

The Tirtir Economy: An Ethnography of Food Recycling among Older Adults in an Urban Informal Settlement

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Abstract: Urban informal settlements are the most deprived when it comes to achieving human capital development because of poor economic growth and weak governance. As such, informal settlers are made even more vulnerable to chronic poverty, and it's associated with risks like food insecurity. In the context of urban informal settlement in Manila, residents address food insecurity by resorting to the consumption of scavenged food locally known as “*tirtir*”. Rooted from the Filipino term “*tira-tira*” which translates to leftover, *tirtir* has become a norm among the urban poor to combat hunger. The study then captures the resiliency to food insecurity of the older adults in an urban informal settlement through their participation in the *tirtir* economy. This study specifically explores (a) the older adults' concept of food security; (b) the lived experiences of the older adults with food recycling; and (c) the contexts that influenced the older adults to practice food recycling. Using focused ethnography, the study argues that the older adults' participation in the *tirtir* economy is motivated by their performance of their social roles within the household as caregiver and primary food contributor. These roles are exacerbated by the phenomenon of missing second generation such that the older adults are catapulted to care for their grandchildren as their own children have left them in their care for various socio-economic reasons. This paper concludes with a reframing of the concept of food security by utilizing the descriptions and perceptions of the informants which highlight local concepts of *gutom*, *sapat*, and *malasakit*.

Keywords: food insecurity, food recycling, older adults

INTRODUCTION

The cumulative emergence of informal settlements is rooted from the low extent of humanitarian assistance from the local government (Marx, Stoker, & Suri, 2013). As of 2010, Metro Manila harbored an estimate of 4 million informal settlers out of 11.8 million of the entire urban population (Ballesteros, 2010). Included in this data are the residents of Barangay Matatag² in which around 60,000 reside (Mercado, 2016). Barangay Matatag is a 52-hectare reclaimed area situated in the estuary of Pasig River and Manila Bay. As a vulnerable sector, the residents are exposed to a filthy environment where inland feces, *burak*³, and trashes are apparent. Flooding also occurs frequently because of the poor sewage system within the area. Behind the hazardous condition that designates Barangay Matatag, food insecurity remains the primary issue for the residents.

In areas where unemployment is high, income is low, and social assistances are lacking, the consumption of low nutritional food remains to be rampant (Buted & Ylagan, 2014). This is common among older adults as they are incapable to maintain a livelihood. Due to their inability to buy commoditized food, they resort to the consumption of scavenged food from notable fast-food chains and restaurants. This alternative food source is widely known as “*pagpag*” which means “*shake off the dust and dirt*” (Guevara, 2005).

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² A pseudonym for the locale.

³ *Burak* is a local term for mud.

In Barangay Matatag, it is called “*tirtir*,” which is rooted from the Filipino term “*tira-tira*” or leftover. *Tirtir* has become an informal livelihood in Barangay Matatag as it enabled food insecure families to combat hunger. As a sanitary belief, the residents wash, boil, and recook *tirtir* before consuming it.

From the growing academic literatures on food insecurity, studies on food scavenging or food recycling in the Philippines remains to be limited. Most of the gathered literatures were based on the South African region (Kibera, 2015; Kimani-Murage et al., 2014; Milton et al., 2014). In other contexts, women and children were mostly the participants of the study. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide a community level study on the resiliency of the older adults to food insecurity through their participation in the *tirtir* economy. In this paper, it captures the social role of the older adults as caregiver and primary food contributor within the household.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed qualitative design, specifically focused on ethnography. Data collection and inquiry were executed through fieldworks. The researcher stayed in Barangay Matatag from mid-June 2017 to mid-July 2017 and had ocular visits to fill-in data gaps.

Research Setting and Informants

The research setting is situated in the capital of the Philippines – Manila. Barangay Matatag is selected as a specific research site because a.) the area is at increased risk of health and food insecurity (Gonzalez, 2015), and b.) there is a high number of *tirtir* consumers. As an urban informal settlement, the residents suffer from poor amenities, such as latrines, electricity, and sewage system. Additionally, the area is vulnerable to disasters because due to its location which is near the seaport.

The researcher interviewed twenty (20) older adults and (2) *tirtir* sellers. For the informant selection, this study employed purposive sampling method. The older adult informants were selected based on the following criteria: a) aged fifty-five 55 and above, b.) *tirtir* consumer, and c.) lives in Barangay Matatag. Given that *tirtir* is a social stigmatized food, some were reluctant to be interviewed. With almost fifty (50) older adults that the researcher has conversed to, only twenty (20) older adults affirmed that they consume *tirtir*. Thus, leading to such number of informants. On the other hand, two (2) *tirtir* sellers were only present in Barangay Matatag in which both were interviewed.

Data Gathering Techniques

Building a rapport among the residents of Barangay Matatag was the initial strategy of the researcher to be familiarized within the area and find possible key informants. This was executed during the first week of the fieldwork. Also, every after fieldwork in Aplaya, the researcher went to the market and converse among the *tirtir* sellers. The daily engagement of the researcher has benefitted to the production of an informative and honest response from the informants. After building rapport, data gathering was executed during the second and third week of the fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to keep the researcher prominent on the important questions needed to be asked for the study. Averagely, interviews lasted for twenty (20) minutes. Every after fieldwork, the researcher summed-up all the important events for the day and write it using a field note template. The field note template contains the following labels: time, date, location, categories, characters involved, observation, analysis, and reflection.

For the participant observation, the researcher stayed in the market and joined with the selling of *tirtir*. To further examine the process of *tirtir* preparation before it is carried to Barangay Matatag, the researcher went to Moriones and accompanied with the recooking and packing of *tirtir*. This helped the researcher understand the dynamics of food recycling in Barangay Matatag.

For the data analysis, audio recordings were manually transcribed using Microsoft Word. Then, the transcriptions are sorted and analyzed through closed coding in a qualitative data analysis software – MAXQDA 12.

Ethical Considerations

The participation of the target informants was entirely voluntary. The researcher discussed the overview of the study among the informants. Informed consent was conversed to let the informants be knowledgeable that a.) they may use a pseudonym to secure their identity, b.) they may not answer some of the questions that are too hard or personal, c.) they may stop to participate at any point if their side wishes, and d.) they are free to ask questions about the study. Before conducting the interview, the researcher asked for the informants' permission to record it. Lastly, the researcher ensured that all informants were treated with utmost respect while conversing with them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indicators of Food Insecurity among Older Adults

Poverty related surveys indicate that there is an increasing trend on hunger and malnutrition incidences among older adults in urban households (Alexandra, 2009; Braun, 2010). Household food insecurity refers to the inability of the household member/s to purchase sufficient and nutritious food. Divided based on the themes that have emerged in the interviews, this section presents the barriers to food security among older adults in Barangay Matatag: (a.) *Pinag-aralan*: Inopportunity to Employment, (b.) *Pagdamay*: Household Food Allocation, (c.) *Kawalan*: Loss of Dependent, (d.) *Panghihina*: The Experience of Ageing, and (e.) *Sakuna*: The Impact of Natural Disasters.

Pinag-aralan: Inopportunity to Employment

United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (2015) affirmed that formal schooling is vital for the achievement of human capital. Since majority of the urban poor are unable to finish the imposed education, this highly affects their access to sufficient household income. Table 1 presents the linkage between the attained education of the informants and their daily income. According to Department of Labor and Employment (2017), the minimum wage in NCR is P454 per day in which only one (1) of the informant was able to meet such. Averagely, the budget for food of the informants is 150 php per day. This is inadequate as majority of them belong to a large household size. A breadwinner of the family, Reynaldo Cena, said "*Yung sa gutom talaga ay 'yung kahirapan ng buhay, talagang wala kang pagkikitaan, talagang gugutumin ka. Kaya ang gutom ay isang kadahilanan din sa kakapusan ng kita*" [Hunger is a hardship of life. If you do not have any source of income, you will get hungry. Hunger is an outcome of insufficient money]. Another, Marieta Vecina, a junk collector, said "*Wala naman kaming trabaho na talagang mapagkukunan ng pagkain namin araw-araw kaya pina-pasukan ko na lang 'yung pangangalakal*" [We do not have a job that will surely sustain our food everyday, so I resort to collecting junk]. The older adults still work despite of their retirement age to contribute to the household food needs. Given that Barangay Matatag is subjected to limited employment opportunities, the older adults undertake "heavy" jobs such as collecting junk and catching fish to satisfy the hunger of the other household members. The small amount of income that the older adults have earned led them to settle for cheap and low nutritious food.

Table 1: Educational Attainment and Daily Income of the Informants

Informants	Educational Attainment	Source of income	Household income per day	Budget for food per day
Leonora	Elementary	Vendor	P700 - P1,000	P100
Marieta	Elementary	Junk collector	P80 - P150	P100
Rosalia	High school level	Depending on children's income	P400	P150

Florencia	Elementary level	Depending on children's income	P300	P150
Marlyn	High school	Vendor	P420	P200
Salvacion	Elementary level	Depending on children's income	P300	P150
Romeo	High school level	Depending on children's income	P150	P50
Gloria	High school level	Depending on children's income	P430	P120
Irineo	Elementary	Depends on pension	N.A.	P150
Imelda	Elementary	Vendor, junk collector	P300	P150
Felix	Elementary	Fisherman	P300	P150
Reynaldo	High school	Fisherman	P300	P150
Elsa	Elementary	Laundress	P300	P100
Carmelita	No education	Depending on children's	P150	P50
Fely	Elementary level	Depending on children's income	P400	P300
Reynaldo	No education	Vendor	P200	P170
Nelia	No education	Depending on children's	P200	P150
Venecio	High school	Junk collector	P100	P80
Pacita	Elementary level	Depending on children's income	P50	P50
Josefina	Elementary	Vendor	P200	P100

In other cases, ten (10) of the informants depend on the income of the other household member. When informants are asked on the primary cause of hunger, majority of them claimed the lack of employment opportunities. As tatay Romeo said, "*Kaming mga matatanda, wala na kaming makukuhanan ng pera*" [We older adults, we do not have any source of money]. The older adults think of themselves as burden because of seeking help from their children to sustain their food needs.

Pagdamay and Malasakit: Household Food Allocation

Several researches (Anyanwu, 2013; Meenakshi & Ray, 2000) indicate that large household size is linked to poverty. During the first week of fieldwork, the researcher noticed the high number of pregnant women in the community. In the case of an informant, Venecio Acabido - her daughter became pregnant at the age of 15. Instead of solely focusing on the food needs of the family, Venecio also worries on the needs of his grandchild.

⁴ *Pagdamay* is a Filipino moral value that pertains to the ability of an individual to understand other person's experience. In Gonzalez' (2015) study, the concept of *pagdamay* is shown through the older adults' role as food contributor among their grandchildren.

⁵ *Malasakit* literally translates to compassion. It is a strong feeling of sympathy and concern for someone who is suffering.

The expense for their food needs became insufficient which led them to consumption of low nutritious food. In Barangay Matatag, large household size is common because of the locals' inaccessibility to premarital counseling and contraceptives. Averagely, the informants belong to a household size of 5 and above. In the studies of Ablaza (2016), Diamante (2015), and Payumo (2016) in the locale, having 5 or more household size in Barangay Matatag is challenging as the resource providers need to make sure that every household member has food to eat. As such, the older adults are pushed to work even if they are physically incapable. Reynaldo Cena, who belongs to a 12-member household size, said that being unable to give food or money for the family is a form of *hiya* (shyness) as he claimed himself as the *padre de pamilya*⁶. Tatay Reynaldo said "...dahil para makakain. Eh mamaya mamatay sa gutom, isa pang kahiyaan namin sa katulad ko dito sa pamilya ko. [...for us to eat food. Later on, we will die because of hunger, it is a shame for us like me in the family].

As similar with the previous studies conducted on food insecurity in Barangay Matatag, findings show that the older adults prioritize more the food needs of their grandchildren (Ablaza, 2016; Bitac, 2017; Gonzalez, 2015; Payumo, 2016). As a form of *malasakit* and *pagdamay*, they lessen or sacrifice their food consumption for the sake of their grandchildren. They believe that the younger ones are vital for the household's work force to generate economic support in the future. As Josefina Balbin said, "*Hindi nga ako makakain kasi wala (pagkain) 'yung apo ko. 'Di ako gaano nakakakain dahil iniisip ko 'yung mga apo ko na pumapasok kaya wala 'kong gana* [I cannot eat because my grandchild has no (food). I do not eat much because I think of my grandchild who goes to school; hence I do not have the appetite].

In some cases, some older adults disrupt their meal patterns by not complying with the three-times-a-day intake. In Irineo Oliva's case, he only eats twice a day while his grandchildren eat thrice. He said, "*Ako, dalawang beses lang ako kumain dahil sa umaga kape ang iniinom ko.*" [I only eat twice because in the morning I drink coffee]. Marieta Vecina, a mother of 12 and a grandmother of 3, shares the same sentiment "*Yung mga apo ko, mga anak ko, makakain sila kahit ako... kahit ako, hindi na.*" [My grandchildren and children must be able to eat, even if I won't]. More so, when the researcher gave Reynaldo Baracel a bag of food, he automatically gave it to his grandchildren. Even if he is tired from work, he neglects his hunger for the sake of his grandchildren. At the middle of the interview with him, he said "*Tingnan mo 'yung mga bata, nagkakainan, tuwang-tuwa. Kaya tuwang-tuwa rin ako.*" [Look at the children who are eating, they are happy and because of this, I'm also happy]. The older adults' usual role in the household is to prepare food for the family. Eleven (11) out of twenty (20) informants affirmed that this was their role in the household.

Kawalan: Loss of Dependent

Given the commonality of large household size in Barangay Matatag, enough income earners must be present in a household to meet each member's food needs. However, in the case of the informants, four (4) female older adults claimed that they started to feel the difficulties of purchasing food when their husband died. The females have a heavy reliance towards the males since they are mostly the breadwinner of the family. Josefina Balbin, a plastic bag vendor, said "*Hirap kami. Dati nung buhay 'yung asawa ko, hindi ako ganito.*" [We struggle. Before, when my husband is still alive, I am not like this]. In the case of Salvacion Portugal, a housewife, she started consuming *tirtir* when her husband died because of the lack of budget for food. She said, "*Simula nung nawala 'yung asawa ko. Minsan pag wala kaming ulam, sasabihin ko sa mga apo ko, ito na lang ulamin natin [tirtir] para madali (lutuín)* [When my husband died, when we do not have any food to eat, I tell my grandchildren that *tirtir* will be our food because it is easy to cook]. *Eh kasi papakuluan mo lang 'yun tapos lalagyan mo ng miswa o gulay.*" [Because you only boil it and put noodles or vegetables], she continued. In the case of another informant, Marieta Vecina, she started to scavenge for food when her husband lost his job. Thus, the absence of male income earners in the household led the female older adults settle on low budget food.

In other cases, the informants' own children have left them, leaving the older adults to take care and provide the needs of their grandchildren. As such, the older adults solely struggle to sustain the household's food needs. Despite the difficulty, the older adults uphold their role as food contributor and primary caregiver within the household. Of the 20 (twenty) informants, 11 (eleven) affirmed that they were the head of the household who provide economic support for the other household members. Given that the older adults need healthcare assistance because of their age, they give more focus on the primary needs of their grandchildren.

⁶ *Padre de pamilya* literally translates to "head of the family". In this context, it reflects the role of a father as the main earner of money to support the family.

Panghihina: The Experience of Aging

The older adults are more likely to feel painful sensation within their body as their age is susceptible to energy and nutritional deficiency (Health Council of the Netherlands, 2011). Since the older adults are accustomed to eating small quantity of food, their notion of “healthy” differs from its actual definition. Based on the belief of the informants, an older adult must eat less to avoid sickness. Gloria Dela Cruz said, “*Parang ‘di na rin ako makahinga kung marami akong kinakain* [I can’t breathe when I eat a lot of food]. Salvacion Portugal shares the same sentiment, “*Ay! Ako isang scoop lang ng kanin kasi pag matanda ka na, dapat ‘di ka na kumakain ng madami. Delikado na.*” [Ay! I only eat one scoop of rice because when you’re already old, you cannot eat a lot. It’s dangerous]. They automatically perceive that they must eat less, and the younger ones must eat more. In a typical meal setup, it is already understood that a large portion of food must be distributed to their grandchildren. As such, their self-regarded health has led them to minimize their food intake, making them food insecure.

Sakuna: The Impact of Natural Disasters

When I entered Salvacion’s house, I saw a puddle beside their living room. I asked where it came from and she said, “*Galing kasi ‘yan sa mga nakaraang baha na ‘di na humupa*” [It came from the previous floods which haven’t subside]. During my interview with her, a heavy rain and series of lightning stroke which distracts me to converse with her. Non-stop water is dripping from their roof. After the interview, I passed through flooded streets and struggled to come back at ate Marie’s place⁷.

Thirteen (13) of the twenty (20) informants affirmed that the frequent food they consume are fish and mussels such that Barangay Matatag is located along the seaport. Accordingly, in the case of Salvacion Portugal, they have easy access to food as two (2) of her children are fisherman. Thus, it does not only give them access to food, it also provides them livelihood such as *pangingisda* (catch fish) and *paglilinis ng tahong* (cleaning of mussels). Given this, natural disasters are big threat among the locals because it highly affects their access to food and livelihood. Fely Ocale, whose husband is a fisherman said, “*Kung minsan walang kinikita sa dagat lalo parating na ‘yung bagyo, July na.*” [Sometimes there is no income in the sea, most especially when the typhoon is coming.]. Since the price of fish increases during typhoons, the locals resort to alternative means. A seller of *tirtir*, kuya Ato⁸ said “*Nagbabase rin kami sa isda eh. Kapag ang isda mahal, ‘yan mabilis ‘yang maubos... Pero pag ‘yung mura, mag-aantay ka talaga matapos hanggang mga seven o’clock*” [When the price of fish is expensive, *tirtir* is easily sold-out... But when it’s cheap, you will really have to wait until seven o’clock]. The older adults are at risk of poor nutritional status because food insecurity in Barangay Matatag worsens during disasters. When Fely’s husband has no catch, she asks for *tirtir* from her niece who works at a fast-food chain. Similarly, Reynaldo Cena, a fisherman, consumes *tirtir* instead of fish during typhoons. He said, “*Kung wala kami pang ulam na isda, kung masama ang panahon, yun! Madalas kami kumain nyan.*” [If we do not have fish as our food, if there is a bad weather, there! We frequently eat that].

The Perceived Important Food

Since rice is a staple food for the Filipinos (Bordey et al., 2016), rice is presented as the most important food for the older adults. For them, rice is considered as affordable that can easily be purchased. Even if there is no viand available, the locals will just mix it with soy sauce, sugar, or salt to easily satisfy their hunger. Fely Ocale said, “*Magtiis. Bibiling asin asukal sa kanin, ganun lang*” [Just suffer. Purchase salt and sugar for the rice, that’s all]. In some cases, they will cook rice as *lugaw* (porridge) for them to not purchase a viand anymore.

The second most important food for the older adults is vegetables. The informants believe that by consuming such, it will provide the right nutrients needed by their bodies. Not only this, they perceive that vegetables are more affordable than meat and fish for a home-cooked viand. In Barangay Matatag, the 10 php pack of mixed vegetables that is sold on streets is common among the locals.

The third most important food for the older adults is fish. It was mentioned that Barangay Matatag is located along the seaport which therefore gives the locals easy access to sea food. Not only by its convenience, fish is considered as nutritious for the informants.

⁷ Field note #12, June 27, 2017

⁸ A pseudonym of the informant.

The fourth most important food for the older adults is bread partnered with coffee. They consider this as an affordable food that would easily satisfy their hunger. This is commonly consumed by the informants during breakfast. With coffee, it allows their stomach to be warmed. Instant coffee is also a common food item that they borrow from sari-sari stores.

Table 2: Important Food for the Informants

Food	Indications
Rice	<i>“Dahil ‘yan ang pang araw-araw na kinakain eh.”</i> [Because that is an everyday food].
Vegetables	<i>“Kasi ang gulay, maganda sa katawan ‘yun. Pampataas ng buhay ‘yun eh”</i> [Because vegetables are good for the body. It enables you to live longer]. Tatay Irineo Oliva
Fish	<i>“Madalas kong kainin na ulam ay ‘yung isda eh kasi ‘yung mga anak ko mangingisda eh.”</i> [I frequently eat fish because my children are fisherman]. Nanay Salvacion Portugal
Bread and Coffee	<i>“Tinapay at kape, ‘yun ang pinaka pagkain ko”</i> [Bread and coffee, that is what I eat the most]. Nanay Carmelita Pascual

Tirtir as an Informal Livelihood in Barangay Matatag

Food scavenging is the act of collecting discarded food from fast food chains or restaurants. Food recycling, on the other hand, is the process of re-cooking the scavenged food to make it edible and sanitary for the locals. In Barangay Matatag, there are two (2) distinct scavenged food that are being sold: 1.) fruits and vegetables, and 2.) meat. The scavenged fruits and vegetables are usually gathered in Divisoria then it is sold again in Barangay Matatag. Focusing on the scavenged meat, the locals call it by the term *“tirtir”* which is rooted from the Filipino term, *tira-tira* or leftover.

Around midnight, fast food chains and restaurants start to arrange and dump tons of garbages. The scavengers then will collect it with an exchange of money or cigarettes for the fast-food crew. With all the garbage collected, the scavengers only choose the food scraps or junk materials⁹ that can still be eaten or sold. In terms of food, they specifically collect the chicken and pork pieces which are not *maamoy* (smelly), as what they described. In a day, the scavengers collect an average of thirteen (13) pails of scavenged food or *“tirtir”*. After, the collected *tirtir* will be delivered around seven o’clock in Moriones¹⁰ to sell among the sellers of Barangay Matatag for P150 per pail.

Kuya Ato is one of those who buy these pails of *tirtir* from the scavengers. Usually, the process of washing, cooking, and packing of *tirtir* starts at 8 o’clock in the morning. Kuya Ato’s wife and niece also help him with the preparation of *tirtir*. The *tirtir* is firstly placed in a large pail then it is washed through faucet water. After, it is cooked in a reused oil from fast food chains. The oil is dark in color which means it has been used several times. When the meat is already cooked, it is placed in a pail where Kuya Ato will categorize it based from the *malaman* (meaty) and *mabuto* (boney). According to Kuya Ato, he still overlooks the importance of safety of the food they sell because it may affect the demand of buyers. Kuya Ato pinpoints that the small bones of chicken, half-eaten burgers, and nuggets cost 10 php per plastic. The chicken and pork meat, on the other hand, is placed in a bigger plastic which cost 20 php.

I find it difficult to pack the pieces of *tirtir* because of the oil’s slippery texture. Ate Merly¹¹, the niece of kuya Ato, told me that packing *tirtir* is matter of experience. In an hour, I only packed around 10 pieces of *tirtir*. Meanwhile, they pack a total of 150 pieces daily (50 pcs of 10 php plastics; 100 pcs of 20 php plastics). She told me that their business has been running for almost 15 years already.

⁹ Examples of junk materials are aluminum, paper, concrete, plastics, and glass.

¹⁰ Moriones street is located in Tondo, Manila. It is 20 minutes away from Barangay Matatag through a tricycle ride.

¹¹ A pseudonym of the informant.

More so, I noticed that there is a high demand of tirtir in Moriones as many people arrive at kuya Ato's house to buy it. Instead of tirtir, the people call it "batchoy" which is derived from a name of a Filipino dish¹².

The preparation of *tirtir* usually ends at 11:30 in the morning, then it is placed in a tricycle to deliver it to Barangay Matatag. Kuya Ato will place the 20 packs of chicken *tirtir* in a bag for his *suki*¹³ who owns a "chicken pastel"¹⁴ business. 130 packs of *tirtir* are placed in a small table to display it along the market. Selling usually starts at 1 o'clock in the afternoon and ends at 6 o'clock in the evening. Both sellers said that they earn around 1,000 php daily. Regularly, *tirtir* are sold out because of its high demand in Barangay Matatag. Kuya Ato chose Barangay Matatag as his place of selling because of the populated poor people within the area. He said, "*Malaki ang barangay na 'to kaya maraming tao tsaka mas... parang maraming mahirap dito na kayang budgetin 'yung pera*". [The barangay is big hence there are many people, and also... there are a lot of poor who can budget money].

Resiliency to Food Insecurity through Food Recycling

The culture that is evident in Barangay Matatag has pushed the older adults to practice food recycling. Most of the informants claimed that Barangay Matatag has introduced them to *tirtir*. As they notice that other people consume *tirtir*, they already consider it as a socially accepted food. Even if they are mindful of its risks, they continue to consume it because of its affordability. Food recycling serves as the older adults' adaptive strategy to combat hunger and remain resilient to food insecurity in Barangay Matatag.

The Perceived Health Status

In a study conducted by the nutrition students in Barangay Matatag during 2014, findings reveal that there were no health-related diseases attributed from the consumption of *tirtir*. The poor health status evident within the locals is not traced from *tirtir* but rather the environment of Barangay Matatag. In relation to this study, fifteen (15) of the twenty (20) informants affirmed that they have not feel stomach pain or any health risk with regards to their consumption of *tirtir*. The other five (5) asserted that they experienced vomiting and had a diarrhea. As a sanitary belief, the informants boil and recook *tirtir* before consuming it. They believe that *tirtir* is edible if it is reheated. The most common dish that they cook with *tirtir* is adobo¹⁵. In some cases, the older adults mix it with vegetables.

Table 3: Health Status Attributed to Consuming *Tirtir*

Themes	Indications
Safe	<p>"Hindi ko yan batid dahil sa oras ng kainan wala naman kaming nararamdaman. Parang natural lang na karne. Parang natural lang" [I'm not mindful (with the effect of tirtir) because during meal time, we don't feel anything. It's like a natural meat. It's like natural.]</p> <p>Fely Ocale</p> <p>"Araw-araw 'yun, iba ng iba kaya masasabi mo ring malinis. Pinagaagawan din ng mga tao." [Everyday, (the stocks of tirtir) changes thus it's clean. People are taking it by force.]</p>
Not Safe	<p>"Dati nung binigyan nila ako, sinikmura ako. Sumakit 'yung tyan ko. In-LBM ako." [Before, when they gave me (tirtir), . My stomach hurt. I had an LBM.]</p> <p>Nanay Elsa Espino</p> <p>"Masakit ang sikmura ko. Na-ano ano ako sa hospital noon. Tinanong ako ng doctor kung anong kinakain ko, tirtir ang sinabi ko. Masama raw 'yun sabi ng doktor" [My stomach hurts. I went to the hospital before. The doctor asked me what did I eat, I said tirtir. The doctor said it's bad.]</p> <p>Marlyn Jenelazo</p>

¹² Field Note # 24, July 23, 2017

¹³ *Suki* is a local term for regular customers.

¹⁴ Chicken pastel is a creamy Filipino dish that is mixed with vegetables. The Muslims are the common buyers of *tirtir* who cook it into chicken pastel.

¹⁵ Adobo is a popular Filipino dish that is marinated in vinegar, soy sauce, and garlic.

With the five (5) informants who experienced stomach pain because of *tirtir*, four (4) of them continue to consume it due to lack of budget for food. Mindful of its risks, they are still pushed to practice food recycling to satisfy the hunger of their grandchildren. Thirteen (13) of the informants affirmed that they fed *tirtir* among their grandchildren. Marlyn Jenelazo, a grandmother of two, said that she cooks *tirtir* for the *baon*¹⁶ of her grandchildren. According to her, *tirtir* is a “*pang matagalang pagkain*” (long-term food).

The Perceived Benefits of Food Recycling

Tirtir has not just become a main source of livelihood in Barangay Matatag, but as an affordable, delicious, and convenient staple food for the locals. The high demand of it indicates that *tirtir* has become a socially acceptable food in Barangay Matatag. Asserted by an informant, Rosalia Rentuza, the price of *tirtir* increases because a lot of people depend on such food. She said, “*Pinagaagawan din ng mga tao*” [People are taking it by force]. “*Sa dami ng tao rito, madali siyang maubos*” [Because of the huge number of people here, it is easily sold out], she continued. Since the demand of *tirtir* continues to grow, there are indicators as to why they prefer it more compared to commoditized food.

Table 4 indicates the benefits of *tirtir* in accordance with the informants’ response. For them, *tirtir* is the most affordable way to have an abundant and delicious meal. Most of the informants buy two (2) packs of *tirtir* (40 php) which is equivalent to a day of food supply. Twelve (12) of the informants affirmed that they consume *tirtir* at least once or twice a week. With an affordable price, they are able to taste meat that is far different from the ordinary price. For the informants, the regular meat and *tirtir* have the same taste which led them to prefer *tirtir* because of its affordability. Food recycling has become an alternative way to consume delicious food rather than other common low budget food such as *tuyo* (dried fish), *bagoong* (fermented anchovies), and *lugaw* (porridge). In times of disaster, food recycling serves as their mechanism to address food insecurity. Since fish is expensive during calamities, locals’ resort to *tirtir* because majority of their livelihood has to do with the sea. *Tirtir* has not just enable older adults to save money, but also obtain their other immediate needs.

Table 4: The Perceived Benefits of Food Recycling

Themes	Indications
Affordability	<p>“<i>Sampo, bente (pesos), eh ulam naman ‘yun. Eh yung manok, P180. Hindi kasya kung tutuusin.</i>” [Ten, twenty pesos, it’s already a viand. The regular chicken is P180. It does not fit our income if you’ll realize.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nanay Imelda Orquillo</p> <p>“<i>Sa kagipitan, syempre puro na lang isda ang ulam mo. Eh gusto mo rin ng karne, eh kaso ‘yung karne na bibilhin mo ay mahal, eh yung tirtir mura. Kaya dun kami bibili.</i>” [Because of deficiency, of course fish will always be your food. However, you’ll also want meat but it’s expensive, whereas <i>tirtir</i> is not. As such, we’ll buy <i>tirtir</i> instead.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tatay Reynaldo Cena</p>

¹⁶ *Baon* refers to a packed food that is brought by a student for his/her meal at school.

Taste	<p><i>“Masarap kumain nyan kapag inadobo mo. Iba nga nyan ‘di na niluluto, kinakain na lang.”</i> [That is delicious if you’ll cook it into adobo. Some do not cook it, they just eat it.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nanay Gloria Dela Cruz</p> <p><i>“Masarap ‘yung tirtir. Malasa ch tsaka pang matagalang ulam kasi aadobohin mo yun. Syempre hindi napapanis”</i> [Tirtir is delicious. It’s tasty and a long-term viand because you’ll cook it into adobo. Of course it won’t be rotten.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nanay Josefina Balbin</p>
Convenience	<p><i>Minsan sa UST, yung mga estudyante doon, mga dumadating na estudyante, ‘yung kilala ako, tinatawag nila ako, binibigay sa’kin ‘yung pagkain nilang hindi naubos. Inuubos ko rito.”</i> [Sometimes in UST, the students there, the students who come, those who knew me, they will call me and give their excess food. I finish it here.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tatay Reynaldo Baracel</p> <p><i>“Nakakahingi naman ako sa ibang tao. Minsan may kakilala ako sa restawran na iniinstambayan ko. Yun, may lalapit tapos magbibigay ng ulam. Ang ginagawa ko iniipon ko tapos dinadala ko rito sa bahay.”</i> [I can ask food to other people. Sometimes, I knew people from restaurants that I stayed at. There, they’ll come near and give me food. I save all of those and bring it here at home.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tatay Venecio Acabido</p>

Indeed, two (2) of the informants, Marieta Vecina and Nelia Villanueva, were former food scavengers, and were are selling partners. They go to different fast-food chains and restaurants together and pick-up pails of *tirtir*. Compared to the market, Marieta sells it with a more affordable price. She said, *“Ah! Syempre iniisip ko rin sa sarili ko na nangangailangan din sila katulad din namin kaya binibigay ko kahit sampo. Malaman na ‘yun”* [Ah! Of course I think that some people also have needs like me so I give it for only 10 php. It’s already meaty]. Marieta eats *tirtir* even if her husband does not want to. She said, *“Yung asawa ko, nagagalit nga siya pag ano (kumakain kami ng tirtir). Sabi ko ‘Bakit ba? Anong gagawin natin? Kaysa naman ‘yung mga bata matulog na walang laman ‘yung tiyan”* [My husband is angry when (we eat *tirtir*). I said ‘Why? What are we going to do? Our children will go to sleep with empty stomachs]. As such, Marieta does not think of the health risks of *tirtir* as long as they have food to eat.

Another perceived benefit of food recycling is its convenience. Some of the informants claimed that there were people who roam around to sell *tirtir* to different households. Also, they can easily purchase *tirtir* in the market. In some cases, the older adults gather *tirtir* directly from fast-food chains or restaurants. An informant, Venecio Acabido, is a frequent food scavenger. He goes to different food establishments to ask for food from customers. He can easily get food for his family without spending their household income. For him, food scavenging is a form of *“diskarte”* [strategy] because he does not need worry on how to sustain the food needs of his family. He proudly confirms that he has been letting his grandchildren consume *tirtir* since they were born. Reynaldo Baracel also has the same strategy as Venecio’s.

The Localized View with Food Recycling

The table below presents the views of the informants with food recycling in which emerged both positive and negative responses. Negative – they perceive *tirtir* as a food that is nonstandard and for the lower class. Positive – they affirm their resiliency to food insecurity by exercising their faith and putting an emphasis on the benefits of *tirtir*.

Table 5: The Informants’ View with Food Recycling

Themes	Indications
Faith	<p><i>“Sabi nga nila... Diba naka-TV ‘yan na ano nakakadala ng sakit ‘yan, ipasa-Diyos ko na lang.”</i> [They said... It was shown in the television that it can bring diseases, I just trust it to God].</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Leonora Ompoy</p> <p><i>“Sabi nila ano (marumi ang tirtir). Awa ng Diyos wala naman. ‘Di naman kami nagkakasakit”</i> [They said (tirtir is dirty). In God’s mercy, I felt nothing. We are not getting sick.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Florencia Aloba</p>
Stigma	<p><i>“Habang nagpipili po kami sa bahay namin noon, pinandiriran din kami noon dahil nga basura. Ganun din, ganun din hanggang ngayon.”</i> [While we were collecting at our house before, people are disgusted by us because of the garbage. It’s like that until today].</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Marieta Vecina</p> <p><i>“...eh tapos nakain na nila tapos itinira Itinapon na nga nila dahil kung baga sa mga may kaya, ipakain na lang sa aso ‘yun o sa hayop. Eh kaso kaming mahirap napilitan kami kumain din nyan, parang hayop na rin kami.”</i> [...then people already ate that and left it. They already dump it because for the middle-class, it can be fed for the dogs or animals. However, we poor people are pushed to eat it; we’re also like animals.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Reynaldo Cena</p>
Satisfaction	<p><i>“Pag nakaka-ano ako ng tirtir, masaya ako kasi nakakatipid ako sa ulam. Matipid. Matipid talaga ‘yung tirtir.”</i> [When we consume <i>tirtir</i>, I’m happy because I can save money for our viand. Low-cost. <i>Tirtir</i> is low-cost.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Josefina Balbin</p>
Lenience	<p><i>“Minsan, sabi nga ng iba, hindi daw dahil mga tira-tira na nga lang daw ‘yan, piniprito na lang. Eh kung walang-wala, ayun pwede naman pagtyagaan.”</i> [Sometimes, they said, it cannot be consumed because it’s already a leftover, it will just be fried again. However, if we really have nothing, it can be tolerated].</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Salvacion Portugal</p>

The negative indications of some informants with food recycling, such as “*parang hayop na rin kami*” (we are like animals), “*pinandidirian*” (disgusted), and “*pagtyagaan na lang*” (persevere) show that tirtir is a stigmatized food. The indications of the older adults show that they suffer from a discriminative imposition from others because of consuming scavenged food. As it became a notion that discarded food from food establishments are not edible, the older adults think of themselves as poor individuals who have substandard choices with the food they consume. However, they cope with stigma by affirming that food recycling will help them sustain the food needs of their family. The older adults have accepted that food recycling can only be their means to address hunger and food insecurity. Reynaldo Cena, a breadwinner of the family, said “*Gustong-gusto nila dahil karne, naiba naman dun sa isda. Gustong-gusto nila pero kung tutuusin, medyo masama man ang loob na ipakain sa pamilya mo ang ganun... pero wala kang magawa eh, kulang ka sa budget.*” [They really want meat because it differs from fish. They really want it, but if you’ll see, it’s a bit bad to feed that for my family... but you got nothing to do, your budget lacks]. Despite the stigma, the older adults do not perceive *tirtir* as a food that must be ashamed of eating.

Leonora welcomed me inside her house. I was stunned with its interiors because everything is far different from an ordinary house in Barangay Matatag. The flooring of her living room is covered with tiles and she has different furniture displayed. Despite her capacity to buy commoditized food, she still consumes tirtir. She said, “*Hindi naman ako nahihiya kumain ng tirtir na ‘yan dahil wala naman akong magawa. Kaysa magnakaw pa ‘ko*” [I’m not ashamed of consuming tirtir because I got nothing to do. (It’s better to eat it) than steal]. Before I leave her house, she showed me a pack of tirtir which will be cooked into adobo for her dinner¹⁷.

In other contexts, some of the informants rely on the health risks of *tirtir* to their spiritual faith. According to (Davie & Vincent, 1998), reliance to God is more common among the older adults than the younger ones. Indeed, in the previous studies that is conducted in Barangay Matatag, the common strategy of the older adults against food insecurity is exercising their faith (Ablaza, 2016; Bitlac, 2017; Payumo, 2016). Spiritual actions, specifically prayer, enables the older adults to have a positive outlook with their social condition.

CONCLUSION

This study has come to conclude that unemployment, large household size, ageing, and natural disaster are barriers to food security among older adults in Barangay Matatag. These contexts have pushed them to participate in the *tirtir* economy. Being mindful of its risks, the older adults continue to purchase such because of affordability, taste, and convenience. As a sanitary belief, *tirtir* can be eaten as long as it is washed and recooked. Although some considered *tirtir* as a nonstandard food for the lower class, they cope with stigma through emphasizing on its benefits. The high demand of *tirtir* in Barangay Matatag indicated that it has become a socially acceptable food among the locals.

More so, the older adults find importance on low budget food (rice, vegetables, fish, and bread) to easily satisfy their hunger. Their measurement of healthy is based on the acquisition of three meals per day – disregarding the nutritional value of food.

The findings of this study are in accordance with the continuity theory of ageing where it emphasizes on the human agency of the older adults as a caregiver and food contributor. As a form of *malasakit* and *pagdamay*, the older adults lessen their food consumption for the sake of the other household members – children and grandchildren. They perform their social role within the household through the practice of food recycling.

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¹⁷ Field Note # 9, June 23, 2017

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