

VANISHING TRADITIONS: A CROSS-GENERATIONAL STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF MODERNITY AND DISPLACEMENT ON SAMA CULTURAL IDENTITY**Erovenos L. Emata**elemata02202400474@usep.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

The Sama Tribe of Samal Island, Davao del Norte, historically known as "sea nomads," is a distinct indigenous community facing a critical existential crisis. This systematic review aims to identify the socio-environmental variables contributing to the potential physical and cultural extinction of the tribe.

Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, the study screened 67 records, ultimately synthesizing data from high-quality reports that provide empirical evidence on tribal extinction. A rigorous filtration process assessed 50 reports for eligibility, excluding 20 that lacked specific qualitative or quantitative data required for the study.

The synthesis reveals a state of "slow extinction" driven by a multi-dimensional crisis. Environmental degradation, including overfishing and pollution, has decimated traditional fishing grounds, while climate change-induced sea-level rise threatens coastal settlements. These environmental pressures are compounded by physical displacement due to mining, urbanization, and industrialization. Consequently, the tribe is forced into a marginalized market-based economy, leading to "deculturation" where younger generations abandon traditional practices, language, and rituals in favor of mainstream society.

The extinction of the Sama tribe is a two-pronged process involving physical displacement and cultural erasure. The study recommends urgent interventions, including legal protections for ancestral domains, culturally sensitive education, and the inclusion of the Sama people in local governance to preserve their unique heritage.

Keywords:

Sama Tribe, Samal Island, Sea Nomads, PRISMA 2020, Tribal Extinction, Deculturation, Cultural Erosion, Environmental Threats, Displacement, Indigenous Identity.

INTRODUCTION

In the province of Davao del Norte, Philippines, the coastal landscape of Samal Island is home to the Sama Tribe, a distinct indigenous community historically recognized as "sea nomads" or "boat people". Sama's assert, however, that they are distinct and have unique music, arts expression, and tribal rituals. They were previously given names based on the things in their vicinity, and to each name they added the word Samal that doubled as their surname. Due to this reason, it was simple to point out the natives among the rest of the native populations in other nearby islands (Acaba, 2007).

The Sama people are commonly called sea nomads or boat people, and their way of living has long been associated with fishing and coastal culture. But Sama tribe encountered many Challenges that reflect to become slowly extinct their tribe. These are Environmental Threats like Overfishing and pollution on marine life that the Sama rely on for survival, Climate change resulting in increased sea levels that pose a threat to their coastal settlement and reduce the fish stock that they depend on, Displacement and Loss of Traditional Lands that result in the loss of the coastal area and making it increasingly difficult for the Sama to preserve their traditional mode of life, Cultural Erosion like Loss of Language and disuse of traditional practices by the young who want to become mainstream, Social and Economic Marginalization that render Poverty and denial of access to education and healthcare that further alienates the Sama people from wider society and much more (Remulta, 2017).

Indigenous peoples usually have a rich cultural identity drawn from their heritage, traditions, language, and world view, (Eder, 2023). Their practices usually involve a close attachment to nature, the land, and community. Indigenous

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societies usually possess traditional systems of governance in the form of collective decision-making, councils of elders, and communal values. Such systems can be highly diverse within the community. But certain or even all of the Native people are threatened with a real extinction of their culture and physical existence if depopulation, deculturation, and land loss trends are not checked.

The extinction threat is not only physical but also cultural because the younger generations are not likely to observe traditional practices, hence losing the Batak lifestyle gradually. Marginalized groups face threats in terms of the loss of their traditional lifestyles. Encroachment by modern society, the forces of the market, urbanization, and industrialization displace their land, resources, and culture. With these regions becoming targets of mining, agriculture, deforestation, and other kinds of development, such communities are being displaced and their cultural and economic foundation destroyed (Rao, 2015).

Therefore, this systematic review adhering to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, that aims to determine and identify the variables and data needed for the study that will also help to link some factors that might impacted on the extinction of Sama tribe.

METHODS

Study Design

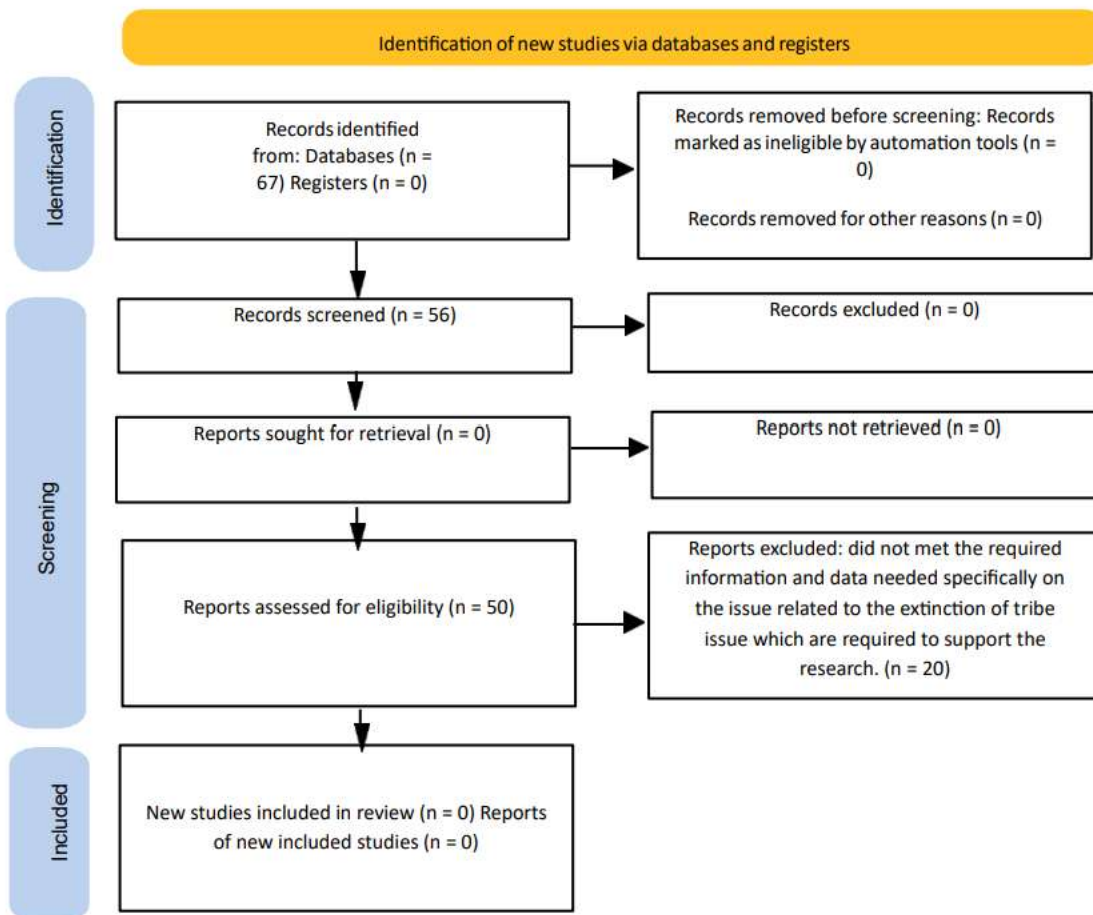
This research utilizes a systematic review design, strictly adhering to the PRISMA (2020) (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure the highest level of transparency and academic integrity. The overarching goal of this study design is to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize the specific variables and data points necessary to understand the factors contributing to the potential extinction of the Sama tribe. By adopting this rigorous framework, the study seeks to establish a scientifically grounded link between various socio-environmental stressors and the current status of this indigenous population.

Eligibility Criteria

The criteria for selecting the literature were governed by specific inclusion and exclusion parameters designed to ensure that the gathered data directly supported the research objectives. The study prioritized peer-reviewed records and formal reports that provided empirical data related to the physical and cultural extinction of the Sama tribe. Conversely, any reports or studies were excluded if they failed to provide the specific information and data needed to support the research, particularly those lacking depth regarding the tribe's unique music, arts expression, and rituals (Acaba 2007).

Study Selection and Extraction

The selection process followed a structured multi-stage approach, beginning with the identification of 67 records through extensive database searches. After an initial screening for duplicates and general relevance, 56 records remained for closer inspection. From this group, 50 reports were assessed for eligibility through a full-text review. Ultimately, 20 reports were excluded from the final synthesis because they did not provide the specific qualitative or quantitative data required to address the extinction issues facing the tribe. This careful filtration process ensured that the final conclusions were based on the most relevant and high-quality information available.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis of Core Findings

The synthesis of the gathered literature reveals that the Sama Tribe of Samal Island is currently trapped in a multi-dimensional crisis where environmental degradation and socio-political marginalization converge to create a state of "slow extinction" (Eder, 2023). The core findings indicate that their identity as "sea nomads" is fundamentally tied to the health of the marine ecosystem; however, the dual impact of overfishing by commercial entities and rising pollution levels has decimated the biodiversity of their traditional fishing grounds (Acaba, 2007).

This environmental collapse is further compounded by climate change, where rising sea levels are not merely a future threat but a present reality that is actively displacing coastal settlements. When these physical habitats are lost, the Sama are forced inland into a market-based economy for which they are often unprepared, leading to a transition from self-sufficient harvesters to marginalized, unskilled laborers.

Furthermore, the synthesis identifies a critical intergenerational disconnect; as the traditional economic foundation (fishing) disappears, the younger generation views the Sama language and tribal rituals as obsolete in a modernizing world. This results in "deculturation," a process where the tribe's unique music, arts, and governance systems are abandoned in an attempt to integrate into the mainstream (Acaba, 2007). Ultimately, the findings suggest that the extinction of the Sama is a two-pronged process: a physical displacement from their ancestral waters and a cultural erasure driven by systemic poverty and a lack of access to culturally inclusive education.

Primary Driver	Mechanism of Impact	Long-term Outcome for the Tribe
Marine Ecosystem Collapse	Overfishing and pollution reduce catch yields and destroy coral reefs.	Destruction of the traditional "Sea Nomad" economic model.
Geographic Displacement	Encroachment by mining, large-scale agriculture, and urbanization.	Permanent loss of ancestral domains and coastal settlement sites.
Economic Vulnerability	Shift from subsistence fishing to low-wage, unskilled urban labor.	Widespread poverty and dependence on external social welfare.
Sociolinguistic Attrition	Younger members abandoning the Sama language for Tagalog or English.	Total loss of oral traditions, tribal history, and unique identity markers.
Institutional Neglect	Denial of access to specialized healthcare and tailored education.	High mortality rates and lack of political agency in local government.

Expanded Comparison Table: Drivers of Extinction

Discussion of Synthesis

The synthesis emphasizes that the "extinction" mentioned in the research is not a single event but a systemic erosion. As noted by Acaba (2007), the unique naming conventions and surnames of the Sama made them easily identifiable; today, that visibility is fading as members adopt mainstream identities to avoid the stigma associated with poverty. The discussion of these findings concludes that the preservation of the Sama cannot be achieved through environmental protection alone; it requires a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses land rights, economic sovereignty, and the revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems.

Discussion on Economic Impact

The transition of the Sama people from a self-sufficient maritime economy to a marginalized market-based economy has had devastating consequences. Historically, their economy was built on a sustainable relationship with the sea; however, the loss of traditional fishing grounds has forced many tribe members into low-wage, unskilled labor in urban centers. This economic shift does not just result in poverty; it results in "deculturation," where the economic necessity of survival overrides the preservation of tribal rituals and arts. As the tribe becomes economically dependent on the very systems that displace them, their unique cultural worldview—which is deeply attached to nature—is systematically replaced by the values of a globalized market.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study involves the exclusion of twenty potentially relevant reports that lacked the specific data required to validate the extinction claims. Additionally, because the Sama are a highly mobile population, there is a lack of localized census data that tracks their movements over time. The study is also limited by the rapid pace of environmental change; as sea levels rise and fish stocks decline at accelerating rates, some historical data may not fully reflect the current urgency of the tribe's situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent the final extinction of the Sama tribe, it is recommended that the local and national governments establish Ancestral Waters and Lands Protections that prevent industrial encroachment on Samal Island. There must be a concerted effort to implement culturally sensitive education programs that teach the Sama language and arts alongside modern curricula. Furthermore, environmental policies must be strengthened to combat the overfishing and pollution that are destroying the tribe's economic base. Finally, it is recommended that the Sama people be given a formal seat in local governance to ensure their voices are heard in development decisions that affect their ancestral homes.

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Sama tribe of Samal Island is currently facing a critical existential threat that is both physical and cultural in nature. The evidence gathered through this PRISMA-guided review suggests that the "sea nomad" way of life is being dismantled by the combined forces of environmental degradation, economic marginalization, and physical displacement. While the tribe possesses a rich heritage of music and arts, these are being lost to the younger generation as they are forced to integrate into a mainstream society that often ignores their unique identity. Without immediate and targeted intervention to protect their lands and preserve their traditions, the Sama tribe risks becoming a tragic footnote in the history of Philippine indigenous populations.

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