

Garbage Life: Waste Collectors' Problems, Coping Strategies, and Insights

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Abstract

Waste collectors collect tons of garbage daily. While some studies explored the exposure of waste collectors to their work, workplace, workmates, and community, the interaction of these factors and the waste collectors' perception of their health remain unexplored. This qualitative descriptive study explored the experiences of waste collectors by utilizing a biopsychosocial framework to investigate their problems, coping strategies, and insights. The 20 participants specified physical discomforts and physical injuries as their problems in terms of biological aspects. Regarding the psychological aspect, they encountered self-worth and health uncertainty concerns, and in terms of the social aspect, they experienced workplace issues and negative social perception and stigma. The coping strategies that they utilized were body and health care and body perceptions (biological aspect), work acceptance (psychological aspect), work comparison, work convenience, flexible time, and social appreciation (social aspect). They also gained insights into health and body perception (physical aspect), optimism and purpose (psychological aspect), and work environment and dignity (social aspect). The insights gained by the participants enabled them to be more resilient in facing the challenges connected with their work and be more appreciative of their jobs.

Keywords

waste collectors, garbage collectors, health-psychology, biopsychosocial, occupational exposure

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1. Introduction

Waste collectors are responsible for waste collection (Mohammed & Abdul Latif, 2014). As a place develops, the population and waste production increase. The steady rise in waste production is one of the worsening problems that any place constantly faces and deals with, especially the fast-developing ones (Song et al., 2015). Puerto Princesa City is one of the fastest developing cities in the Philippines. As the city progresses, its waste production continues to rise; from 85 tons a day in 2014, it doubled in 2015 and reached 200 tons by 2017 (City garbage doubles, 2015; Villamor, 2018).

Correspondingly, no matter how humble their work may be, waste collectors are the people society perpetually needs. In Puerto Princesa City, they are the people behind the city's cleanliness. Their work keeps the streets clean and the surroundings pleasing to the eyes. However, their work regularly exposes them to the hazards of waste. Garbage collection is rated as one of America's seven most dangerous jobs (Johnson, 2017). Many studies prove the health hazards their work brings (Abd El-Wahab et al., 2014; Aweng & Fatt, 2014; Cruvinel et al., 2019; Decharat, 2017;

Neghab et al., 2013; Tsovilis et al., 2014). Apart from that, they experience stigma caused by the nature of their work (Bickmeier et al., 2015; Vázquez, 2013) and face other challenges at work and in their personal lives (Velasco et al., 2015).

Based on the literature mentioned, workplaces immensely influence a person's health. Creating conducive, safe, and healthy work environments for employees is important to preserve their safety and welfare. The negative connotation of the work of waste collectors and the persistent existence of health risks in their workplace can have detrimental and long-lasting effects on their health. Thus, in examining the experiences of waste collectors using a qualitative approach, the results obtained are essential in diagnosing problems present in their work environment and their line of work and the need to address these concerns. With numerous institutions creating favorable and healthy work environments for their employees, applying these to the context of waste collectors through programs and regulations that cater to their needs is not entirely implausible. Previous studies emphasize the impact of the occupation on the waste collectors, but the health perception of the waste collectors towards their occupation remains underexplored. It is hoped that this qualitative descriptive study can add substance to the biopsychosocial spectrum of worker and workplace relationships to encourage the government and other concerned organizations to give proper attention to their employees' welfare.



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Waste collectors are exposed to a day-to-day collection of trash or garbage, known as solid waste, which people usually throw away. Trash, or municipal solid waste (MSW), comes from residential homes, offices, accommodations, schools, and other establishments (Municipal Solid Waste, 2016).

Waste collection refers to gathering solid wastes from houses, industrial and commercial establishments, and institutions and bringing them to where they are treated or disposed of (Plastics Europe, 2018). This work involves health and safety risks such as injury, death, and illnesses. It is described as one of the most hazardous jobs, ranked seventh in the United States regarding the number of mortalities in the workplace (Tibbetts, 2013). This work is primarily the duty of waste collectors.

In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 7160 established that the Local Government Unit (LGU) has the direct responsibility for its area of jurisdiction's solid waste management, implementation of cleanliness and sanitation, administration and care of its natural resources, and environment (Department of Environment and Natural Resources [DENR] 2019).

Open dumpsites are prevalent in developing countries. These are waste disposal sites that are unscientific, obsolete, and ineffective, and usually placed outside developing urban cities (Sankoh et al., 2013). Open dumpsites are dangerous to health and the environment because of the lack of engineering and safety standards (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2005).

On the other hand, controlled dumpsites are waste disposal sites more improved in operational and management aspects only and not on facility or structural standards. These are usually alternatives or the next option to open dumpsites when insufficient funds exist to construct sanitary landfills. It can be applied over existing open dumpsites or built on new sites (UNEP, 2005).

Sanitary landfills are modern waste disposal sites built according to high site selection, design, construction, and operation standards. They ensure cleanliness and safety and help reduce greenhouse gases that cause global warming. Landfilling involves putting solid and semi-solid wastes on the ground in thin layers, compressing them up to their smallest practical volume, and covering them daily with suitable earth materials to keep them away from the environment (Ghosh & Hasan, 2010). These procedures make the landfill "sanitary." These prevent waste from being exposed to the environment and lessen potential pollution problems (Eskezia et al., 2016; Ghosh & Hasan, 2010).

In response to the worsening problems of waste in the country, Republic Act No. 9003, also known as the "Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, was enacted on January 26, 2001, to adopt systematic, comprehensive, and ecological solid waste management programs (Art. 1, Sec. 2 of R.A. 9003, 2001). Included in RA 9003 is the mandate for the Local Government Units to either build a sanitary landfill or convert open dumps or controlled dumps into a sanitary landfill (National Solid Waste Management Commission, 2016). In compliance with this, in 2002, the City Government of Puerto Princesa built a sanitary landfill, a facility worth 200 million, in Barangay Sta. Lourdes, the first LGU-controlled and first of its kind in the Philippines. The construction started in 2002 and was inaugurated in April 2006 (PGMA inaugurates R.P.'s first LGU-controlled sanitary landfill, 2006).

Waste collectors are most likely to suffer from the risks of waste collection. They are those with direct and regular contact to the abundance of wastes in the dump truck or the dumpsites. They are exposed to many different chemical, biological, physical, safety, and ergonomic hazards, and various stressors. They may also be infected blood, bodily fluids, syringes, other medical and drug wastes, or radioactive medical wastes included in the garbage. Airborne microorganisms such as fungi (mold) and gram-negative bacteria may likewise be present, which may cause allergic and irritant responses, respiratory problems, and hypersensitivity reactions. Harmful physical agents include noise, vibration, and extreme temperatures. Accidents may also arise by being struck or crushed by vehicles and equipment, leading to injury or even death. Waste collectors often complain of bone or muscular pains resulting from lifting, pulling, pushing, twisting, and gripping a tool or object (Newman, 2016). To make the situation worse, most waste collectors do not use or have access to personal protective equipment to safeguard them from harm in the workplace (Mohammed & Abdul Latif, 2014). In addition, workplace stressors can come from stealing wages among workers, unavailability of a bathroom for use, overtime work, no meal breaks, low and irregular salaries, absence of opportunity to be promoted, and job inferiority (Newman, 2016).

There are high incidences of waste collectors having respiratory problems and lung function impairment due to exposure to bioaerosols and contaminants in the workplace (Neghab et al., 2013). There is a strong correlation between waste disposal work and some health problems, like musculoskeletal problems, skin problems, respiratory disease, nail problems, gastrointestinal problems, and eye problems (Decharat, 2017). A test for parasitic infections in waste collectors revealed that about half of the workers were infected, and 12 parasitic species were found among those tested (Abd El-Wahab et al., 2014). Previous test results also confirmed that there was indeed a rise in Hepatitis B infection among waste collectors. They found out that the risk for infection could be from needle stick injuries. However, cases of hepatitis C infection were dismissed (Tsovoli et al., 2014).

Some studies suggest that there are more challenges waste collectors appear to face in life regarding the psychological and social impacts. From childhood to adolescence to the beginning of adulthood, waste collectors in Nicaragua went through many stressful and excessive serious situations at a very young age, which led them to take part in adult acts early on. They belonged to the poorest families and lived in the poorest communities. They were very hard to reach, had the highest illiteracy rates, were worst in health, were extremely denounced, and did not have high hopes for the future. These factors might have significantly affected their isolation and discrimination from society and its continuous aggravation (Vázquez, 2013). However, in an earlier study made by Vasquez (2013), the result showed that even if the participants lived in extreme poverty, they still claimed to be happy and were optimistic about the future, for they did not associate happiness with earning but with their social and leisure activities (Vasquez, 2013).

Another study was conducted to determine if the necessity of work and other ideal beliefs and strategies could fight the challenges and hindrances in taking away the stigmas linked with dirty jobs to attain and preserve the workers' worth. The result showed the people's preference for appropriateness, for "clean" white-collar jobs and money

return, rather than manual service work and work helpful to the communities (Hamilton et al., 2017).

The present study utilized the conceptual framework of the biopsychosocial approach, which systematically considers biological, psychological, and social factors and their complex interactions in understanding health, illness, and health care delivery.” (Biopsychosocial Model, n.d.). The biopsychosocial approach, pioneered by Dr. George Engel and Dr. John Romano, claims that in determining the course of health-related outcomes, any one factor is not enough. Rather, it is the interaction between people’s genetic makeup (biology), mental health and behavior (psychology), and social and cultural context (Lumen Biopsychosocial Model of Health and Illness, n.d.). In the biopsychosocial approach, it is important to include the individual and his attributes as a person and human being. It countered the traditional biomedicine approach, which only points to biological or physical factors as causes of illnesses. It is the very reason for the foundation of the biopsychosocial approach (Fava & Sonino, 2008).

Health psychology likewise reflects the biopsychosocial approach, as it also gives importance to the combination of biological, psychological, and social factors in determining the cause of illness. In health psychology, the mind and body interact with each other through separate and different entities. Hence, it is vital to develop a holistic or a whole-person approach to health or consider many causal factors of an illness (or a condition) (Sarafino & Smith, 2017). Health psychology also emphasizes that sickness does not only cause psychological consequences but also psychological factors that can lead to sickness. Psychology and health can be connected directly or indirectly. The connection is direct if psychological factors such as stress can cause illnesses like coronary heart disease and cancer. It is indirect if psychological factors like perception can influence behavior, impacting health (Sarafino & Smith, 2017).

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This qualitative descriptive research involved waste collectors in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, Philippines. The research utilized indigenous methods, as cited by Yacat (2013), such as *pagtatanung-tanong* (asking questions), *padalaw-dalaw* (visiting), and *pakikipagkwentuhan* (having conversation). These methods provided significant data from the waste collectors’ narrative. These were essential to the design of the present study, which explored the experiences of the waste collectors and gave a deeper view and understanding (Bradshaw et al., 2017) of their lives. This design gave a meaningful outcome about the experiences of the waste collectors and how these affected their health and lifestyle.

2.2. Research Participants

The researchers used convenience sampling, also known as availability sampling. It is a type of non-probability or non-random sampling. This technique is used when the target participants are accessible and have met certain practical criteria provided by the researcher (Etikan, 2016). The researchers selected 20 participants employed as city solid

waste workers and were directly exposed to the collected garbage. Table 1 presents the necessary information about the participants. To protect the identity of the participants, they were given aliases.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Alias	Age	Place of Residence	Marital Status	Years In Service	Extra Income	Educational Level
Wil	59	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	5	Construction work Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	Elementary graduate
Rene	50	Sta. Monica, Puerto Princesa City	Separated	10	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	High school graduate
Art	35	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	10	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	Elementary graduate
Oben	38	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	2	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	High school graduate
Roger	33	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	6	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	High school graduate
Dodoy	20	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Cohabiting	2	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	High school graduate
Ed	22	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	2	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	High school graduate
Ken	22	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Single	1	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	High school graduate
Mike	31	Mangingsida, Puerto Princesa City	Married	7	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Fishing	High school graduate
Ben	20	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Single	1	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Piggery	High school level
Jay	54	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	10	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Construction work	High school graduate
Hen	61	Sta. Monica, Puerto Princesa City	Married	16	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	Elementary graduate
Herb	55	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	2	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	Elementary graduate
Ad	18	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Separated	1	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash)	Elementary graduate
Harry	54	Tiniguiban, Puerto Princesa City	Married	14	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Construction work	High school graduate
Rob	55	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	18	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Construction work	Elementary graduate
Edgar	43	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Married	4 months	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Gardening	High school level



Table 1. Cont.

Alias	Age	Place of Residence	Marital Status	Years In Service	Extra Income	Educational Level
Fred	35	Bacungan, Puerto Princesa City	Married	1	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Farming Driving Construction work	High school graduate
Rad	19	Sta. Lourdes, Puerto Princesa City	Cohabiting	4 months	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Bamboo cutter	High school level
Ab	34	Jacana, Puerto Princesa City	Married	7 months	Pangangalakal (sells recyclable trash) Piggery	High school graduate

2.3. Research Instrument

Before the interview with the participants, the researchers requested the City Solid Waste Management Office (CWSMO) for a copy of the master list of the currently employed City solid waste workers and their corresponding work schedules. A semi-structured interview questionnaire, which consisted of three parts, was used. The first part contained questions about the problems they encountered as waste collectors. The second part consisted of questions about their coping strategies, and the third part included questions about the insights they gained.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data gathering and inquiry were executed using *katutubong pamamaraan* (indigenous Filipino method) from August to October 2018 and an ocular visit to fill in the gaps. The researchers used indigenous methods such as *pagtatanung-tanong* (asking questions), *padalaw-dalaw* (visiting), and *pakikipagkwentuhan* (having a conversation). The researchers first used the *pagtatanung-tanong*, or asking relevant questions based on the questions the researchers crafted, and *padalaw-dalaw*, or visiting the place where the participants were located. The researchers scheduled the visit thrice: the first visit was to inquire about the currently employed city solid waste workers and ask the CSWMO the time and date of the shift of the target participants. On the second visit, the researchers interviewed the target participants who were available to have solid and reliable data. The result of the first interview was the basis of questions for the third and the last session. Lastly, the researchers used *pakikipagkwentuhan* or storytelling or having an informal conversation based on the previous interview. The data were recorded via cellphone, and notes were taken during the interview.

2.5. Data Analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it should be the foundational analysis to understand the qualitative descriptive study better.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

The participation of the waste collectors was entirely voluntary. The researchers discussed the study overview with the participants and sought their informed consent. They were assured that their identity would be kept

confidential by using aliases. They were also informed that they could refuse or stop being part of the study without penalties if they would prefer. The participants were also free to ask questions regarding the study. The study underwent technical and ethics review by the research committee (thesis committee assigned by the department).

3. Results

3.1. Biological Aspect

The body is the primary resource and mechanism for performing different tasks. It is true, especially for people who rely mainly on their physical bodies to get their work done, like waste collectors. However, because of the nature of their work and workplace, waste collectors' bodies face many elements, conditions, and situations different from what most people encounter. Being in constant and direct exposure to the waste, the waste collectors are the most susceptible to all sorts of harmful materials, pollutants, and microorganisms in the garbage, in addition to the strenuous duties that their work demands. This section on the biological aspect focuses on the biological problems encountered, coping strategies used, and insights gained by the participants.

3.1.1. Biological Problems

Regarding biological problems, the participants experienced physical discomforts and physical injuries. As a manual job, waste collection requires much physical effort, resulting in physical discomfort. Waste collectors' different body parts are in constant action while performing their tasks. The participants affirmed that they felt exhausted and sometimes weak at the end of their working hours.

"Pagod po. Medyo matamlay din nga."
(It's tiring. I feel weak) – Rad

Others said that their arms were painful from lifting the heavy waste bins.

"Masakit po 'yong mga braso ko sa pagbubuhat po" (My arms got strained due to heavy lifting)
– Edgar

The participants echoed that it was tiring to collect waste. They had to carry many large, overflowing, and heavy waste bins and bags or containers of waste they got from individual houses or establishments. Waste collectors threaded through roads, streets, and alleys to collect all the waste. They also had to move fast in going up and down the dump truck, catch it up while running, and finish work on time.

Tiredness and body pains, which are muscular-skeletal disorders, are the most prevalent complaints of waste collectors from different countries. To name a few, in Egypt, waste collectors reported experiencing lower back pains (Abou-ElWafa et al., 2012); in Shiraz, Iran, not only pains in the lower back but also in the knees (Abou-ElWafa et al., 2012). In the same way, in Malaysia, waste collectors suffered from lower back, elbow, or wrist pains (Rahman, et.al., 2015). According to the studies mentioned, all these ailments resulted from over-fatigue due to heavy manual work of lifting, carrying, pulling, and pushing (Rahman, et.al.,

2015), walking along, running, or jumping up/down from the dump truck (Abou-ElWafa et al., 2012).

Aside from physical discomforts, the participants also experienced physical injuries. In the performance of work, certain situations or tasks can cause injuries. Injuries are injuries to the physical body due to accidents or environmental stressors (WHO, 2021). Though these can be prevented by observing safe behaviors and safety measures, these can still happen anytime or anywhere.

There were times when some participants were bruised, cut, or pricked by pointed or sharp objects.

"Natutosok din ako ng karayom o nasusugatan din ako minsan kapag humahakot lalo na kapag sa ospital kami humahakot." (Sometimes I get pricked by used needles when we collect garbage from the hospitals) – Ren

One waste collector narrated that he had strained his arm when a tree branch struck him while standing on the dump truck.

"Ako nga sumabit din ako sa sanga. Kaso nasa hulihan ako. Ayan o. Pinatahi ko lang iyan o. Pinasemento ko." (I was struck by a hanging branch of a tree when I was at the rear side of a dump truck. I had my injured arm stitched and cemented.) – Oben

Another more serious accident was when one participant fell from the truck when the handle he tried to grip to go up suddenly broke.

"Nahulog ako sa truck yong sa December 31, yong nakaraang taon. Alam mo mataas 'yan. 'Pag akayat ko natanggal yung hawakan diretso ako sa lupa. Bagsak ako. Nadisgrasya. 'Pag bagsak ko diretso tayo ako. Kasi sa hapon hakot sila hanggang alas kwatro. Tapos pag gabi kami na. Ay madilim na yon. Tapos kong nadisgrasya nagpahinga ako ng mga tatlong araw lang." (On December 31 last year, I fell from a truck. I was about to go up when the handle I was about to grip suddenly broke. I stood up right away as if nothing happened. My co-workers had their shift until four o'clock in the afternoon. We had our turn in the evening. It was dark that time. I rested for about three days after that incident.) – Rad

In the United States, waste collection is considered one of the most dangerous jobs (Newman, 2016). Compared with average workers, waste collectors are ten times more likely to be killed while doing their jobs. In 2014, data showed that the probability of waste collectors getting injured on the job is 2.6 times higher than those who do mining, quarrying, oil and gas extraction and 1.4 times higher than those working in construction and manufacturing industries (Newman, 2016).

Not all bodily injuries are caused by untoward situations. There are times when these are caused merely by

handling wastes, the primary duty of waste collectors. One participant, though at first claimed that waste collection had brought no negative effect to his body, suddenly remembered that his fingernails were deformed early on after becoming a waste collector.

"Iyong sa akin? Parang wala lang Pero iyong kuan, para bang nasisira iyong kuko." (I thought my work did not cause physical injuries. But my fingernails were deformed) – Abe

The participants experienced bodily injuries that could be the consequences of their carelessness or negligence. However, it could be discounted that it could result from insufficient personal protective equipment and obsolete work machinery like the dump truck. It could also be pointed to other people who thoughtlessly throw dangerous waste.

3.1.2. Coping with Biological Problems

The waste collectors' biological problems stem from the very nature of their work and workplace. Hence, the waste collectors' bodies and health are at risk regularly. The participants claimed that they coped with biological problems through the body and health care and body protection.

In terms of body and health care, the participants stated that they cared for themselves by eating a large amount of food and vitamins. Despite their constant exposure to the waste, the participants confidently asserted that they had normal and good body and health conditions.

"Ayos naman. Maliksi rin. Nag vivitamin naman ako." (I am energetic because I take vitamins) – Ben

Regarding body protection, the participants wore personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE is worn to lessen dangers during work and in the workplace. Employers must provide these to their employees, and employers must also make sure that these are always worn within the workplace (Denisov, et al., 2013).

The CWSM Office issues personal protective equipment to waste collectors. These are t-shirts as uniforms, face masks, gloves, rubber boots, and even raincoats during rainy seasons.

"Ah, may mask. Issue iyan dito sa office. May mga gwantes. May mga gwantes kami, bota. Ay kung minsan dalawa. Kung minsan, labhan mo na agad para kung may ipapalit ka, mapalitan mo agad. May damit, may kapote pa nga. Libre." (We have free masks, gloves, and boots given by the office. Sometimes, we are given two pairs. After using them, you need to wash them immediately. T-shirts are also provided for free, including a raincoat) – Hen

Nonetheless, most participants preferred using a shirt, transforming it into bonnet-like protection for their entire face and head, making it more effective than a face mask.



"Minsan po kasi sobrang mabaho, di talagang maiwasan mareklamo ka. Ano lang takip-takip lang ng damit." (Sometimes the smell is terrible. I use a shirt as an improvised mask) -Dodo

Some participants did not comply with using the PPEs despite the regular provision of the CWSM office. It was easier and faster for them to use their bare hands to handle waste. They also said the gloves were not thick and sturdy enough to protect their hands from wet, contaminated, or harmful waste. In the same way, the face masks might cover their nose and mouth, but the participants preferred to use their shirts to protect them from the foul odor and the extreme heat of the sun.

Although the PPEs passed the quality check, one study tested PPEs for their effectiveness and comfort. The result of the study shows that PPEs are uncomfortable and inconvenient to use. The PPEs' effectiveness is not equal to their effectiveness when used (Deniso et al., 2013).

3.1.3. Biological Insights

Insights arise from different experiences. As waste collectors, the participants had personal views of their bodies and health in response to the nature of their work and workplace. The participants' biological insight revolved around how they viewed and described their bodies and health as waste collectors.

The participants viewed their bodies as normal and not affected by their job. Wastes did not seem to have ill effects on them.

"Parang wala na rin po. Matagal na rin akong ano. Wala na ring appektado sa katawan." (I am used to it. I have been a waste collector for a long time. It feels like it does not affect my body anymore) – Herb

The participants sensed no change in their bodies since they started working as garbage collectors. Their bodies stayed the same; they even said they had gotten used to their work.

"Wala naman. Parang alam ko ng nasaanay na din ang katawan ko sa trabaho na ito." (It feels nothing. My body has gotten used to this job) - Fred

The participants were not worried about the effect of their work on their bodies.

"Ah, hindi. Tuloy lang ang buhay para mabuhay." (No. Life must go on) -Harry

They expressed their insights based on whether their bodies and health were affected by waste. Most of them claimed that there were no changes in their bodies and that collecting waste did not have any harmful effects. They viewed their bodies and health as normal from the start. Some even believed that waste made them more immune to germs and diseases.

The participants' claim of being used to the presence of waste is a product of habituation, adaptation, and desensitization. All three concepts result from constant and repeated exposure to certain stimuli. Habituation happens when the emotional and behavioral reaction to a certain stimulus decreases; adaptation involves processes in the brain that cause the sensation and perception to decrease, while desensitization is the outcome of adaptation over time (Pellegrino et al., 2017).

The participants' biological insights also suggest that their risk perception is decreased or eliminated. It is proven that even if a condition or situation is viewed as hazardous, it becomes tolerable because of its benefits (Slovic et al., 2005). It is called "unrealistic optimism," when individuals see themselves as not at risk, even when dangers are objective (Ferrer & Klein, 2015).

3.2. Psychological Aspect

3.2.1. Psychological Problems

Psychological problems of waste collectors refer to issues that affect their thoughts and emotions and, consequently, behaviors. Because being a waste collector is seen as literally and figuratively dirty and connected to risks, stigma, and poverty, it can be expected that they have more issues and worries in life compared with other people with different occupations. However, it turned out otherwise. The participants' psychological problems revolved only on how they saw themselves, their work, and their bodies and health when continuously exposed to waste. In addition, all the participants realized the importance of education for greater work options and uplift status and quality of life.

One problem experienced by the participants in terms of psychological aspects was low self-worth. They saw themselves as inferior to other people. They associated their low self-worth with their low level of education, which they believed led them to their present work and status in life. One participant set foot in college for a few days. Another participant studied in college for a whole semester. Some were high school graduates, but most did not finish high school or even elementary education.

This low level of education made the participants feel less competent and confident to find other jobs that would give them considerable compensation and short working time, unlike what they received in their work as waste collectors.

"Kung trabaho lang maraming trabaho diyan. Kasi sa totoo lang wala naman akong natapos. Highschool lang." (There are many jobs out there, but I didn't finish any degree. I am only a high school graduate) - Ren

The participants' low level of education also conditioned their thoughts of having limited work options. They consistently stated construction work as the only opportunity they could have.

"Mahirap din kasi kung mag-construction. Hindi rin ako nakapagtapos ng high school eh. third year lang." (it's very hard to work in a construction-related job. I didn't finish any degree. I only finished third-year high school) – Ad

According to Riddell & Song (2011), in most countries, the higher the level of education, the higher the chances of being employed, securing jobs with employment contracts, higher salaries, better work conditions, and being re-employed after being unemployed. Moreover, people with a higher level of education have more choices in life, giving them greater freedom, control, security, and economic conditions (Gardner & Oswald, 2018). They added that work achievements and financial successes are positively correlated to a higher level of education.

Another problem in terms of the psychological aspect was the participants' health uncertainty or concern.

All participants confidently expressed during the interview that their bodies were in normal and good condition. However, some confided uncertainty or concern regarding their future health when suddenly confronted by the thought of continuous and prolonged exposure to waste.

"Minsan naiisip ko rin na umalis. Ayaw ko rin kasi tumagal dito. Nangangamba din ako sa pangangatawan ko. Sa basura iyan eh" (Sometimes it comes to my mind to resign. I don't want to stay here any longer. I am afraid what it might do to my body; it's garbage we're talking about) – Oben

Another study on dirty work confirmed that the risks are often disregarded and repressed due to the necessity of the work. This sudden confession of health uncertainty or concern can be due to the unintentional expression of their repressed worry and fear. The participants tended to set aside the possible dangers of their work because it is their main income source. However, with the additional knowledge they gained (Feinstein et al., 2018) and the influence of other people's perceptions regarding their work and workplace, there might be times when they consider the likelihood of their body and health being negatively affected by waste.

3.2.2. Coping with Psychological Problems

Considering the dirt, risks, negative connotations, and poverty the waste collectors had to face constantly, they were able to cope with these problems. For the participants, coping psychologically means acceptance, meaning, and significance.

The participants' perceived and acquired limitations led them to adopt a willing attitude of being waste collectors. When asked if they were not demanded or forced to work as waste collectors, they replied:

"Oo. Kusang kagustuhan." (Yes. I willingly applied for this job)– Ab

Though they were aware of the negative connotations attached to their work, they learned to accept both the negative connotations and their work.

"Kahit iyong basurero lang, okay lang. Tanggap naman namin e." (Even if we are waste collectors, we accept who we are) – Ad

In addition, the participant's acceptance of their work made them consider it a delightful part of their lives, with one participant saying,

"Parang naging hobby ko na rin na magtrabaho rito." (I use my job as a hobby) – Ad

By saying this, the participants could likely see the other sources of happiness in being waste collectors. One cannot consider something a hobby without the pleasure that can be derived from it.

The participant's acceptance of their work also involved undertaking all the risks their job entails. Though subconsciously, there might be health worries and uncertainties, they tended to set aside the feeling of fear, for their work was also their source of living.

"Wala lang. Basta trabaho. As long po na kumikita." (It's nothing as long as I have a job, as long as I am earning) – Jay

These statements prove that the participants were inclined to give more importance to having a job, owning and embracing it, and drawing positive emotions until it became a source of pleasure and significance. At the same time, their suppression of negative thoughts and emotions towards the probability of getting sick as a harmful effect of being exposed to waste to earn an income is their way of coping with health worries and uncertainties.

In the context of dirty work, this practice is called "reframing," wherein dirty workers modify the meaning of their work in two ways. First, utilizing "infusing," they attached merit to their work. For the participants, waste collection meant income-earning work and even a hobby, which provided for the needs of their families. Second, employing "neutralizing," they rejected the demerit attached to the work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). For the participants, setting aside the risks, shame, worries, and uncertainties was essential because they had to work, and their family's survival was their utmost responsibility.

3.2.3. Psychological Insights

Based on their everyday experiences and multiple problems, the waste collectors learned to select and prioritize the issues that were essential and worthy of attention and action. When there are fewer options and value and significance are hard to find and expect from society, regardless of the numerous interconnected problems, focusing on whatever is urgent, attainable, good, and beneficial will be more objective and helpful. It is also helpful to assure themselves of the necessity and higher purpose of what they do. These surround the participants' psychological insights.



The participants found a sense of optimism and purpose in their work. Purpose makes people do what they must do, making them understand their situation and directing them to create goals to achieve in the future. Purpose involves action, not merely knowing and understanding (Raine, 2014). That is how Viktor Frankl, a psychologist, and physician, pioneered the study and therapy of finding life meaning (Auhagen, 2000).

The participants might have problems regarding their work, workplace, and lives, yet they chose to look at the positive side of every situation. They chose to accept their limitations, work, and uncertainties; more than that, they also put higher significance on what they do to give a greater meaning to who they are. These pushed them to keep working with optimism and purpose despite the issues within themselves and their work.

For them, they worked for their families. They would do everything they could for the sake of their families.

"Bayaan na lang at pinapakita ko lang na kaya ko ito at kakayanin ko ito para sa pamilya."
(I let it be, I show to them that I can do it for my family) - Oben

The participants continued to work to provide for their daily basic needs and provide education for their children. Some participants did not want to give their children the responsibility of providing for them as long as they could still work and provide for themselves and their families, even their children's families. When the participants were asked when they would stop working as waste collectors, even those older or who had worked for a long time responded that they could not stop working.

"Wala pa rin po. Kasi kagaya sa akin, mahirap lang. Iyang ano tama lang. Ibig sabihin parang kaya ko pa rin, Ayaw ko ring magpa ano sa mga anak ko kasi may mga anak pa ako tinutustusan mga apo ko ba." (I will not stop working yet. Like me, I am poor. I don't want to be a burden to my children because they have their own too. I have to earn for my grandchildren) - Herb

In a larger scope, the participants believed they were doing something for the community, and the people should even be thankful to them.

"Dapat nga magpasalamat pa sila kasi nakakatulong kami." (They should be thankful to us because we help the community) - Ed

Seeing their work as a means of empathy and sacrifice for their families and the community was how the participants viewed their work to compensate for their low self-worth, worries, and uncertainties. It was for them, their higher purpose. It made their work and themselves valuable. Their work was not only for themselves but also for others.

Again, in the context of dirty work, this is also a practice of "reframing" through "infusing" and "neutralizing," but this time including a larger and deeper significance for the family and the community. They saw their work and themselves as productive and contributing forces of society. They were not menaces scattered in places only doing vices and crimes; they were not dependents merely

waiting for the government for financial support and assistance; they worked and generated income; and they were agents of the society taking responsibility for the waste because if they did not, no one else would, and the community would be left dirtier. Overseeing sanitation gives the trash collectors the "necessity shield," which assures them that society unfaithfully needs them and, at the same time, somehow protects them from being discriminated against and stigmatized (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

3.3. Social Aspect

3.1.1. Social Problems

This section presents the waste collectors' common stressors regarding their interactions and relationships with the environment and people around them. These include work and workplace issues, negative social perceptions, and stigma.

The participants faced several work issues, including the delayed salary.

Receiving a monthly salary is one of the main reasons why people work. What makes work even more appealing is gaining additional benefits and the opportunity to make it a regular, stable job. However, this is not the case for the participants. First, all participants affirmed that their salaries were delayed for three to four months. Salary or compensation benefits workers in pay, wages, or monetary rewards in exchange for work performed (Ramzan et al., 2014). For the participants, it was hard when their salaries got delayed. The delay made it harder for them to make both ends meet. That was why some of them had to resort to credit or loans.

"Ganitong wala pang sahod, nangungutang lang ang misis ko sa tindahan. Pagkasahod bayad lang." (Just like these days we don't have salary yet, my wife borrows from the store. We pay for it once we receive our salary.) - Oben

Secondly, all participants asserted that all of them were job order workers. No single waste collector had become a regular worker since day one.

"Wala pong regular dito sa amin. Kuan lang, casual lang po talaga. Kahit sabihin mong matagal ka na po, wala po talaga. Wala pong regular." (There is no regular employee among us. We are casual employees only. Even if one has been working for a long time, there is no provision for regular employment.) - Jay

The CSWM Office confirmed this, saying that waste collectors had to renew their employment and pass another set of biodata every three months, prioritizing those previously employed, except those with frequent absences and other negative work records.

In a study conducted in Kenya, job order workers usually were not loyal to their work, resulting in their downsized commitment (Wandera, 2011). However, this finding did not apply to the present study's participants. Most of them stayed loyal and committed to their work; some

even for years because they and their families needed the salaries they got from it.

Lastly, in connection with the participants' being job-order workers, they did not receive complete work benefits or even a single health benefit, considering their work posed health hazards. What made it worse was that the workers were unaware of these important matters.

Studies show that work benefits benefit work performance and satisfaction (Tessema et al., 2013). Therefore, the lack of it leads to the opposite result. The employees in the CWSM Office affirmed that most waste collectors often fail to render obedience to policies, rules, and instructions and, at times, get absent from work, often without permission. The Office employees added that they understood the waste collectors because they were aware of the limitations of the waste collectors, the difficulty of their work, and the Office's shortcomings in providing salaries and benefits. They also knew it would be difficult to find a replacement if the garbage collectors stopped working. However, the participants were still satisfied with their work even without complete work benefits. They already viewed their daily income in *pangangalakal* (selling recyclable trash) and flexible working time as significant advantages of their work.

Aside from the work issues, the participants also faced workplace issues. Workers usually view their workplace as their second home, spending ample time in it. Home is pictured as a place of health and safety, arranged in a pleasant and welcoming way, with its roofs and walls to serve as protection. However, this is not the case for waste collectors whose workplace is the dump truck or the dumpsite. Largely and constantly surrounded by waste, waste collectors' workplaces can be seen plainly as a problem with full exposure to extreme or changing weather.

Though the participants acknowledged that they were already accustomed to waste, there were still times when its sight, dirt, and smell bothered them. According to one participant, the decomposing waste made him vomit.

Sumuka-suka ako. May mga uod. Kaso gano 'n e. Basurero ka." (I vomit. There are worms, but it is what it is, I'm a waste collector) - Oben

Moreover, there were excrement and dead animals.

Wastes gathered by waste collectors are largely residual wastes mainly comprised of leftover food and waste from yards. These wastes are biodegradable wastes that decompose over time. That is why these wastes are not only a haven for maggots, as a participant recounted, but also for rats, cockroaches, vermin, flies, and other organisms that are possible carriers of transmittable illnesses (UNEP, 2005). In addition to visible organisms and pests, other microorganisms like organic pollutants, bacteria, and fungi are also in waste (Domingo & Nadal, 2009). Furthermore, decomposition involves the emission of foul smell, and underlying it are methane gas, carbon dioxide, dust, endotoxins, and airborne microorganisms (Ho Hwang et al., 2011).

However, it was not the smell of the waste that bothered the participants. For participants, the most challenging part of their work was being exposed to the scorching heat of the sun or extreme cold due to continuous rain.

"Hindi na rin sa amoy ng basura, sa init na ba Ma'am, yung init po ang kalaban., Inom na lang ng tubig, bibili ng ice. Minsan kapag maulan, malamig, natutuyuan kami ng pawis sa likod." (It's the heat that is challenging, not the smell of the trash. We just drink water, and we buy ice. Sometimes, if it rains, our sweat just dries on our back.) - Mike

These weather conditions can affect workers in two ways. Biologically, these bring discomfort to the body. These are labeled as thermal stress. It can either be heat stress or cold stress. Heat stress can cause heat exhaustion, experienced in headaches, dizziness, sleepiness, lack of concentration, and, in more severe cases, dehydration and heatstroke. Cold stress can cause vascular injuries, skin inflammations and blisters, increased muscle tone and shivering, hypothermia, lowering of organ temperatures, and even death (World Health Organization, 2021).

The third social problem experienced by the participants was negative social perception and stigma. Social perception is how people create impressions of others and combine all their information to construct a general logical picture. For the waste collectors, social perceptions about them relating to their work were predominantly negative. Most participants had their fair share of negative experiences with how others perceive and treat them. All of them claimed that people regard them as smelly.

"Hindi talaga maiiwasan yan. Pagtatap kaagad ng truck tabon kaagad ng bunganga eh. Nakakainsulto tapos kaya sabi nila ang baho." (You cannot avoid it. When the truck stops, they will cover their mouth. It is insulting because they will say it's smelly) - Mike

Some even belittled them because of their work.

"May mga sinasabi ang bayaw ko sa akin, kasi ito lang ang trabaho ko, basurero." (My brother-in-law belittles me for being a waste collector) - Oben

Stigma is a trait wherein people are regarded as unworthy of credit and acceptance. People sometimes avoided the participants because they were waste collectors.

"Minsan po ayaw po nila makipagkwentuhan kasi ganon mabaho." (Sometimes they don't want to talk to us because we smell bad.) - Jay

Both negative social perception and stigma have unfavorable effects on a person's self-esteem (Crocker, 2008) and sense of self (Mousaid et al., 2017). These can either motivate people to work harder and prove their worth or lead to thinking they are not worthy of credit and acceptance



and should be ashamed of their work. Social stigma is a problem encountered by waste collectors because it causes unfair treatment from other people. Their smell repulses some people, and some consider their work lowly. Some people try to avoid them and disrespect them. These contribute to the factors that cause society's negative perception and stigma because the garbage collectors might take these negatively.

3.3.3. Coping with social problems

The participants dealt with social problems through the following: work comparison, work convenience, flexible time, social appreciation, and sidelines.

Regarding work comparison, the participants considered their current job similar or even better than their previous job.

"Kasi po kung nagtatrabaho ka po sa construction, buong araw, mabigat pa. Eh dito sa amin, pag nagpasok ka ng ala-una, area nakasampa ka sa truck, kapag naubos na yung ano yung hinahakot nyo at naikot nyo na yung area nyo, ah sabi ng monitoring clear na clear na. kahit na alas dos, alas tres, alas tres y media pwede na ako mag dump." (Because if you work in construction site, it is a whole day's work, and it is heavy, unlike here. When we are scheduled for one o'clock in the afternoon, and we finish it, and the monitor tells us that the area is already clear, we can dump the garbage and go home even if it just 2:00 or 3:00 or 3:30 in the afternoon) - Art

Another participant's way of coping with social problems is work convenience. Waste collectors applied for the job because the application process was not difficult. They also chose their job because they lived near their workplace.

"Kasi dito na din po ako lumaki, sanay na din po ako. Kasi sa simula pa lang nandito na ako." (I'm used to it because I was raised here, I have been here since the beginning.) -Rad

In addition, the participants stayed in their present jobs because they thought it had advantages. Most participants liked their job because of the flexible schedule or time. They only spent five to seven hours a day, and often, the garbage varied in quantity.

"Kasi may pahinga naman dito. Hindi naman full day ang trabaho. Pagkatapos trabaho pwede ka na magpahinga." (We have a break; we don't have to work the whole day. After our work, we can rest) - Ben

Another coping strategy the participants used was the appreciation of the other people towards them. Some participants testified that some people they did not know were good to them. They were given food from hotels and restaurants.

"Minsan yung hinahakutan namin ng basura binibigyan kami ng meryenda kapag may sobra sa mga hotel." (Sometimes the people in the hotel where we collect garbage give us snacks.) - Ad

This simple act of kindness towards the waste collectors somehow encouraged them to believe that many people still respect and understand their job as waste collectors. Moreover, waste collectors were motivated to stay in their jobs because their superiors and co-workers appreciated them. They treated one another as family members.

"Kasi sa trabaho naming ito para na kaming magkakapatid." (In our job we treat one another as a family) - Mike

Filipinos have ways and concepts of initiating social interaction that build and promote a good and smooth relationship with others that becomes the outcome of *pakikipagkapwa* or shared identity/self (Mendoza & Perkinson, 2003). In the setting of waste collectors, they enjoyed and chose to stay in their jobs because they liked the same flow together and understood one another.

The participants had their way of considering *"kapwa"* (shared identity). They developed a smooth interpersonal relationship with their co-workers, leading them to stay and enjoy their jobs. It is a usual trait of the Filipino to have a good connection and promote a good relationship. The waste collectors initiate *"pakikisama"*, an interpersonal relationship where people are friendly to one another, a typical Filipino trait (Saito, 2010).

Another coping strategy of the participants was looking for alternative ways of having income or sidelines. In the case of the waste collectors whose salaries were delayed for four months, they looked for alternative means to earn their everyday living.

"Ang mahirap lang naman dito sahod eh. Dapat may sideline." (Salary is the only problem here. You should know how to find alternative sources of income) - Mike

Every waste collector had extra work to make both ends meet if they did not receive their salary on time. Some of them worked at construction sites after their working shift. Two of them were fishermen, and some of them raised swine. They also segregated and sold recyclable garbage. They found other means to earn money and provide for their families.

When the participants' salaries were delayed, their spouses looked for different ways to provide for the family's needs.

"Minsan iyon na lang po ang misis ko na naglalaba. Minsan sa isang lingo, tatlong beses. Iyon na lang po ang ginagawa namin. Minsan pang suportang pag walang sahod." (Sometimes my wife gets hired to do laundry three times a week. That's how we support the family when there is no salary yet.) - Jay

Some participants raised hogs that they could sell to have extra income for their future use. Some of them worked on the construction sites when their shift was over. Another alternative way that the participants had in mind was to sell recyclable trash (*pangangalakal*).

"Ay po. Nangangalakal po. Mga plastic na iyan, bale hati kayo. Hatian natin iyan." (We collect trash such as plastic and divide it among us)- Harry

Waste collectors found several ways to have extra work to provide an additional income for their daily living expenses based on the data. They had their simple strategies for living or "*diskarte*" in Filipino concept, such as raising a domesticated pig so they could sell it. Another sideline is "*pangangalakal*" or selling recyclable trash. The participants' strategies in coping showed the Filipinos' common characteristic, which is not to stick in only one area just to provide their needs for a living (Valledor-Lukey, 2012).

3.3.3. Social Insights

As regards social insights, the participants valued their work environment. Waste collectors enjoyed the little detours that their duty afforded them. They enjoyed looking at places along their routes.

"Lalong-lalo na kung mga nasa ano ka, marami ka nakikita, marami ka ano. Kasi iba iba iyong mga hindi mo naaabot na lugar na naaabot mo. Akala ko noon ang Puerto maliit lang iyon pala malaki rin. Kasi iyan sabihin mong hindi ka palagi sa truck na iyan. Minsan may isa doon na hiram ka, doon ka na naman sa isang barangay." (When we collect trash, we can go to places we've never been. I thought Puerto is a small place but it's big. We do not always have the same route. Sometimes, if the other group in another barangay has limited garbage collectors, we will be requested to help.) - Herb

Doing their job not just for their own but also for the community shows how important the waste collectors' job is for our community.

"Siyempre kapag maka ano, iyong, sa paglilinis ng basura sa bayan. Kasi mapangit man tingnan kung marumi iyong ating lugar e. Kasi parang maganda rin ba ano, para makatulong din ba kami sa bayan. Maglinis ng Puerto..." (It is good to help in maintaining the cleanliness of the community. Because it is unpleasant to see a place full of garbage. It is a good thing that we can help our community. We help in maintaining the cleanliness of Puerto)- Ad

The participants perceived their jobs positively. They could see the good in the little things, even with the simple tours they get on duty, and how they could help the community.

The working environment significantly impacts job performance and occupational motivation (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). In the case of waste collectors, their route or the assigned place where they collect affects them. Their working environment is a factor that contributes to their job satisfaction.

Another social insight that the participants gained was dignity. For the participants, collecting waste could provide for their daily needs and might be more profitable than other jobs. Collecting waste could help them through their salary and the sideline, such as in "*pangangalakal*."

"Pero hindi nila alam, mas kuwan sa basura, may pera." (But they don't know that there is money in the garbage.) -Jay

Aside from being in a profitable job, waste collectors considered their job dignified.

"Marangal naman kasi ang trabaho na ito e. Iyon ang kagandahan." (Our job is a dignified one. That's the beauty in it) - Harry

The participants considered their job as something valuable to the community. They helped the community to be clean. Although some people would comment on their smell, for the participants, if not for them, the community would suffer from the smell and not them.

"Sabi ng mga tao, mabaho daw pag nagakuha kami ng basura. Sa isip isip ko normal lang naman ang trabahong ito. Marangal naman kaysa naman magnakaw ka. Baka mataas pa ang sweldo namin kaysa sa iba dyan. Magpasalamat na lang sila pag hindi naming hakutin mamaho din kayo dyan. Pag hindi talaga nakuha ang basura grabeng baho nyan. Sa bayan isang araw lang hindi makabyahe ang truck tambak na ang basura." (They say that we smell when we collect garbage. In my mind, our job is normal; it is dignified; it is better than stealing. Our salary may be higher than what other workers receive. They should thank us because if we don't collect garbage, it will stink. In the city proper, if we don't collect in just a day, there will be tons of garbage.) - Art

The participants were aware of their value to the people. They were not ashamed of their job and even said that the community must be thankful to them because of their significant contribution through their jobs.

"Ano po syempre, di naman naming kinakahiya trabaho namin. Dapat nga magpasalamat pa sila kasi nakakatulong kami." (I am not ashamed of my job. They should thank us that we can help the community) - Ed

Dignity can affect an individual's self-esteem and sense of societal value (Hamilton et al., 2017). Waste collectors accept their jobs but cannot control societal views about them.



The participants' statements above show they were satisfied and proud of their job. They did not see that their work was lower than the other higher-earning jobs. They were not ashamed of their source of living because they worked to provide for their family.

4. Discussion

Given the biological problems met by the waste collectors, the participants experienced physical discomfort and physical injuries. Their experience supports studies that report that waste collection is an occupation that is risky and dangerous to the health of workers (Abd El-Wahab et al., 2014; Decharat, 2017; Johnson, 2017; Neghab et al., 2013; Tsovilis et al., 2014) and requires much bodily and physical effort that waste collectors claim to have bones and muscular pains (Newman, 2016). Nevertheless, the present study participants viewed themselves as healthy despite the risks and dangers associated with their work. They viewed health as the absence of sickness. As mentioned, they all believed their bodies were in good and normal condition despite constant and direct contact with waste. They claimed they did not feel any change in their bodies from the first day as waste collectors until now. Even if they experienced physical discomfort and injuries, they did not consider it a problem because they believed it was common for everybody, regardless of work or workplace. They also believed that having such a workplace does not hinder them from being healthy. For them, it is only a matter of positively seeing and taking things and situations. The physical discomforts they experienced were only part of the consequences of their daily work. In the same way, physical injuries were part of their work but were only occasional and isolated happenings that could happen to anyone, anywhere, and anytime.

Their coping strategies regarding these identified problems in terms of the biological aspect were body and health care, such as taking vitamins and body protection like wearing personal protective equipment. If they do not work, they will not survive, their families included. They focused their attention on the positive side of their work. Acceptance, optimism, and a sense of purpose were the keys to their assumed "normal, good, and healthy" bodies and health and why they continue to live and thrive.

Regarding the psychological aspect, the participants' problems led them to perceive limited work options, value their present work more, and disregard all the worries and uncertainties of body and health risks to which their work is connected. In a study by Vasquez (2013), waste collectors in Nicaragua experienced stressful events even at an early age, leading them to participate in adult acts. Because they belonged to the poorest communities, worst in health, had the highest illiteracy rates, and did not have high hopes for the future, these led them to discrimination and isolation from society. Previous studies also reported that education positively correlates with work achievements and financial successes (Gardner & Oswald, 2018; Riddell & Song, 2011). In this connection, the present study participants reported that they had low self-worth because of low educational attainment. However, low self-worth did not affect the participants' rejection of a sick role because of the acceptance and "reframing" they applied to work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Their health worries and uncertainties, on the other hand, may be reflections of their

repressed fears were overshadowed by their work's imbibed necessity to their families and the community. Acceptance, "reframing," and "necessity shield" made them view their work as not only the main source of their livelihood and extra income, ensuring their family's survival first and foremost, but also giving them a sense of positivity and purpose. This sense of optimism may be considered "unrealistic optimism," as pointed out in a previous study that showed that waste collectors viewed themselves as not at risk even when the dangers were evident (Ferrer & Klein, 2015).

In terms of the social aspect, the participants faced work issues (e.g., delayed salary, no job tenure or security, and absence of health or work benefits), workplace issues (direct exposure to different types of wastes and exposure to extreme or changing weather), and negative social perception and stigma. The participants counteract these social problems through work comparison, convenience, flexible time, social appreciation, and sidelines. Regarding work comparison, they considered their work good or better than other jobs (e.g., working on the farm). They pointed out that job applications were easy and living near their workplace was advantageous for work convenience. Concerning flexible time, they highlighted that a flexible work schedule enabled them to have other sources of income after collecting waste. For social appreciation, they felt their importance because they were appreciated by some people and by their superiors and fellow workers. Lastly, for the sidelines, they looked for alternative sources of income if their salaries were delayed. These coping strategies contrasted with some studies that signified that negative perception and stigma impact a person's self-esteem (Crocker, 2008) and sense of self (Mousaid et al., 2017). The waste collectors in this study did not mind negative experiences with others in the community. Instead, they cultivated a good and stable relationship with co-workers, "refocusing" on the advantages of their work and establishing their moral and societal values. As regards insights gained, they highlighted work environment and dignity. Their work enabled them to see the other places in the city, and they were happy that they played a significant role in maintaining the cleanliness of the community. They also emphasized that working as waste collectors is a dignified means of earning a living; hence, they were not ashamed.

5. Conclusion

Waste collectors encounter several challenges that make them develop strategic ways to deal with them. These challenges are the risks to the body and health, exposure to hazardous waste, the intense smell, the weather, absence of health benefits, delayed monthly salary, limited compensation, the stigma the community gives them, and accidents. Those challenges do not hinder them from viewing themselves as healthy and dignified as other workers. Resiliency plays a significant role in bouncing back from those challenges. Their co-workers and their families serve as their sources of motivation in continuing their work as waste collectors.

This study shows waste collectors' risks and dangers in their occupation, making them find several strategic ways of counteracting them. It also emphasizes the importance of unity, affirmation, motivation, and a positive attitude in coping with workplace challenges no matter how risky the occupation is. Furthermore, it

demonstrates that the Filipino culture has a significant role in molding the resilient attitude of waste collectors. Unity in the workplace, smooth communication, and community appreciation enhance their resiliency.

This study recommends that the waste collectors be provided compensatory benefits because they have intense exposure to risks and dangers and be supplied with appropriate personal protective equipment or protective gear that will make them perform their tasks efficiently. They should also be given free regular check-ups and medications such as pain relievers or vitamins. It is also suggested that proper waste management seminars and awareness campaigns be conducted among the residents to help the community and the waste collectors make their work easier.

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