



PRESIDENT DUTERTE'S DRUG WAR IN THE PHILIPPINES: AN ASSESSMENT

Wenifredo Delmonte Alagabia Jr

University of the Cordilleras, Baguio City Philippines

Graduate School, Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice Major in Criminology

Email: wenifredo.alagabia@yahoo.com

Contact: +63 9151361724; +63 9236836890

ABSTRACT

The drug war of President Rodrigo Duterte was the centerpiece of his campaign and arguably the rallying point and core of his presidency. Despite furtive efforts to wipe the Philippines clean of illegal drug trafficking, this war has still become a subject of controversy and domestic and international criticism. This study poses questions of whether this would have positive or negative implications to peace and order, as well as gauging its impact to Filipinos who are affected directly and indirectly.

Collateral damage with this kind of "war" has become a common occurrence. Often, innocent people are most vulnerable: citizens who belong to the poorest demography of the country.

It is the aim of this study to present factual data and interviews to quantify the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the war on drugs of the President. Perspectives and points of view of those involved in the implementation of the program are local officials from the most affected barangays in Metro Manila, specifically in Quezon City who were among the respondents of this study. Aspects such as the respondents' residency as well as their observations on the drug trade and crime rates before and during the Duterte administration were extracted to validate accomplishment reports or secondary data published by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

In summary, data revealed satisfactory results which is a clear validation that the drug war of the government was effectively and efficiently carried out by government security forces and other state actors. Corollary to this, it was clearly manifested that positive effects to peace and order were visible and can be reflected through the country's improving safety and security atmosphere.

This study presents the strong points of the war on drugs program of the current administration, hence, a powerful anchor towards the continuous implementation and a founded plea towards its support from the Filipino people.

Keywords: drug war, illegal drugs, PDEA, peace and order, war on drugs

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the Filipino people have been battling the war against the use and trade of prohibited drugs. It is that one fight that never runs out of fuel with every generation being the platform of newer and far-developed line of dangerous narcotics. Seemingly, it can never actually be won or that probably most have given up on their hopes to deal away with the enigma. It then encroached into Filipinos' social and economic activities, driven with several factors – i.e. social mobility afforded by the high-risk/high-rewards nature of the drug trade that induces one to embrace drug use and the ever-growing enterprise of drug dealing. Other factors would be the weakening of familial ties, fragmented traditional families or the set-up of estranged spouses affecting the emotional stability of their children who are prime candidates for peer influence. Resorting to drug use can also be attributed to unemployment, self-assessment of one's inclusion in the poverty sector, and the list goes on ad infinitum.

Reports show that shabu (local street name for methamphetamine hydrochloride, specifically crystal methamphetamine) addiction is the most significant drug problem in the Philippines. It was further reported that the said narcotic is the most widely trafficked illegal drug in the country, with the market for it continually expanding. A UN World Drug Report also declared the Philippines to have topped the list of countries in East Asia with the highest rate of methamphetamine use, with even the influential Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) taking note and expressing their concern about the proliferation of the drug problem and the alleged involvement of several high-ranking government officials in its trade. Worse, this is just one of the many form of illegal drugs that continue to find lucrative markets in the Philippines. The increase in number of people trading and using illegal drugs cannot be denied. The scope and breadth of the drug trade cannot be fully quantified as even the supposed-to-be isolated prison facilities were shown to be focal points for drug traffickers, most always in collusion with corrupt officials. The Philippines, as alleged, may be conservatively categorized as a narco-state prior to the drug war of President Duterte.

Emergent patterns of drug use in the contemporary world reflect the social disruptions of the second or contemporary wave of globalization, including "structural adjustment" strategies promoted by developed nations ostensibly intended to modernize developing nations, and the neo-liberal shift from government ownership and direction to the privatization of state industries and a reliance on market forces to control economic development (Appadurai, 2001; Goroux, 2004). One goal of neo-liberal policies promoted by Western nations and the development banks that have been so prominent during the second wave of globalization is the removal of all barriers to free trade allowing the unfettered flow of commodities across national boundaries. Among other effects these transformations, dismantled economic controls inadvertently weakening the safeguards, however ineffective, which served to stem the expansion of drug trafficking activities in the past" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 1994, p. 13). As a consequence, the flow of both legal and illegal drugs has increased dramatically in many areas despite simultaneous, and from the standpoint of expectations of the scale of state involvement in the economy, the contradictory promotion of drug control efforts (Andreas, 1995).

Although methods have improved, estimating the production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs in developing countries remains a highly problematic endeavor given limitations on data collection. It is known that patterns of drug use in developing nations vary by drug type and by region (U.N. Office on Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2003). While various drug control mechanisms have been established, analysis of recent trends "makes quite gloomy reading for those hoping to see elimination or significant reduction: the over-riding impression is one of stable or increasing trends at the global level in recent years. However, this stability masks dynamic changes at the national and regional level" (Forward Thinking on Drug Use, 2003).

There is extensive evidence of "drug-corruption" among government officials and employees from numerous countries. In Afghanistan, the illicit opium industry has been found to be "a massive source of corruption that undermines public institutions" (Byrd & Buddenberg, 2006, p. 1). Antonio Maria Costa, the United Nations anti-drug chief, reports that in Afghanistan police chiefs, governors, and various other government officials are profiting from the opium trade (Barker, 2006). Similarly, in Brazil, Arias (2006b, p. 51) documents the insidious ways that drug corruption "progressively undermines the rule of law, leads to higher levels of human rights abuses, and can pose profound challenges to democracy." Drug corruption was rampant in Colombia during the height of Pablo Escobar's rule as a key figure in the illicit cocaine trade during the 1980s. In dealing with officials, Escobar implemented an approach he called *placa o plomo* (silver or lead [bullets]) in which government representatives were given a choice between accepting a bribe or facing assassination (Singer, 2007).

Given these contentions and the negative impact of drug proliferation to society, the proponent of the study aims to present

a perspective on the effectiveness and efficiency of anti-drug efforts in the Philippines by observing its implementation and exploring the view point of barangay officials involved in the war on drugs.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

The research aimed at gauging the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the war on drugs program of President Duterte. Specifically, it sought to answer the following inquiries:

1. To determine the government's significant anti-drug accomplishments under President Duterte's administration in terms of:
 - 1.1 Number of anti-drug operations conducted;
 - 1.2 Drug personalities arrested;
 - 1.3 Value of dangerous drugs seized;
 - 1.4 Clandestine laboratories dismantled;
 - 1.5 Types of Drug seized in kilos or pieces:
 - 1.5.1 Shabu
 - 1.5.2 Cocaine
 - 1.5.3 Ecstasy
 - 1.5.4 Marijuana
 - 1.6 Drug surrenderees:
 - 1.6.1 Pushers
 - 1.6.2 Users
2. What are the observations of the barangay officials in the most drug-affected barangays in Quezon City regarding the drug trade and crime rate in their respective barangays before and during the implementation of President Duterte's drug war?
3. What policy recommendations can be proposed to further reduce illegal drug activities and crime rates and improve the implementation of drug war in the Philippines?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



The conceptual framework of the study presents the direction of the research. It represents significant variables that were subjected to interpretation and validation. Secondary data was obtained for the period of one (1) year regarding the results of the President's war on drugs as collated by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) – the leading government body mandated to implement the program. Furthermore, observations of respondents were assessed based on the barangay official's personal knowledge of the drug trade and crime rate in their respective barangays. Moreover, the study aimed at culminating this endeavor with providing policy proposals for the enhanced implementation of the drug war. Finally, the study will serve to validate how effective and efficient the war on drug is based on the peace and order condition of the country.

METHOD

The descriptive research design was adapted to provide a quantitative foundation on how respondents assess the implementation of government anti-drug initiatives and the peace and order brought about by the war on drugs. Secondary data or tallied reports and statistics by Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) on the war on drugs from 2016 - during the first year of President Duterte's presidency, was utilized to highlight accomplishments of the program.

The purposive sampling technique was used to determine barangays seriously affected by drugs. Barangay officials from the most affected barangays in Quezon City such as Holy Spirit, Baesa, Batasan Hills, Pinyahan, Sangandaan, Del Monte, San Roque, Pasong Putik Proper, Martin De Porres, and San Jose interviewed to establish the recent and current situation of the drug trade and crime rate in their respective communities.

To interpret the results of the interview conducted, axial coding was employed. Axial coding is a qualitative research technique that involves relating data together in order to reveal codes, categories, and subcategories ground within participants' voices within one's collected data. In other words, axial coding is one way to construct linkages between data. Axial coding has a historical relationship with grounded theory, which is a qualitative methodological framework that involves constantly comparing emergent themes within one's data set in order to make theoretical claims regarding one's communicative conduct. Coding, or the process of inductively locating linkages between data, may occur in myriad ways such as behaviors, events, activities, strategies, states, meanings, participation, relationships, conditions, consequences, and settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented hereunto are tallied results on the accomplishments of the war on drugs and the perceptions of respondents on the effectiveness of anti-drug operations, including its impact to peace and order.

Table 1. Anti- Drugs Accomplishment

ANTI-DRUG ACCOMPLISHMENT	
Anti-Drug Operations Conducted	34,077
Drug personalities arrested	28,056
Clandestine Laboratories Dismantled	10
Value of Dangerous Drugs Seized	18 billion

For year 2016, data show 34,077 anti- drug operations conducted. These successful operations were conducted by PDEA and other law enforcement agencies nationwide. In terms of frequency, the majority of anti-drug operations conducted are buy-bust operations, followed by serving of search warrants, test-buys, casing/surveillance operations, *in flagrante delicto*, checkpoint operations, searches incidental to lawful arrests, serving of warrant of arrest, routinary inspections, marijuana eradication, interdiction, recovery of dangerous drugs/CPECs and controlled delivery. From the total number of anti-drug operations conducted, 305 were listed as high impact operations. In comparison to anti-drug accomplishments in 2015, an increase of 36.08% or 25,041 more anti-drug operations was tallied in 2016.

Expounding on the aforementioned data, these anti-drug operations resulted to the arrest of 28, 056 *drug personalities* or pushers, possessors, users, drug den visitors, drug den owners, drug den employees, cultivators, protector/coddlers, couriers and financiers. Among the arrested drug personalities, 231 are government officials or 93 elected officials, 37 law enforcement personnel and 101 government employees. The total number of arrested drug personalities in comparison to 2015 data, surged upward by 44.38%.

Ten (10) clandestine laboratories were dismantled in 2016. All ten are considered as industrial laboratories or *megalabs* which can produce more than 50 kilos of shabu per production cycle; the other types of clandestine laboratories are: medium scale laboratory which can produce 10 to 50 kilos of shabu per production cycle, and small scale laboratory which can produce 1 to 10 kilos of shabu per production cycle. The dismantling of shabu laboratories shows a 400% increase as compared to 2015.

In the entirety of 2016, the value of dangerous drugs seized reached 18 Billion Pesos. This is a 237% increase as compared to 2015.

Table 2. Types of Drug Seized in Kilos/Pieces

TYPES OF DRUGS SEIZED IN KILOS/PIECES	
Shabu	2,210.52 Kilos and 1,805.71 liters of liquid shabu
Cocaine	70.60 Kg of cocaine and 1.86 liters of liquid cocaine
Ecstasy	21,736 Pieces
Dried Marijuana	1,154.62 Kilos

Data shows the types of drugs seized in kilos/pieces/liters: Shabu seizures amounted to 2,210.52 Kilograms as well as 1,805.71 liters of liquid shabu: a 319% increase as compared to 2015; Cocaine seizures reached 70.60 Kilograms, including 1.86 liters of liquid cocaine or a 514% increase compared to 2015; MDMA or ecstasy seizures amounted to 21,736 pieces - a 649% increase as compared to 2015; and Marijuana seizures reached 1,154.62 Kilograms, a recorded 170% increase in comparison to 2015 statistics.

Table 3. Drug Surrenderers

DRUG SURRENDERERS	
Pushers	74,649
Users	914,721

In 2016 alone, data shows that an unprecedented 989,415 drug personalities surrendered to the law enforcement agencies. These drug personalities were composed of 914,721 users and 74,694 pushers. Since the inception of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), this is the very first recorded instance of surrenders reaching such numbers, and this is largely credited to the unique strategy that the Philippine Government employed: the request for drug personalities to surrender voluntarily. As reflected, other law enforcement agencies individually visited 5,788,537 houses nationwide that resulted to the voluntary surrenders.

Table 4. Interview-Axial Coding

INDICATORS	FACTUAL CODING	AXIAL CODING
1. Tenure in position and residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "I was Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC) focal person before and have been elected in office for 3 years and have been a part of the barangay peace and order committee (BPC)." ➤ "This is my first term. I was just elected last 2018. But I have been volunteering in the barangay as the president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Most of the barangay officials were born and have been a resident in their respective barangay throughout their lives. ➤ The respondents were barangay chairmen and councilors who have been involved in the drug war efforts of the government specifically BADAC. ➤ Most of the officials have been on their 2nd or 3rd terms.

	<p>of liga ng mga purok for 13 years. I have been in this barangay since 1987.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “This was our first time and we were elected last 2018.” ➤ “Almost 1 year. I have been in this barangay since birth.” ➤ “I have been in office for 1 year. Prior to my position, I have been a councilor for 5 years and have been a resident for the past 34 years.” ➤ “I have been a chairman for the past 5 years and have been a resident here since birth.” ➤ “I have been a councilor and chairman for the past 18 years. I have been a resident here since birth.” 	
<p>2. Status of drug trade before and during drug war implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “Before, the drug situation was worse and crime rate was high; now, when there was already a barangay drug clearing program such as "tokhang", we were able to identify pushers, users and drug dens. As to drugs, it is 70 to 80% rampant and crime rate is 50 to 60% rampant before the Duterte administration. Most of the crimes recorded are theft and pick-pocketing. Now, drugs is only at 40% because pushers are apprehended and users are provided counseling.” ➤ “It was reduced down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Drug affection in the selected barangay were from 50 to 90% before the implementation of drug war. ➤ During the implementation of the drug war, drug trade was reduced by 80 - 90%.

	<p>to 80%, with 20% of them still using drugs.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “Before, we had significant numbers of users and pushers and you can see them in the streets. They are very active and you can recognize them. It is like selling and eating peanuts anytime of the day. Some come from different places. Now, when “tokhang” was implemented we had significant drug surrenderees and it was reduced by 90%.” ➤ “Before, we had significant numbers of drug users and pushers because of the excessive supply of drugs. Now the drug problem has been reduced by 75% to 80%.” ➤ “We were considered to be the #1 most drug infested barangay. Drug supply was reduced by 50%.” ➤ “Drug affectation is now at 15%.” ➤ “Before, we never knew that we had the worst drug problem until the new president was elected.” 	
3. Status of crime rate before and during drug war implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “It is a fact. The crime rates went down because of the efforts of the DILG to implement BADAC.” ➤ “Before the Duterte administration, the crime rate was high, especially theft and other petty crimes. Now that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Crime rate before the implementation of the drug war was at its all-time high although no estimate or numerical value was mentioned by the interviewees. ➤ During the implementation of the drug war the crime rate was brought down to

	<p>Duterte is here and he initiated the drug war, it was reduced, at some point it even went down to 0%.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “Before, crime rates are high but now it was reduced however, riding in tandem cannot be eliminated; most of them coming from Novaliches and Valenzuela.” 	<p>as low as 0%.</p>
<p>4. Number of drug surrenderees before and during the drug war implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “At first, we had 246 surrenderees; now at the end of 2018, 674 surrenderees. Even PDEA, PNP and BADAC admit that drugs cannot be eliminated but can only be reduced.” ➤ “Before Duterte, we do not have that kind of program; now we have 1400 drug surrenderees.” ➤ “Before there were at least 100 surrenderees/user; now we only have 7 under the supervision of BADAC.” ➤ “Before I assumed office last July 2 2018, there were no records regarding BADAC implementation. A list of drug personalities (10) were only provided last January and have had 3 surrenderees graduated from the program.” ➤ “Before, none. Now, 150 surrenderees. Around 20 graduated from the program.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Due to the non-implementation of BADAC before the Duterte Administration, some barangays do not have records of drug surrenderees; some have records with a range of 10 to 150 drug surrenderees and personalities. ➤ During the implementation of the drug war, drug surrenderees were significantly increased, reaching as much as 1400 in one barangay.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The President's war on drugs program, on its first year, has been proven effective given statistical data and documentary evidence of its illegal drugs seizures, drug den dismantling and cases filed against users, pushers and manufacturers.
2. Drug trade in the barangay level was at its worst before the implementation of the war on drugs and was only significantly reduced during the program's implementation.
3. Crime rates mostly related to illegal drugs have been proliferating at an unprecedented rate before the implementation of the drug war and during its implementation it was noticeable that crime rate was also significantly reduced. Although some petty crimes are still recorded, heinous crimes remain to be insignificant.
4. Due to non-implementation of the Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC) before the Duterte administration, some barangays have no records of drug surrenderees or personalities; during the implementation of the drug war, the number drug surrenderees and personalities reached figures of over a thousand for each barangay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government has to further intensify its campaign against illegal drugs specifically geared towards big time pushers and manufacturers instead of the more vulnerable sections of the society who are plagued by the menace of illegal drugs.
2. Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC) implementation and monitoring must be strictly implemented on all barangays to ensure continuous suppression of the drug trade and drug related crimes.
3. Rehabilitation facilities across the country must be fully utilized and ensure that apprehended drug users are rehabilitated and reintegrated in the society to become productive citizens.
4. There must be proper accounting of drug surrenderees and personalities duly verified and validated by competent agencies. The program they will undergo must be properly monitored to determine success rate in order to allow their reintegration to normal society.
5. Barangay officials should be given proper and frequent trainings and seminars to remind and equip them for their role in the implementation of the government's efforts to eliminate illegal drugs in the Philippines.
6. Government agencies involved in the implementation of the war on drugs such as the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) must continuously bridge and synergize with local communities such as barangays, municipalities or cities in drafting and strictly implementing ordinances specifically addressing the illegal drug trade and drug related crimes.

References

- [1] Caulkins, J. P. (2000). *Measurement and analysis of drug problems and drug control efforts*. *Criminal justice*, 4, 391-449.
- [2] Caulkins, J. P. (2002). *Law enforcement's role in a harm reduction regime*. *War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Human Rights*, 305-31.
- [3] Cohen, M. A. (2000). *Measuring the costs and benefits of crime and justice*. *Criminal justice*, 4(1), 263-315.
- [4] Cowan, B. W. (2011). *Forward-thinking teens: The effects of college costs on adolescent risky behavior*. *Economics of education review*, 30(5), 813-825.
- [5] International Narcotics Control Board. (2006). *Annual report: Regional highlights*. Press release #3. Vienna, Austria: Vienna Information Centre.
- [6] Goroux, H. (2004). *The terror of neoliberalism: Cultural politics and the promise of democracy*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
- [7] Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) *Annual Accomplishment Report 2016*.
- [8] Rhodes, W., Layne, M., Johnston, P., & Hozik, L. (2000). *What America's Users Spend on Illegal Drugs: 1988-1998*. Abt Associates.
- [9] Shishkin, P., & Crawford, D. (2006). *In Afghanistan, heroin trade soars despite US aid*. *Wall Street Journal*, 1.
- [10] Singer, M. (2008). *Drugs and development: the global impact of drug use and trafficking on social and economic development*. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19(6), 467-478.
- [11] United Nations Office on Drugs, & Crime. (2005). *2005 World drug report (Vol. 2)*. United Nations Publications.