letter advocates not to become self-centered, because everyone surrounding us is essential for our overall development. Expressing love and gratitude are also the two most important factors, it states, for our future growth.

As everyone has some potential within themselves, we need to work on those possibilities. Even though one might fail to reach the goal, perseverance is crucial to reach our destiny. Parents need to teach their children about time management according to priority basis and help them to act accordingly. The letter proposes, our failure is not defining us, but how we work to get rid of those failures, is what we are. Because being industriously consistent is more important than being meritorious. It suggests prioritizing the moment more than anything and making a blueprint in mind for our plan. Since having a clear goal and work accordingly without considering the result, success is just a matter of time.

The next letter focuses on the overall development of a moral being and counsels to learn self-evaluation. The letters discuss different analogies from the animal world and show how

we can learn anything from anywhere. Refining good from evil is also one of the major characteristics of human that needs to be developed over time, according to the letters.

Gender equality and equity are the two major ideas of the letters that show breaking stereotypes is obligatory to make a just society. It shows that at home, both males and females must work as coworkers rather than playing the role of provider and taker. Learning the basic skills like cooking cannot be considered the sole responsibility of a woman. Though gender role is a concern of gender ethics, which "are shared beliefs that apply to individuals on the basis of their socially identified sex which are the basis of the division of labor in most societies" (Wood and Eagle, 2010), (Cerrato and Cifre, 2018) men can even cook and do household work, taking care of children, because both males and females make a home. Our sex shouldn't define our actions in a marital relationship. It states that if gender equality is not established at home, it will not spread or influence society.

The letters also raise some moral questions that need to be addressed while training children. It raises the question that does gender discrimination only happens to girls? Does the sati ritual end, or are women still sacrificing their career, self-respect, and choices in the name of raising children? It also raises the question of gender bias as people justify sacrifices from women as the expense of motherhood or a happy married life. It also asks, aren't the boys also facing discrimination at home when their abuses are not taken into account?

According to one of the surveys of the Bangladesh Men's Rights Foundation (BMRF) around 80% of married men in Bangladesh have faced mental abuse by their spouses (Islam, 2020).

Notably, the abused men are not taking initiative against this violence for fear of society and other factors, as this might diminish their manhood in the eyes of everyone. The secretary of BMRF, Majed Evena Azad, says that, "We have got thousands of messages from men who have been abused mentally and physically by their spouses and their relatives. But they are afraid to talk or seek legal help about it as our society regards a man as a weak person when he admits such a thing. They laugh at male victims." (Islam, 2020) It raises the question that if we are raising our voice for domestic violence against women, why don't we do the same when men are mentally vulnerable to their partners or parents?

The letter suggests that children must learn care from family because care is also one of the virtues that needs to be nurtured to lead a happy life. It shows that a relation without belief, care, and acknowledgement is nothing but empty. Parents must learn to accept their mistakes, if any, so that children learn acceptance and feel secure to express their emotions and opinions. The letter recommends that parents, rather than being harsh for mistakes of their child, create a scope of open discussion and teach gratitude and love within the family so that they feel connected to share. These practices will decrease the possibilities of suicide and create an interconnection among family members. Rather than only showing the positive side of a relationship, the letter suggests that children must also see the difficulties in a relationship, because life is not a utopia but a choice. Therefore, even if there is any conflict, we must teach our children how to deal with the situation without destroying the self-esteem of others and themselves, and be respectful to their partner. It emphasizes the importance of not interfering others' lives, even if that is the life between someone's children and their spouse. Parents can only share their thoughts without provoking against each other. Since, a healthy relationship starts from home, if the home is not grooming the children about the philosophy of life and only focusing on the materialistic goal, children will suffer in the long run and feel vulnerable in the future. Family must teach their children how to make decisions in life and deal with every situation rather than making the decision on their own to guide their children.

The letters also urge children to practice simplicity at its best because it has a beauty within itself. It also talks about the necessity of constructive criticism to develop in life. It shows that people may criticize us for whatever we do, yet we need to know ourselves better than others. Therefore, we need to be careful about which feedback is applicable for our development, rather than focusing on the destructive attitude of

others. It demonstrates that only merit is not enough to be successful in life. One needs to have perseverance, patience, and consistency to achieve success.

By breaking the traditional belief of sacrifice, the letters show the importance of self-love and suggest to practice it for self-development, so that people will not get the chance to take advantage of someone's simplicity. It distinguishes the basic difference between self-love and selfish attitude and shows the importance of maintaining a balance in a relationship, while becoming a proactive person instead of a reactive one. One of the incidents can be taken into consideration in this regard. A senior assistant superintendent of police, Polash Saha, committed suicide a few years back in his office. In his suicide note, he wrote, 'Neither my mother nor my wife is responsible for my death. I am solely responsible. I have failed to keep anyone happy. My wife should take all the gold and live well. Responsibility for my mother now lies with my two brothers. They should keep her well. Everything except gold should go to my mother. My elder sister should coordinate all these.'(Age, 2024)

Careful observation of the note shows the amount of disappointment and frustration he was going through to settle the matter between his mother and wife. The pressure that he was going through was unbearable to him, which led him to go to this extent. The question is, doesn't parenting have a role to play in this case? As a parents, are we using our children as a tool for our happiness? The amount of pressure a male is going through in his adulthood, do we ever think of that? All these questions lead to the fact that children must learn self-love and balance in their lives, and parents must know where to draw the line. Because the identity of our children is not only that they are our children, but also, they are a dignified being who has the right of free will. Destroying the autonomy and dignity of an individual eventually destroys them, which could bring consequences like Polash Shaha. The letter suggests that loving ourselves is not always selfishness, rather, it's necessary for our overall growth to some extent.

The letters also advocate the parents to be better listeners to their child rather than giving them advice before listening. The letter shows that, simply because of not being a good listener, children lose their faith in their parents and stop sharing with them. This eventually leads to judgmental assumptions, false beliefs, and communication gaps in the parent-child relationship, which could have a bad influence to the extent that it can be threatening to their future. Therefore, the author requests that the parents make their child their best friend, even if they can never be a best friend to the children.

Parents must encourage children's creativity, free thinking, and let them go beyond tradition. The letters focus on making a moral being rather than an academically successful person. It shows the importance of friend selection, time management, coming out of the comfort zone, and proposes to the parents to give proper guidance to them regarding these, because these are vital to change someone's life. The letter requests to make a footprint on the world so that it can remember an individual as a pioneer for future generations.

Apart from the above-mentioned suggestions, there are some areas of improvement that could have been incorporated while parenting. Along with being an ethical person and giving gender ideas to the children, children must learn to think about their environment as well. In this case, ecological empathy needs to be practiced for our overall growth. As stated, "…. the practice of ecological empathy can develop our sense of stewardship. Thus, ecological empathy is needed to serve the entire biotic community because this is one of the ways to make a connection between the human and non-human elements of nature." (Mahbub, 2021)

From the above all discussion, it can be said that though parenting is a lifelong process, early age parenting is playing a vital role for the future development of a child. As one of the reports of UNICEF states that "from pregnancy to age 3 is the most critical, when the brain grows faster than at any other time; 80% of a baby's brain is formed by this age." (UNICEF, 2024) Therefore, it's important to guide them with proper care, love and nutrition from the very beginning so that they can develop as a complete being and learn to respect human dignity and autonomy from the early age of their life. Because only a moral begin can create a moral society.

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Shifting Perspectives in Nursing Ethics Education: Introducing the Fetal Surrogate Decision-Maker's Perspective

- Kaori Onozawa[1),2)]
- Nao Araki[2)]
*- Michio Miyasaka[1)]** (Corresponding author)
1) Graduate School of Health Sciences, Niigata University, Japan
2) School of Nursing, Sapporo City University, Japan
**Email: miyasaka@clg.niigata-u.ac.jp*

Abstract

This study aims to elucidate nursing students' perceptions of prenatal testing from the perspective of a fetal surrogate decision-maker. A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Data were collected from 80 nursing students using open-ended questionnaires and analyzed through content analysis. The findings revealed that students recognized both benefits and disadvantages of prenatal testing for the fetus. Perceived benefits included enabling parents to prepare for care by understanding the fetus's health condition in advance, while disadvantages involved concerns about the right to life and birth. Some responses contradicted the role of a surrogate decision-maker, such as supporting the avoidance of birth in certain situations, which were considered to reflect negative perceptions of disability and limited awareness of fetal rights. Introducing this perspective into nursing education may foster a broader ethical understanding of prenatal testing.

Introduction

In Japan, the number of pregnant women undergoing prenatal testing has been increasing due to advancements in genetic testing technology and the increasing number of older mothers. Since the introduction of non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) in a multi-centre clinical study in 2013, it has been noted that some clinics offer genetic testing without adequate advice or support to pregnant women.

This situation has raised ethical concerns because many women choose to terminate their pregnancies when a congenital disorder or other condition is detected in the fetus through testing. It has been suggested that providing prenatal testing without adequate consultation is ethically problematic due to its potential support of eugenic ideologies and its contradiction of the principle of normalizing diversity (Health Science Council, Science and Technology Committee 2021). To provide continuous support from pregnancy onward, a consultation support system for pregnant women who are concerned about

prenatal testing has been established, with midwives expected as key providers of this support. Nevertheless, how midwives and other nursing professionals should approach prenatal testing and how it should be addressed in nursing education remain significant, challenging issues (Asano et al. 2017).

In most cases, the subject being examined is the individual undergoing testing. However, during prenatal testing, the fetus is the subject of examination while the pregnant person undergoes the test. After birth, parents can act as legal representatives of their child in consenting to treatments or medical procedures. However, some argue that a pregnant woman cannot serve as the legal representative of the fetus, as a decision to terminate the pregnancy on the basis of prenatal test results would deprive the fetus of the opportunity for birth and substantially compromise its interests. However, according to the Civil Code of Japan, "the enjoyment of private rights begins at birth, meaning that a fetus is not considered a legal subject with rights and interests.

Additionally, the Maternal Health Act permits abortion up to 22 weeks of pregnancy. However, advances in fetal therapy have enabled the provision of some treatments based on fetal diagnoses, with certain interventions occurring before the 22nd week of pregnancy (Endo 2017), depending on the specific medical condition. This suggests that, in certain cases, the rights and interests of the fetus may be considered from a medical point of view. With the continuing development of diagnostic and therapeutic technologies for the fetus, the question of the extent to which a fetus—whose legal rights and interests are not formally recognized—should be regarded as an object of medical protection has become a significant ethical issue in contemporary discourse.

Previous research on the ethical issues of prenatal testing has revealed that some pregnant women experience emotional conflicts regarding their unborn children after undergoing prenatal testing, such as feelings of guilt (Araki 2008 ; Miyata et al. 2021). Studies surveying nursing and medical students have predominantly focused on attitudes toward prenatal testing and its ethical implications. However, most research has been conducted from the perspective of pregnant women, with limited studies considering the perspective of the fetus (Ohara et al. 2015 ; Mori 2019)

To address this gap in the literature, the present study focuses on the perspective of the fetal surrogate decision-maker as a means of hypothetically approaching the fetal perspective. Specifically, this study examines how nursing students—who may be involved in prenatal testing in the future—conceptually understand prenatal testing when adopting the standpoint of a fetal surrogate decision-maker.

In basic nursing education, educational content related to genetics and prenatal testing remains insufficiently systematized (Aoki et al. 2020). Accordingly, introducing such a shift in perspective may serve as a meaningful educational approach for promoting multidimensional ethical reflection on prenatal testing.

The aim of this study is to elucidate nursing students' perceptions of prenatal testing when they consider potentially taking up the role and perspective of a fetal surrogate decision-maker. In this study, a "fetal surrogate decision-maker" is defined as an adult who makes decisions based on the best interests of the fetus.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, as it aimed to clarify participants' perceptions.

Research Participants

The participants were 187 third- and fourth-year nursing students enrolled at College A. The students were required to have completed the courses "Introduction to Maternal Nursing," "Maternal Nursing Theory and Practice," and "Nursing Ethics" with their grades assessed. Married students and students who had given birth were excluded in order to maintain a consistent background among the study participants, although if there were sufficient numbers of these persons a future study for comparison may be interesting. All 187 participants were female.

Data Collection

The survey was conducted during the state of emergency declared due to the spread of COVID-19, which prevented students from attending classes at College A. As a result, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed via mail. This included a stamped return envelope addressed to the principal investigator, and respondents were asked to return the completed survey by mail. The survey period lasted one month (December 1–31, 2020). The questionnaire required respondents to consider the issue from the perspective of three different groups: pregnant women, caregivers, and surrogate decision-makers for the fetus, the latter of which is the primary focus of this study. The questionnaire included the following prompt: "In prenatal testing, since the fetus does not have the capacity to make decisions, a third party must make the decision. Please freely share your thoughts on the test, assuming that you are a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus (a person who is deciding whether to proceed with a test)."

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using the content analysis method described by Krippendorff (1980,

74-91), which derives insights from data and its context while allowing for the creation of practical guidelines. The goal was to clarify perceptions of prenatal testing through multiple text data sources. The analysis proceeded through the following steps:

1) The data was carefully read, and responses corresponding to the perspective of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus were extracted.
2) Sections of text containing relevant content were grouped and coded as a single unit.
3) Each code was summarized into a concise sentence while ensuring the retention of meaning by supplementing the subject and object where necessary.
4) Subcategories were generated based on the similarities and differences in the meaning of the codes.
5) Subcategories were then further classified according to their similarities and differences, leading to the final categorization.
6) The relationships among the codes, subcategories, and categories were repeatedly examined.

Throughout the analysis process, the research was supervised by experts in maternal nursing and qualitative research to ensure reliability and validity.

Ethical Considerations

The survey cooperation request form provided detailed information about the research purpose and methods, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances that responses would not affect participants' grades. It also stated that the research plan would be disclosed, warned that psychological distress and a time burden were possible, guaranteed that personal information would be protected, and indicated that the research findings would be published. Consent was considered obtained upon the return of a complete questionnaire. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Tenshi College (Approval No. 2020-23).

Results

A total of 80 respondents participated in the survey, yielding a response rate of 43%. Among them, 39 responses aligned with the research objectives, in which participants wrote about their thoughts on prenatal testing from the perspective of surrogate decision-makers, creating a valid response rate of 21%. Responses related to the perspective of pregnant women or the participants' own thoughts as nursing students were excluded from the results presented in this paper.

The analysis identified 62 codes related to nursing students' perceptions of prenatal testing from the perspective of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus. These were categorized into 25 subcategories and eight overarching categories. Table 1 shows the categories and subcategories. Many students used the first-person pronoun "I" when imagining themselves in the role of the fetus's representative.

Testing as a tool for parents to make reproductive decisions and prepare for child-rearing

Students viewed prenatal tests as a means for parents to confirm a fetus's condition and the presence of any diseases, and to decide whether to accept or reject a child with a disability. Additionally, they believed that such tests allow parents to determine whether to proceed with a pregnancy based on the presence of any diseases, and that identifying such conditions beforehand enables preparation before birth, thereby reducing the parents' burdens after childbirth.

Sense of security in understanding the fetus's health condition in advance

Some participants considered prenatal testing to allow parents to understand a fetus's health condition in advance. In this case, the participants were reassured that prenatal testing would allow them to understand any potential disabilities before birth.

The desire to be accepted unconditionally without undergoing testing

Some participants did not want parents to undergo testing because they feared that, depending on the results, the fetus might not be wanted, and they wanted fetuses to be accepted and loved just as they were, regardless of whether they had a disease or disability. Among them were those who believed that being conceived was a matter of luck and wanted the parents to decide not to undergo testing if possible.

Additionally, the desire for parents to make the decision to undergo testing with the fetus in mind rather than for their own peace of mind, and the wish for parents to cherish and value their future children regardless of the tests' outcomes.

Prenatal testing is meaningless for the birth of a fetus

Some participants believed that what matters most to a fetus is being loved and cherished by its parents, and therefore considered prenatal testing to be meaningless. Furthermore, they felt that especially in the case of invasive tests, not undergoing such procedures is safer for the fetus, and thus such tests are unnecessary.

Table 1: Nursing Students' Perceptions of Prenatal Testing for the Fetus

Category	Subcategory
Testing as a tool for parents to make reproductive decisions and prepare for child-rearing	A test to monitor fetal development and confirm the presence of a disease A test to determine whether to accept a child with a disability A test to decide whether to give birth based on the presence of a disease A test to prepare for childbirth by identifying diseases or disabilities A test to reduce the burden on the mother after childbirth
A sense of security in understanding the fetus's health condition in advance	A test to inform the mother about the fetus's health condition before birth The reassurance in knowing the health condition prior to birth
The desire to be accepted unconditionally without undergoing testing	I do not want testing because the results may lead to my parents not wanting me to be born I want to be accepted as I am, regardless of disease status, without undergoing testing Since I came into my mother's womb by some kind of fate, I don't want her to undergo prenatal testing I prefer the decision to avoid testing whenever possible I want the decision on testing to be made with consideration for the fetus rather than solely for parental reassurance I want to be cared for and loved regardless of test results
Prenatal testing is meaningless for the birth of a fetus	In order to be born loved and cherished, prenatal testing is meaningless and unnecessary for the fetus itself Even if the test finds a disease, it does not affect the fetus's existence
Fear and sadness regarding the possibility of a fetus not being born due to test results	Depending on the results, there is a possibility that I may not be wanted and not be born If the parents decide not to have the baby due to the results, there is a possibility that my life will be terminated, and I will be killed Fear and sadness about being born with a disease or disability and not being accepted by my parents because of it The invasive nature of testing poses a risk to birth, as it may cause miscarriage
Expecting abortion when abnormalities are detected due to lack of confidence in living with a disability	If abnormalities are detected, I would prefer abortion due to a lack of confidence in living with a disability and expected hardships
If the parents would suffer due to the presence of a disability, I would want the decision regarding testing or abortion to be left to them	I feel sad that my parents will be upset when they find out that I have a disability I accept testing to prevent causing distress or inconvenience to my parents due to a disability I entrust all decisions to my parents as my advocates and respect their choices Even if I am rejected due to a potential disability, I hold no resentment and wish for my parents' happiness
Potential for conflict between parents and children due to differing views on testing	When a child born after prenatal testing learns about it, a rift may form between them and their parents

Fear and sadness regarding the possibility of a fetus not being born due to test results

Some participants believed that depending on the results, the fetus might not be wanted, potentially leading to abortion. They felt fear and sadness at the thought of the fetus being rejected by their parents because of illness or disability. In addition, they recognized that the invasive nature of the tests could lead to miscarriage.

Expecting abortion when abnormalities are detected due to lack of confidence in living with a disability

This category was based on the subcategory "If abnormalities are detected, I would prefer the fetus be aborted due to a lack of confidence in living with a disability and expected hardships." Some participants expressed doubts about a future child's ability to lead fulfilling lives with a disability and advised that an abortion be performed under such circumstances.

If the parents suffer due to the presence of a disability, I would want the decision regarding testing or abortion to be left to them

In addition to feeling sad that the parents would be saddened if they knew the fetus had a disability, participants expressed that they accepted the idea of testing because they did not want parents to suffer or be inconvenienced due to a disability of the child. Furthermore, they held the view that they would entrust everything to the parents, who would act as advocates for the fetus and accept and respect the parents' decisions. Even if the parents were to abandon the child because of the possibility of a disability, they would not hold a grudge and desire universal happiness.

Potential for conflict between parents and children due to differing views on testing

This category was derived from the subcategory, "When a child born after prenatal testing learns about it, a rift may form between them and their parents." Some participants expressed concerns that differences in opinions regarding prenatal testing could affect parent–child relationships in the future.

Discussion

In the bioethics field, it is widely accepted that surrogate decision-makers should base their decisions solely on the interests of the patient rather than their own interests or those of third parties (Miyasaka 2018, 183). In this survey, respondents were asked to provide answers as surrogate decision-makers for a fetus. The nursing students were expected to respond in a manner that reflected the best interests of the fetus.

Nursing student's thoughts from the perspective of a surrogate decision-maker

- Benefits and disadvantages of prenatal testing for the fetus

The report of the expert committee on prenatal testing (including NIPT) from the Health Science Council's Science and Technology Committee indicates that prenatal testing can benefit the fetus by enabling in utero treatment or early postnatal medical intervention (Health Science Council, Science and Technology Committee 2021). Previous surveys of university students' attitudes toward prenatal diagnoses have reported positive perceptions, citing early detection of fetal disorders to improve treatment outcomes and prepare the most suitable postnatal care environments (Murakami et al. 2015). One category identified in this study, "A sense of security in understanding the fetus's health condition in advance," reflects these perceived benefits, assuming the pregnancy will be completed and that the fetus will benefit from prenatal testing.

Conversely, some respondents perceived prenatal testing as an examination that offered no benefit to the fetus, believing it was "meaningless for the birth of a fetus." These perceptions reflected concerns about potential disadvantages to the fetus, including the possibility of not being born based on parental decisions following test results.

Despite being asked to respond as the fetus's surrogate, participants tended to answer from the fetus's own perspective.

The recognition of alternative perspectives

While recognizing the benefits and disadvantages for the fetus aligned with the role of a surrogate decision-maker, some participants expressed alternative perspectives. For example, the theme "Potential for conflict between parents and children due to differing views on testing" highlights concerns about potential parent-child conflicts later in life. Previous interviews with women who underwent prenatal testing and gave birth to healthy children revealed that some mothers struggled with disclosing their testing decisions to their children (Onozawa et al. 2020), suggesting that prenatal testing may adversely affect parent–child relationships.

Additionally, themes such as "Expecting abortion when abnormalities are detected due to lack of confidence in living with a disability" and "If the parents would suffer due to the presence of a disability, I would want the decision regarding testing or abortion to be left to them" suggest an inclination to avoid the birth of a fetus. These perspectives appear to contradict the role of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus, which involves making decisions based on the fetus's best interests.

Potential contradictions and considerations

When considering prenatal testing from the standpoint of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus, participants acknowledged both benefits and disadvantages. However, some responses contradicted this role, highlighting an issue that needs to be addressed in nursing education. Several factors may explain these contradictory perceptions.

First, negative perceptions of disability have an impact. In post-war Japan, sterilization and abortion were legally permitted in cases where the birth of a child with a disability was anticipated with the aim of "preventing the birth of defective offspring from a eugenic perspective," as stated in Article 1 of the Eugenic Protection Act.

Later, the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, along with other organizations, advocated for the explicit inclusion of a "fetal clause" that would allow the abortion of fetuses with disabilities. However, this proposal was rejected due to opposition from people with disabilities and other groups (Matsubara 2000, 170-174). This historical context has nevertheless contributed to the persistence of negative perceptions regarding the birth of children with disabilities. A study conducted on university and graduate students revealed that negative stereotypes about people with disabilities, such as the belief that they "have low ability," persist in both implicit and explicit attitudes (Kurita et al. 2012). Similarly, our participants also shared a negative attitude toward being born with a disability.

A lack of awareness and interest in the rights and interests of the fetus was also at play. The growth, development, and survival of a fetus depend on the mother's health. With the advancement of medical technology, it has become possible for medical professionals and pregnant women to observe fetuses through ultrasound scans and other means. However, nursing students may have not had the opportunity to see a fetus firsthand, and there is a possibility that they perceive the fetus—an entity that is not visible and whose conception varies across countries—as an uncertain existence (Tsukahara 2014, 3-14).

A survey on women's attitudes toward the legal restrictions on abortion targeting women aged 20–24, including pregnant women and those who have given birth, found that low proportion of people believed that the rights of the fetus should take precedence over the rights of the mother across all groups, with particularly low support among students (Nire et al. 2015). In this study, few of the participants held the view that the rights of the fetus to life took precedence over a woman's right to choose, which may have influenced their responses based on the assumption that the fetus would not be born.

Third, the influence of the legal concept of "wrongful life" is a significant factor. The concept refers to a type of legal claim in which a child (usually through a guardian) argues that due to a medical professional's negligence—such as failing to diagnose a serious condition or failing to inform the parents—the child was born with severe disabilities, and that being born at all caused harm compared to not being born. (Sakai et al. 2016, 134-137; Pence 2000, 328). This concept seems to align with the findings of this study, which suggest that if parents choose to have the baby, the child will inevitably live with a disability, leading to suffering not only for the child but also the parents.

The importance of shifting perspectives

In the context of nursing education on prenatal testing, it is important to promote understanding of two key and often opposing considerations: nursing that respects pregnant individuals' self-determination and meets their needs, and, conversely, the fetal right to life. Educational content should include instruction on differing ethical perspectives, such as the pro-life stance, which emphasizes the fetus's right to life, and the pro-choice stance, which emphasizes a pregnant person's right to make autonomous decisions.

Learning to recognize and understand values and viewpoints different from one's own—rather than being confined by personal beliefs—fosters an attitude of respect and empathy toward the diverse individuals who are the focus of nursing practice. It has been noted that deliberately shifting one's perspective can be a useful strategy for gaining a more comprehensive view of a subject (Iida et al. 2021, 23). Previous studies involving university students have shown that intentionally adopting the viewpoints of others can lead to a broader understanding of a subject(Kuramoto 2022).

In the present study, participants were asked to think from the standpoint of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus. It is possible that for some participants, their own parent–child relationships influenced their thinking, or that setting aside their personal values and experiences proved difficult. Nevertheless, a notable outcome of this study was that participants were able to shift their perspective to that of a "fetal surrogate decision-maker," and consider the implications of both the birth and non-birth of the fetus. To provide nursing students with a broader perspective on prenatal testing, it is therefore necessary to develop educational content that encourages such multifaceted exploration.

Conclusions

The examination of prenatal testing from the perspective of a surrogate for the fetus enabled many of the nursing students to better recognize both the benefits and disadvantages for the fetus. The benefits they mentioned included allowing parents to understand a fetus's health condition before birth,

while disadvantages involved concerns about the impairment of the right to life and birth.

Some respondents expressed perspectives that contradicted the role of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus, such as favoring the avoidance of birth in certain cases. These contradictions were attributed to a low level of awareness and interest in fetal rights and interests among nursing students and negative perceptions of disability.

Overall, the results indicated that introducing the perspective of a surrogate decision-maker for the fetus in nursing education may help nursing students develop a broader understanding of prenatal testing. Moreover, when educating students on the ethical issues of prenatal testing, in addition to adopting nursing approaches that respect the position and rights of pregnant people, it is essential to provide learning opportunities that address the rights and interests of the fetus.

In future studies we may also investigate how the same nursing students could argue from different perspectives to more broadly understand some of the bioethical issues raised for each of the stakeholders involved in the provision of prenatal diagnostic services to the Japanese population.

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Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study.

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Editorial address, and all correspondence to:
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