



ASIAN JOURNAL OF RESILIENCE

The Official Research Publication of Palawan State University

ISSN: 2719-0307

2021



Volume 3, Issue No. 1

International Refereed

AJR aims to become a platform for recommendations and development of frameworks, creations for programs and policies, and discourses about varied approaches to environment and human resilience and well-being along the dimensions of individual, society, and human-environment interaction in the Asian context. AJR is a multidisciplinary publication that endorses resilience and well-being as the themes of the different fields of study. AJR's resilience and well-being are anchored on preparedness, adaptation, flexibility, and recovery during changes and adversities. AJR welcomes articles about resilience and well-being in social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, education, health sciences, tourism, technology, commerce, and industry.

Copyright 2021 by Palawan State University

Cover design by: Almujaheed Jamion

All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form or any means without the written permission of the copyright.

Published by:

PALAWAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Tinguiban Heights, Puerto Princesa City

5300, Palawan, Philippines.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief

JONALYN B. VILLAROSA

Palawan State University, Philippines

Associate Editors

EUNICE T. VIRAY

Palawan State University, Philippines

IAN ANTHONY B. DAVATOS

Palawan State University, Philippines

TERESITA D. TAJOLosa

Palawan State University, Philippines

AIMEE LYNN A. BARRION-DUPO

University of the Philippines Los Baños, Philippines

FRAIDE A. GANOTICE JR.

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

SUSANNA SIU-ZSE YEUNG

Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Managing Editor

JEMIMAH G. PIZARRO

Palawan State University, Philippines

For the electronic version of the journal, please
visit: www.asianjournalofresilience.com
or scan the code below





Asian Journal of
Resilience

2021

Volume 3, Issue No. 1

Table of Contents

v	Editor's Note
1	Garbage Life: Waste Collectors' Problems, Coping Strategies, and Insights <i>Charbie A. Nicanor, BC Faith C. Villar, Alexandra B. Adelantar, Hazel Gay Esquiviaz-Chua, Ecleah Sol M. Yadao</i>
17	Caregivers Need Help Too: The Lived Experiences and Coping Mechanisms of the Caregivers of the Dengue Patients in Palawan, Philippines <i>Gregorio S. Naldo, Jr., Maria Khryzza Nova E. Gacosta, Kharen E. Arevalo, Loida Y. Orcales</i>
26	Issues Related to Lesbian and Gay Students' Experiences: Implications to the Promotion of Gender-Safe Spaces <i>John Paul D. Reloj</i>

Editor's Note

The third issue of the Asian Journal of Resilience (AJR) features research articles that illustrate different facets of resilience as viewed through the lens of waste collectors, caregivers, and lesbian and gay students.

The first paper, *Garbage Life: Waste Collectors' Problems, Coping Strategies, and Insights*, examines the experiences of garbage collectors. Authored by Mr. Charbie Nicanor, Ms. BC Faith C. Villar, Mr. Alexandar B. Adelantar, Ms. Hazel Gay Esquiviaz-Chua, and Ms. Ecleah Sol M. Yadao, this article analyzes the difficulties encountered, coping mechanisms employed, and insights gained by the waste collectors. Using a biopsychosocial framework, the authors explore the abovementioned concerns from biological, psychological, and social perspectives. This article also emphasizes how the waste collectors' insights made them more tenacious in facing difficulties and helped them appreciate their work.

The second article, *Caregivers Need Help, Too: The Lived Experiences and Coping Mechanisms of the Caregivers of the Dengue Patients in Palawan, Philippines*, sheds light on the experiences of informal caregivers. This qualitative phenomenological study delves into the lived experiences and coping techniques of the parents or guardians of patients with dengue fever. The themes generated from the study are challenges, care practices, and coping strategies of the caregivers. The caregivers display fortitude in the face of the problems connected with caring for dengue patients, but the study findings reveal that they also require support. The authors of this paper, Mr. Gregorio S. Naldo, Jr., Ms. Maria Khryzza Nova E. Gacosta, Ms. Kharen E. Arevalo, and Ms. Loida Y. Orcales, recommend that emotional, psychological, and social support and other forms of assistance be provided to the caregivers.

The third paper, *Issues Related to Lesbian and Gay Students' Experiences: Implications to the Promotion of Gender-Safe Spaces*, investigates the experiences of lesbian and gay students as seen through the eyes of heterosexual and homosexual learners. Authored by Mr. John Paul D. Reloj, the paper examines the challenges encountered and the coping mechanisms used by lesbian and gay students. The article also outlines the participants' recommendations for promoting gender-safe spaces. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of including the advancement of gender-safe environments as an essential component of a student development program.

The AJR Editorial Board conveys its profound appreciation to the authors, reviewers, and editors of the research studies mentioned above. The publication of this issue has been possible because of their significant contributions.

Jonalyn B. Villarosa
Editor-in-Chief

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

Charbie A. Nicanor¹
 Alexandra B. Adelantar²
 BC Faith C. Villar³
 Hazel Gay Esquiviaz-Chua¹
 Ecleah Sol M. Yadao⁴



Date Received: 05 Mar 2021
 Date Revised: 08 Nov 2021
 Date Accepted: 16 Dec 2021

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

Corresponding Author:

Charbie A. Nicanor

Email: cnicanor@psu.palawan.edu.ph

¹ Palawan State University, Palawan, Philippines

² Reed Elsevier Shared Services Philippines, Inc., Quezon City, Philippines

³ Tiny Nook Therapy Center, Puerto Princesa City, Philippines

⁴ Provincial Government of Palawan, Philippines

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.



Creative Commons CC BY: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits any use, reproduction, and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified in the Asian Journal of Resilience (<http://asianjournalofresilience.com/index.php/ajr>).

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 (Tibbets, 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 apektado 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.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare that no conflict of interest is involved in the study.

Funding

The authors received no financial support from any individuals or groups for this article's research and/or authorship.

References

- Abd El-Wahab, E., Eassa, S., Lotfi, S., El Masry, S., Shatat, H., & Kotkat, A. (2014). Adverse health problems among municipality workers in Alexandria (Egypt). *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 5(5), 545-556. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24932385>
- Abou-Elwafa, H. S., El-Bestar, S. F., El-Gilany, A. H., & Awad, E. (2012). Musculoskeletal disorders among municipal solid waste collectors in Mansoura, Egypt: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ open*, 2(5), e001338. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2012-001338>
- Article 1, Section 2 of Republic Act 9003. (2001). An act providing for an ecological solid waste management program, creating the necessary institutional mechanisms and incentives, declaring certain acts prohibited and providing penalties, appropriating funds therefore, and for other purposes. https://www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2001/ra_9003_2001.html
- Ashforth, B., & Kreiner, G. (1999). "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *The academy of management review*, 413-434. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259134>
- Auhagen, A. (2000) On the psychology of meaning of life: *Swiss Journal of Psychology*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232603892_On_the_psychology_of_meaning_of_life
- Aweng, E.R., and Fatt, C.C. Survey of Potential Health Risk of Rubbish Collectors from the Garbage Dump Sites in Kelantan, Malaysia, February 2014. <https://www.ajouronline.com/index.php/AJAS/article/view/828/439>
- Bickmeier, R., Lopina, E., & Rogelberg, S. (2015). Well-being and performance in the context of dirty work. In Veldhoven, M., & Peccei, R. (Ed.). *Well-being and Performance at Work: The role of context*, 16. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781317588795/chapters/10.4324%2F9781317543325-8>
- Biopsychosocial Model. (n.d.). University of Rochester. <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/medialibraries/urmc-media/education/md/documents/biopsychosocial-model-approach.pdf>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7717.2009.01129.x
- Bradshaw, C., Atkinson, S., & Doody, O. (2017). Employing a qualitative description approach in health care research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 4, 233339361774228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393617742282>
- City garbage doubles. (2015). Palawan News. Puerto Princesa, Palawan: Palawan News Publication. <https://palawan-news.com/city-garbage-doubles/>
- Crocker, D. (2008). *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511492594
- Cruvinel, V., Marques, C. P., Cardoso, V., Novaes, M., Araújo, W. N., Angulo-Tuesta, A., Escalda, P., Galato, D., Brito, P., & da Silva, E. N. (2019). Health conditions and occupational risks in a novel group: waste pickers in the largest open garbage dump in Latin America. *BMC public health*, 19(1), 581. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6879-x>
- Decharat, S. (2017). Prevalence of adverse health effects among municipal solid waste workers, Southern Thailand. *International Journal Of Occupational Hygiene*, 9(4), 186-191. <http://ijoh.tums.ac.ir/index.php/ijoh/article/view/309>
- Denisov, É. I., Morozova, T. V., Adeninskaia, E. E., & Kur'arov, N. N. (2013). *Meditsina truda i promyshlennaia ekologiia*, 4, 18-25.
- Department of Environment and Natural Resources. DENR surpasses 2019 solid waste management targets. (2019, December 24). November 7, 2021. <https://denr.gov.ph/index.php/news-events/press-releases/1394-denr-surpasses-2019-solid-waste-management-targets>



- Domingo, J., & Nadal, M. (2009). Domestic waste composting facilities: A review of human health risks. *Environment International*, 382-389. http://sgpwe.izt.uam.mx/files/users/uami/citla/Lectura_s_temas_selechos/domestic_waste_composting_faciliti es.pdf
- Eskezia, D., Alemu, Z., Yimam, K. & Tadese, F. (2016). Prevalence and associated factors of occupational injuries among municipal solid waste collectors in four zones of Amhara region, Northwest Ethiopia. *BMC Public Health*, 16(1), 862. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3483-1>
- Etikan, I. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Fava, G. A., & Sonino, N. (2008). The biopsychosocial model thirty years later. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 77(1), 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000110052>
- Feinstein, L., Sabates, R., Anderson, T., Sorhaindo, A., Hammond, C. (2018). What are the effects of education on health? https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242456417_4_What_are_the_effects_of_education_on_health
- Ferrer, R. & Klein, W.M. (2015). Risk perceptions and health behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26258160>
- Gardner, J. & Oswald, A. (2018). How does education affect mental well-being and job satisfaction? https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266404323_How_Does_Education_Affect_Mental_Well-Being_and_Job_Satisfaction
- Ghosh, S., & Hasan, S. (2010). Sanitary landfill. *Engineering Geology, Environmental Geology*, Vol. III. <https://docplayer.net/35065793-Environmental-and-engineering-geology-vol-iii-sanitary-landfill-suman-ghosh-syed-e-hasan.html>
- Hamilton, P., Redman, T., & McMurray, R. (2017). "Lower than a snake's belly": discursive constructions of dignity and heroism in low-status garbage work. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3618-z>
- Ho Hwang, S., Uk Park, D., Chul Ha, K., Woo Cho, H. & Yoon, C. (2011). Airborne bacteria concentrations and related factors at university laboratories, hospital diagnostic laboratories and a biowaste site. *Journal of clinical pathology*, 64, 261-4. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jcp.2010.084764>
- Johnson, D. (2017). The top 10 most dangerous jobs in America. *Time Magazine*. <http://time.com/5074471/most-dangerous-jobs/>
- Lumen Biopsychosocial Model of health and Illness. (n.d.). In *Lumen Boundless Psychology*. "The biopsychosocial model of health and illness." Boundless Psychology. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-psychology/chapter/introduction-to-health-psychology/>
- Mendoza, S., & Perkinson, J. (2003). Filipino "Kapwa" in Global Dialogue: A Different Politics of Being-With the "Other." *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12-4. <https://www.s3-live.kent.edu/s3fs-root/s3fs-public/file/10-S.-Lily-Mendoza-Jim-Perkinson.pdf>
- Mohammed, S., & Abdul Latif. (2014). Possible health danger associated with garbage/refuse collectors. *IOSR Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology*, 8(9), 22-30. <https://doi.org/10.9790/2402-08942230>
- Mousaid, S., Huegaerts, K., Bosmans, K., Julià, M., Benach, J., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). The quality of work in the Belgian service voucher system. *International Journal of Health Services*, 47(1), 40-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020731416677478>
- Municipal Solid Waste. (2016). U.S. *Environmental Agency*. <https://archive.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/web/html/>
- National Solid Waste Management Commission. (2016). *National Solid Waste Management in Philippines*, 1-250. <http://nswmc.emb.gov.ph/>
- Neghab, J., Khodaparast-kazerouni, F., Hassanzadeh, J., & Ahmadzadeh, F. (2013). Assessment of respiratory symptoms and lung functional impairments among a group of garbage collectors. *International Journal of Occupational Hygiene*, 5(2), 76-81. <http://ijoh.tums.ac.ir/index.php/ijoh/article/view/71>
- Newman, D. (2016). *Dirty and dangerous: Worker safety and health in New York City's Scofflaw Commercial Waste Industry*. New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, 2-64. New York. http://nycosh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/DirtyDangerous_FullReport_Final.pdf
- Pellegrino, R., Sinding, C., de Wijk, R.A., Hummel, T. (2017). Habituation and adaptation to odors in humans. *Physiology Behavior*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28408237>
- PGMA inaugurates R.P.'s first LGU-controlled sanitary landfill. (2006). *Philippine Information Agency*. <http://archives.pia.gov.ph/?m=12&sec=reader&rp=2&fi=p060401.htm&no=12&date=04/01/9106>
- Plastics Europe (2018): An analysis of European plastics production, demand and waste data. https://www.plasticseurope.org/application/files/5715/1717/4180/Plastics_the_facts_2017_FINAL_for_web_site_one_page.pdf

- Rahman, W., Luo, J., Golam Hafeez, A. S. M., Sun, T. (2015). A comprehensive review of microfinance impacts, sustainability, and outreach. *Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology*, 6(2), 64-76. <https://doi.org/10.9734/AJAEES/2015/16513>
- Ramzan, M., Kashif Zubair, H., Ali, G. and Arslan, M. (2014). Impact of compensation on employee performance (Empirical evidence from banking sector of Pakistan) *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5(2), 302-309. http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_5_No_2_February_2014/34.pdf
- Raziq, A. & Maulabakhsh, R. (2015). Impact of working environment on job satisfaction: *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 23, 717-725. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00524-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00524-9)
- Riddell, W. C., & Song, X. (2011). Education, job search and re-employment outcomes among the unemployed. *IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper Series*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1965151>
- Saito, I. (2010). Pakikisama: A Filipino trait. *Institute of Psychology Risho University*, 3-9. http://repository.ris.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/11266/5196/1/shinrikenkiyo_008_045.pdf
- Sankoh, F., Yan, X., & Tran, Q. (2013). Environmental and health impact of solid waste disposal in developing cities: A case study of Granville Brook Dumpsite, Freetown, Sierra Leone. *Journal of Environmental Protection*, 665-670. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jep.2013.47076>
- Sarafino, E. P. & Smith, T. W. (2017). *Health psychology: Biopsychosocial interactions*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley
- Slovic, P., Fischhoff, B. & Lichtenstein, S. (2005). Facts and fears: Understanding perceived risk. *Policy and Practice in Health and Safety*. 39. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0445-4_9
- Song, Q., Li, J., & Zeng, X. (2015). Minimizing the increasing solid waste through zero waste strategy. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 104(2017), 199-210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.08.027>
- Tessema, M., Ready, K., & Embaye, A. (2013). The effects of employee recognition, pay and benefits on job satisfaction: Cross country evidence. *Journal of Business and Economics*, 4 (1), 1-13.
- Tibbetts, J. (2013). Garbage collection is "one of the most hazardous jobs". *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association Journal = Journal de l'Association Medicale Canadienne*, 185(7), 4434. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-4434>
- Tsovili, E., Rachiotis, G., Symvoulakis, E., Thanasias, E., Giannissopoulou, O., Papagiannis, D., Hadjichristodoulou, C. (2014). Municipal waste collectors and hepatitis B and C virus infection: a cross-sectional study. *Le Infezioni in Medicina : Rivista Periodica Di Ezologia, Epidemiologia, Diagnostica, Clinica E Terapia Delle Patologie Infettive*, 22(4), 271-276. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25551841>
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2005). *Training Module. Closing an Open Dumpsite and Shifting from Open Dumping to Controlled Dumping and to Sanitary Land Filling*, 6-7. Pampanga, Philippines: Department of Environmental and Natural Resources. http://www.unep.or.jp/etc/Publications/spc/SPC_Training-Module.pdf
- Valledor-Lukey, V. (2012). Pagkababae at pagkalalake (Femininity and masculinity): Developing a Filipino gender trait inventory and predicting self-esteem and sexism. *Child and Family Studies - Dissertations*, 28-149. https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&context=cfs_etd
- Vázquez, J. (2013). Happiness among the garbage: Differences in overall happiness among trash pickers in León (Nicaragua). *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.743574>
- Velasco G., Bittner, C., Harth, V., & Preisser, A. (2015). Health status and health-related quality of life of municipal waste collection workers - A cross-sectional survey. *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology*, 10(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12995-015-0065-6>
- Villamor, A. (2018, January). City struggles with volume of collected garbage. <http://palawan-news.com/city-struggles-volume-collected-garbage/>
- Wandera, H. (2011). The effect of short term employment contract on an organization. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(21), 184-204. http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_21_Special_Issue_December_2011/22-1.pdf
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Comprehensive mental health action plan 2013-2030*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031029>
- Yacat, J. (2013). Filipino psychology (Sikolohiyang Pilipino). *The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2, 551-556. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118339893.wbecp224>



About the Authors

Charbie A. Nicanor is a graduate of Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Palawan State University. A licensed Psychometrician, he currently works as an instructor at Palawan State University- El Nido. He was invited as a speaker at the 2nd International Virtual Research Conference of Asia Pacific School Psychology Association. He was also a psychosocial volunteer at the Mental Health and Psychosocial Services (MHPSS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also serves as a volunteer counselor at Share Psychosocial Services and an on-call Psychometrician at Psych System Innovation Incorporated and Palawan State University- Office of the Student Affairs and Services. His research interest includes criminal psychology, political psychology, LGBT psychology, and Filipino psychology.

BC Faith C. Villar obtained her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Palawan State University. She currently works as an assistant therapist at Tiny Nook Therapy Center, a pediatric clinic that offers occupational therapy for children with special abilities.

Alexandra B. Adelantar is a graduate of Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Palawan State University. At present, she works as a content editor at Reed Elsevier Shared Services Philippines, Inc.

Hazel Gay Esquiviaz-Chua graduated with the degree Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Palawan State University. Her research interest includes family psychology, marital counseling, and child psychology.

Ecleah Sol M. Yadao obtained her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Palawan State University. She is a licensed psychometrician. She previously worked as a guidance counselor at Palawan State University. She is currently designated as a psychometrician at the Provincial Government of Palawan.

Caregivers Need Help Too: The Lived Experiences and Coping Mechanisms of the Caregivers of the Dengue Patients in Palawan, Philippines



Gregorio S. Naldo Jr.¹
Maria Khryzza Nova E. Gacosta¹
Kharen E. Arevalo¹
Loida Y. Orcales²

Date Received: 10 Jan 2020
Date Revised: 25 Oct 2021
Date Accepted: 25 Dec 2021

Abstract

Dengue is a fast-spreading disease characterized by a severe flu-like illness that can cause severe complications that can lead to death. While dengue patients are at the frontline in battling the disease, their caregivers are the ones experiencing the challenge of ensuring the patients' recovery. Extant literature related to dengue focuses on the condition of the patients, their mental and emotional status, and the disease's effects. Previous studies about the dengue patients' caregivers are minimal. This qualitative phenomenological study aims to understand better the experiences of dengue patients' informal caregivers (parents/guardians). It describes the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of seven selected caregivers of dengue patients in Quezon, Palawan, Philippines, where there was a dengue outbreak in 2019. Three major themes were generated: challenges, care practices, and coping strategies. The challenges were financial difficulty, lack of knowledge about dengue, fulfilling too many roles, patients' behavior, physical and psychological health, and strained relationship with spouse. Care practices included personal care, herbal medicine, and caregiving strategies learned. Coping strategies were categorized as positive and negative. The caregivers demonstrated resilience in facing the challenges associated with caring for dengue patients, but data reveal that they needed assistance, too.

Keywords

experiences, coping, caregivers, dengue

Corresponding Author:

Gregorio S. Naldo, Jr.
Email: gsnaldo@psu.palawan.edu.ph
¹Palawan State University, Palawan, Philippines
²Department of Health, Quezon, Palawan, Philippines

(33%) to hilly (31%) to mountainous (26%). Farming is the main source of livelihood in Quezon. Other alternative sources of income and subsistence are fishing and gathering of forest products (Mandap, 2000).

1. Introduction

Considering that Palawan is abundant in water bodies and forest areas, it is not safe and free from various diseases like dengue – a fast-spreading illness caused by mosquito bites. In 2018, Palawan recorded the highest number of dengue cases in the Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (MIMAROPA) Region (Formosa, 2018a). In numbers and percentages, as reported by Formosa (2018b), the province of Palawan recorded an increase of 239 % in dengue cases, with four deaths from January to August 2018. The rate illustrated 1,228 dengue cases from the 22 towns in Palawan. In 2019, Palawan topped the MIMAROPA region again, having the most dengue cases as of June 2019 (Magdayao, 2019b). The figures were 94.4 % higher compared with 1,375 cases in the same period in 2018 (Magdayao, 2019b). Among the 22 municipalities that registered dengue cases, Quezon logged the highest number, with 236 cases (Magdayao, 2019b).

Quezon is classified as a second-class municipality in Palawan. It consists of 14 villages (barangays) and has 9571 households in its locality. Its terrain ranges from flat

Severe dengue is a potentially deadly complication due to plasma leaking, fluid accumulation, respiratory distress, severe bleeding, or organ impairment. The term outbreak was first defined in 1562 as a sudden or violent increase in activity or currency. At present, an outbreak is represented in many types. An outbreak caused by disease is a manifestation of increased cases more than the normally expected cases in a community. It was an outbreak with the dengue cases rising rapidly in Quezon, Palawan. As a result, it was declared under a state of calamity (Magdayao, 2019a).

The most significant number of dengue cases ever reported globally was in 2019. All World Health Organization (WHO) regions were affected, and dengue transmission was recorded in Afghanistan for the first time. The American Region alone reported 3.1 million cases, with more than 25,000 classified as severe. Despite this alarming number of cases, deaths associated with dengue were fewer than in the previous year. A high number of cases were reported in Bangladesh (101,000), Malaysia (131,000), the Philippines (420,000), and Vietnam (320,000) (WHO, 2021).

Informal caregivers or caregivers who have no specific training first apply the alternative way to relieve the



Creative Commons CC BY: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits any use, reproduction, and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified in the Asian Journal of Resilience (<http://asianjournalofresilience.com/index.php/ajr>).

symptoms in dengue cases. Home care has gradually gained more importance, and it is a tremendous burden on the shoulders of caregivers. They help with directed care activities such as physical care, symptom management, and monitoring of changes. They perform in-house activities such as shopping, childcare, house care, cooking, and laundry while caring for the patient and ensuring patient safety (Ugur et al. 2014).

Given et al. (2001) reported that caregivers experience challenges in pain management, patient mobilization, daily life activities, communication with health personnel, symptom management, home medicine treatment, and the management of emotional reactions of the patients and often feel helpless and useless, especially when they cannot control the patient's pains. Caregivers should be prepared for home care to provide accurate and complete patient care (Ugur et al., 2014).

As stated in the study of Reinhard et al. (2008), caregivers are sometimes referred to as "secondary patients," who need and deserve protection and guidance. The researchers conducted this study to understand the caregivers' (parents/guardians) views of the dengue patients in the area. The objective of the present study was to determine the caregivers' experiences in taking care of the dengue patients, the problems they encountered in taking care of the patients from the beginning until recovery, and the coping strategies they used.

Most of the studies conducted related to dengue focused on the condition of the patients, their mental and emotional status, and the disease's effects. Previous studies about the patients' caregivers are minimal and focused on the overall well-being of caregivers themselves, regardless of their patient's condition or illness. For instance, the study of Ahmad Zubaidi et al. (2020) and Palacio et al. (2019) focused on the burdens and challenges of informal caregivers concerning their well-being. Moreover, the findings of the study of Frank et al. (2017) suggested that caregivers had basic knowledge about dengue but that misconceptions about the mosquito itself and confusion about other diseases (like malaria) influenced people's protective practices. The results of these studies are related to the study of Udawatte et al. (2020) that suggested that enhancing caregivers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices is a major factor to be addressed by the hospital staff to supply better inward care for dengue patients and minimize mortality. Hence, having adequate knowledge about the said disease, including proper handling and care of the patient, is important for the patient and the caregivers. In addition, according to the study of Legorreta-Soberanis et al. (2017), dengue cases pose an important economic burden on households in a dengue-endemic area.

On the other hand, the present study focused on the experiences of the informal caregivers, including their challenges and coping strategies. The previous studies focused more on studying a particular disease, its symptoms, and the age range of the most affected population. Still, the economic crisis and the psychological and emotional conditions of the caregivers were given less attention, especially in the Philippines. Hence, the present study aimed to raise awareness of the psychological and emotional difficulties experienced by caregivers and their resilience in coping with the task of caring for dengue patients. The results of this study can be used to formulate appropriate measures on how to assist the caregivers experiencing the same situation the participants of this study went through.

2. Methods

The present study describes the caregivers' experiences and coping mechanisms in caring for dengue patients. The participants were seven female caregivers who had experienced two or more cases of dengue illness in their families. The participants were all residents of Barangay Alfonso XIII, Quezon, Palawan, Philippines. The last dengue outbreak occurred in 2019, with a rapidly increasing number of cases recorded over the past years. Because of this, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) - Palawan placed the area under calamity.

Table 1 presents the participants' profiles, including their age, occupation, and the number of dengue patients in the household.

Participant Number	Code Name	Age	Occupation	Total Number of Dengue Patients Handled
1	Bebeth	38	Vendor	2
2	Gina	32	Homemaker	2
3	Merry	40	Homemaker	2
4	Nora	62	Homemaker	2
5	Net	64	Homemaker	2
6	Mae	37	Sales Attendant	3
7	Kay	43	Laundrywoman	2

The researchers used the Filipino indigenous researcher-researched relationship models for building rapport with the participants, such as: "*pakikisama*" – a Filipino value which means upholding a smooth interpersonal relationship by getting along with others or a group, "*pakikitungo*" – or civility, "*pakikibagay*" – or conformity, and "*pakikipagpalagayang-loob*"- or being in-rapport/understanding/acceptance with others.

Moreover, the Filipino indigenous research methods of *pagtatanong-tanong*, *pakikipagkwentuhan*, and *padalaw-dalaw* were also used. "*Pagtatanong-tanong* (asking questions)"- the repetition of "*tanong*" to "*tanong-tanong*" means solemnity of purpose, which further means that one is truly determined to get answers to one's questions was used in gathering the data. "*Pakikipagkwentuhan*" (storytelling / informal conversation) is a casual exchange of information, ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and experiences between the researcher and the participants. "*Padalaw-dalaw*" is repeated visits to the participants.

The researchers used phone recorders to record the entire conversation in all the interview sessions. The recorded interviews were transcribed. The researchers used the transcript as raw data to analyze thematic analysis to understand the study better. They interpreted, analyzed, and organized the data through multiple readings from the transcript. They aimed to find developing patterns and themes that were listed under the expressed objective of the study, which were the caregivers' experiences in taking care of the dengue patients, the problems they encountered in taking care of the patient from the beginning until the recovery, and the coping strategies the caregivers used.

Full consent was obtained from the participants before the conduct of this study. The participants were also informed about the nature and purpose of the research. Before the interview, they were likewise assured of the confidentiality of their identities.

3. Results

This study focused on the caregivers of dengue patients who cared for them from onset to recovery. It emphasized the experiences and coping mechanisms of the caregivers who had two or more dengue patients in their households. It yielded three major themes, namely: (1) challenges (financial difficulty, lack of knowledge about dengue, fulfilling too many roles, behavior of the patients, physical and psychological health, and strained relationship with the spouse), (2) care practices (participants' practices in taking care of their patients); and (3) coping strategies (how the participants handled or managed the whole situation).

3.1. Challenges

There are different kinds of challenges that caregivers encounter while taking care of dengue patients. Caregiving can include physical help with daily living, personal care, financial assistance, medical or emotional, and social support. Time management and age differences also come as a part of the challenge, especially if a person takes care of more than one patient.

3.1.1. Financial Difficulty

In this study, one of the challenges faced by the participants was financial difficulty. One of their primary concerns was their financial struggle because they did not expect dengue to be a severe disease, and most thought their patients only had a fever. Most of the caregivers' household income was only enough to suffice for their children's daily essentials like food, water, and school expenses, and nearly no money was saved. They stated that the disease caught by their family members also took a toll on them financially. Most of the participants stated that they had to go through specific measures to either earn or borrow enough money for the medication of their sick family members.

"Ayon utang utang talaga kay wala rin kami masyadong ipon ubos na agad nong sa una pa lang yong sa bunso ko." [We had to borrow money because we did not have enough savings, and it was already spent on my youngest child.]
–Gina

Borrowing money was the immediate solution for this. Another problem encountered was when the family's sole provider was the one who had dengue because they would have no other source of income. They had no savings to provide for medicine. According to the participants, they barely had enough to budget for the day, so having a dengue patient in the family was a burden. The study of Reinhard et al. (2008) supported the participants' claim, which reported that informal caregivers are unpaid individuals who provide care to a patient. Moreover, informal caregivers spend much time addressing their patients' needs. Therefore, informal caregivers have no time to do paid jobs to support their financial needs. Hence, their immediate solution is borrowing money instead.

3.1.2. Lack of Knowledge About Dengue

Knowledge of the disease will result in early detection of dengue and faster remedies that will allow caregivers to avoid a worse situation. However, this was not the case for the participants. Most of them stated that they lacked knowledge about the said fever and thought it was just the usual flu or cold that they did not give much attention to, resulting in late detection of the dengue fever and a worse condition for the patients. The following statement of a participant illustrates this challenge.

Di ko alam na ganon ang mangyayari kasi di ko naman alam na dengue akala ko tumutubo lang ngipin nya kasi namamaga ang gilagid nya tatlong linggo nga yon syang ganyan bago ko pa pina check-up. (...) sana nga nalaman ko at pina-check ko kaagad para naagapan" [I did not expect that it would turn out like that. I didn't realize that it's dengue. I thought it was just because of his teeth for his gums were swelling. It lasted for three weeks before I decided to have him checked. If I was able to detect it early and have him checked [by a doctor], maybe it would be prevented] – Mae

The experience itself provided life lessons to the participants. They learned that early disease detection was essential to alleviate or prevent its symptoms. They also learned some tips that will give them the advantage of providing proper treatment if the fever ever strikes again. Being knowledgeable about the disease would also decrease their concerns about money. The participants could also share and educate the people in their community on what and what not to do if the dengue fever would affect their household.

3.1.3. Fulfilling Too Many Roles

Too many responsibilities or roles were a real challenge to the caregivers because they had to attend to the needs of their patients and the rest of the household. Unlike professional nurses or caregivers who only focus on their patients, the participants were primarily mothers who cared for other household members.

"Habang naka-confine ito, don naman ako sa isa kung anak na nakaburol, ano gawa ko naman punta dun tapos uwi ako sa bahay, tapos tatawagan na naman ako ng kapatid ko kasi may reseta na naman. Takbo na naman ako doon, tapos ko bili ng reseta balik naman ako ng bahay, tapos inaasikaso ko rin mga anak ko." [During his confinement, I was also busy with the wake of my other son. I usually go there, then to my house and then my sister would still even call me to return there [at the hospital] to buy the prescribed medicines. Then after that, I still have to go back to our house to attend or take care of the needs of my children.] – Mae

On these occasions, the caregivers' effort doubled the amount needed to give time both for the family and work to support them and take care of them, especially to the patients. The participants had to be flexible with work and responsibilities in the house. The participants had to properly manage their time to make it less stressful for them.



Doing this also lessened the hardships of caring for the household, and they could do their duties properly.

3.1.4. Behavior of the Patients

The caregivers found it challenging to attend to children or teens compared to adults caring for them while sick. Children and teens could be picky in food, medicine, and temperamental, testing their patience and understanding.

"Mahirap lalo na kapag bata ang pasyente kasi di mo alam ang gusto kasi nga nag iinarte, eh kapag matanda di mo na kailangan pa pilitin kasi Syempre alam na nila na kailangan nila gumaling, tapos di ka ganun ka puyat pag bata puyat talaga ah monitor mo oras-oras dapat kaya grabe ang pagod." [It's hard especially when the patient is a child because you don't know what he wants. Unlike when the patient is an adult, you don't need to force him because he already knows that he needs to be well or recover; and also, you will have better sleep as compared when the patient is a child because you will have to monitor him from time to time. That's why it's a lot tiring.] – Net

The participants had more difficulty caring for younger patients because they were temperamental and picky. It became more difficult for the caregivers to deal with them because they could not compel the younger ones to cooperate. The patients' behavior could be understood that it was caused by them being sick.

3.1.5. Physical and Psychological Health

To care for the patients properly, the caregivers must ensure they have enough physical and mental strength for the patients and themselves. The caregivers' physical condition can also be affected, especially if they are the only ones caring for their sick family members.

Informal caregivers may experience benefits from providing care, such as feeling closer to the care recipient. Still, they also may encounter strains like having less time to care for themselves and their children or incurring costs due to providing support to someone with a chronic health condition (Bouldin et al., 2018). One of the participants said that she became too thin due to sickness.

"Syempre pumayat ka din, kay problema ba naman, tapos non mga ilang lingo lang ako naman nagkasakit." [Of course, you will lose weight, because of problems. Then after that, just after a few weeks, I also got sick.] – Merry

The caregivers were physically drained from taking care of their sick family members, affecting their psychological condition. Aside from the lack of rest due to taking care of both the household and the ill family member, the caregivers could not just go to sleep or rest easily because they also had to think about the other needs of the family, which resulted in restless nights. It even resulted in the caregivers giving less attention to their simple necessities.

It was also about the participants' mental health because they were the ones who took care of and were responsible for all things concerning the sick family member aside from buying the medicines prescribed by the physician. According to Bouldin et al. (2018), caregivers may

experience greater burdens associated with caregiving because caregiving may negatively impact health through increased stress or physical demands. One participant stated:

"Parang gusto ko bumigay, (...) Ewan ko blangko ako lutang ako para akong papel sa takot. Yung totoo di pa ako maayos. Iniisip ko (...) Iiyak muna ako ulit kasi paano kung mangyari na naman ulit. Mas lalo na akong malungkot, stress sobra. Hanggang ngayon pag naisip ko, naiiyak pa rin ako." [I feel like I already want to give up (...) I am spaced out and I was like a paper because of fear. To be honest, I am still not okay. I will cry again because what if it happens again. I will become sadder... stressed. Until now I am still crying whenever I think of it.] – Mae

Because of all the stressors and challenges the caregivers had to take and manage, they were mentally and physically affected while taking care of their sick family members. They could not think rationally and appropriately about household concerns and hospital bills because they knew their needs were almost intolerable. It caused the participants to experience anxiety and sleepless nights from overthinking.

The caregivers' mental health can be even more at risk when they perceive that the patient's care needs exceed their caregiving capabilities (Kazemi et al., 2021). Therefore, physical and psychological health are the most affected aspects in the lives of informal caregivers.

3.1.6. Strained Relationship with Spouse

There are some essential keys to keeping a relationship in times of complications. Time, communication, and understanding to overcome the whole situation are needed. When the researchers asked the participants about their situation as husband and wife, one participant responded:

"May kanya-kanya na kaming buhay. Simula talaga non wala na, nawalan na ako ng gana. Nakikipaghiwalay na ako sa kanya. Gusto ko sya ipakulam. Sana sya na lang namatay di na lang ang anak ko kasi sya mapalitan, yong anak ko hindi." [We have different lives now. Since then, I have lost my interest. I wanted to end our relationship and I even hoped for his death instead of my son for I can replace him, unlike my son.] – Mae

Because of their problem, the lack of time and communication affected their relationship as husband and wife. The intimacy decreased because of the constant challenges. With the continuous stressors, conflict of interest, and less time together to sort things out, the couples blamed each other for whatever happened to their family up to the point of separation.

3.2. Care Practices

Being in a rural area where access to the latest medicinal help is less, and the place they live in is bountiful of natural resources, these caregivers provided a variety of types of support and remedies, including taking their patients to medical appointments, helping them manage diet and medications at home, and facilitating their participation in social activities (Bouldin et al., 2018).

3.2.1. Personal Care

Care is a “regard coming from desire or esteem.” This study showed care as a desire to care for the patients to be cured or healed. According to the data gathered in the present study, taking proper care was also one of the participants’ problems. One of the participants described her experience related to this.

“Di makatulog nang maayos kasi kailangan mo rin sya i- monitor, tapos gigising ka na naman kasi titingnan mo kung ano yong gamot na ituturok sa kanya. Tapos di ka basta-basta makaalis kahit mag- ih kasi iiyak. Hilut-hilutin mo na naman kung saan ang masakit.” [I could get enough sleep because I had to monitor him. Then I had to wake up to check the medicines they would give him. I also could go anytime I wanted, even to the comfort room because he would cry, and I had to massage him.] – Gina

Based on the participants caring for the patients, it was difficult because of their lack of knowledge about dengue fever. It was challenging, especially for those with two patients. They did not know how to manage themselves because they were the only ones caring for them. They did everything to the best of their knowledge to take good care of their patients. The caregivers did not let the doctors do all the jobs. They lent their hands to offer some help.

3.2.2. Herbal Medicine

Based on the data, most participants used herbal medicine for remedies as it was much more accessible and affordable to them and was known to them to be very effective. This was confirmed by a participant, as shown in her statements below.

“Pinainom ko na lang ng tawa tawa kay walang pera. May nagturo sa akin na painumin daw ng maraming tubig tapos ano yong talbos ng papaya.” [I decided to give him tawa tawa (an herbal/medicinal plant) as a medicine because of a lack of money. Somebody taught me to provide him with plenty of water to drink then some papaya leaves] – Bebeth

According to the participants, the herbal medicines also worked and were just as effective. They were also not afraid to let their family member take the herbal medicine continuously because it was very effective and did not have side effects, unlike the prescribed drugs that could be taken a certain number of times a day only. It was also very affordable since it could be acquired from their backyard.

3.2.3. Caregiving Strategies Learned

Filipinos are resourceful and always add personal touches to everything they do. They look for strategies to address their situation, such as giving herbal medicine or paracetamol to decrease the worries that their sick family member might get worse.

“Ano yong ginawa ko sa unang apo ko ginawa ko sa kanya ulit sa apo ko na nagkasakit ng dengue. Syempre may alam ka na kung ano

dapat gawin sa dengue na sakit.” [I treated him the same way I did with my first grandson who also had dengue. Of course, I already know how to treat dengue.] – Nora

With this experience, those caregivers felt relieved knowing they could help the patients ease their pain. Because of this, they were able to prevent the worsening of the disease and also saved money. Overall, this also reduced the caregiver’s stress levels due to the situation.

3.3. Coping Strategies

Coping mechanisms are ways to deal with, manage, or adapt to the stress from the environment or within the body. Each person has a strategy for dealing with his/her stressors. These coping strategies are not only for actual health treatment payments. In addition to direct costs such as facility and medicine, indirect health treatment costs include unofficial payments, transportation, food, gifts, and lost income from missing work due to illness (Nguyen et al., 2011).

The next section presents the participants’ coping strategies, categorized into the coping strategies they used to overcome the challenges they experienced.

3.3.1. Positive Coping Strategies

There are different strategies people can use to cope with their problems. It can be their determination to overcome their situation. In this study, the researchers identified the participants’ five common positive strategies. (1) They came up with solutions (solution-oriented) to earn money, (2) kept a positive outlook towards the situation to avoid more stress and lessen worries, (3) kept working (perseverance) despite the hectic situation to make ends meet and pay debts to avoid another problem, (4) maintained good faith, and (5) sustained good family or social support.

“Kahit may sakit ako pinipilit ko maasikaso yong mga anak ko. Ako pa rin kikilos kasi yong asawa ko nagtatrabaho kahit di pa ganon kaayos kay karami naming bayarin. Sakit sa ulo pag may ga singil, di mo na alam sasabihin. Syempre kelangan rin nila ng pera kaya walang choice.” [I still take good care and attend to the needs of my children even though I am sick. I still need to do my duties because my husband is also working because we have too much debt to pay. It gives me a headache every time the lenders ask for our payment. Of course, they also need money, so we don’t have a choice.] – Gina

The participants’ determination to keep an open mind and continue their daily routines despite their problems kept them optimistic about recovering their sick family members. Even though they were physically, mentally, and emotionally tired, the caregivers kept working to provide solutions while caring for the family member affected by dengue fever. The participants did not want to waste time caring for their patients, keeping in mind that they did not want to have bigger problems afterward.



3.3.1.a Solution Orientedness

A person typically experiences challenges or problems daily, and looking for and providing answers or solutions is the usual reaction.

"Talagang gumawa ako ng paraan para mapagamot yong anak ko. Tinanggap ko na lang para sa mga anak ko kailangan din nila ako. Ewan hindi ko maisip kasi minsan darating din talaga na ganon hindi natin maisip na darating din talaga na magkakasakit tayo." [I make an effort for the treatment of my son. I accepted it for my children, they need me. I don't know. I never thought that we will be encountering this kind of situation, that we will be sick.]-Mae

The first instinct of the participants, when faced with the problem, was to provide solutions. They looked for not only one but multiple keys to provide for their sick family member. They did this with a complete commitment to provide for their sick family member and their entire household.

3.3.1.b Positive Outlook

Below are the participants' statements stating how they remained positive despite the difficulty of caring for their sick family members.

"Intisip ko na lang na gagaling sila." [I 'm just thinking that they will soon recover.]- Merry

"Isipin mo na lang talaga positive kasi pag negative naku lalo ka talaga ma-stress." [You'll have to think positive because if not, you'll become more stressed.]- Gina

"Ano relax lang isipin mo na lang gagaling kasi dinala mo na sa doctor." [Just relax, think he'll be fine soon since you already brought him to a doctor.]- Kay

Despite all the challenges in their situations, the participants kept a positive outlook on fighting their worries. Keeping a positive outlook throughout the process made them less anxious and distressed because their mind was set that their family members would get better eventually instead of jumping to negative conclusions.

3.3.1.c Perseverance

Perseverance is doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. In the case of the participants of the current study, even though physical strength was also at its limit, they kept on doing what they had to do to improve the health of their sick family members.

"Kahit na may sakit ka naga ano, nagatrabaho ako kahit ano... minsan nga nag-ano... naglabada pa ako, kahit may sakit." [Even if I'm sick, I still work... Sometimes, I even do the laundry even if I'm sick]-Merry

Even though their physical strength almost gave up, the participants kept going. They kept on working and taking care of the sick members of the family. Their perseverance made them move forward and function to take care of their sick family members throughout the day.

3.3.1.d "Bahala na" Fatalistic Attitude (Leave Everything to God)

Filipinos are known to be religious and devoted. The country is rich in different religions, and Filipinos rely on their spiritual and emotional strength mostly in their faith. Their faith and belief can be substantial even amid harsh situations. Presented below are the caregivers' responses regarding their fatalistic attitude of "bahala na," which, according to Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000), is reflective of Catholicism in the Philippines.

"Parang sabihin mo na lang 'Diyos ko, bahala ka na', bahala na ang Diyos kung dugtungan nya pa ba. Sabing kritikal ang isip mo kaagad eh doon ka kakapit sa taas. Wala ka namang ibang kakapitan eh." [You'll just say "God, take care of this." It's in the hands of God if He will still let him live. When they say it's critical, you automatically submit it to God because you don't have anything or anyone to lean on.]- Kay

The faith of the caregivers was one of the sources of their strength. They clung to this faith and left their worries with their prayer, believing they would be answered and guided, no matter the outcome.

3.3.1.e Family and Social Support

Filipinos are known as family-centered and being generous in times of need. Employing love and support from their family and the people surrounding them, this kind of social support allowed the caregivers to recover quickly. A participant's response shown below describes this kind of support.

"Buti nga may tindahan dito na malapit nagautang kami. May mga kamag-anak dito. Mayroon din nagatulong, tsaka yon nga sa tulong ng mga ate ko dito, yong kuya ko. Nagautang kami dito." [It's good that there is a nearby store here, where we can borrow goods/items. We have relatives here. They're helping us. My older sisters and my brother also help. I borrow (money) here.]- Merry

In this connection, Kazemi et al. (2021) emphasized that support is needed to enable informal caregivers to continue in their role as long as possible, without compromising their physical or mental health. Effective and adaptive coping strategies may play a protective role in reducing the caregiver's distress.

Whether small or large, receiving support from family or peers was a great help for the caregivers. It somehow lightened the weight of their worries and relieved some of their stresses.

3.3.2. Negative Coping Strategies

This section presents the negative coping strategies used by the participants, which were incurring multiple debts and blaming other people, to deal with the challenges they experienced.

3.3.2.a Incurring Multiple Debts

Poverty is one of the crucial problems of most Filipino citizens; surpassing their everyday lives is never easy. To

solve this problem, participants of this study sought help from lending companies.

"Ano kahit bago pa lang kami dito nag-utang na ako sa microfinance para may panggastos." [I already borrowed money here at the microfinance for our daily needs even if we are new here.] –Marry

Some of the participants struggled financially and had to resort to borrowing money. It somehow decreased their confidence since they did not think it was appropriate, but they had to do it regardless of the consequences.

"Nakipag- away ako sa nurse kasi matagal na kami don di pa kami inasikaso. Tapos nong nalaman na 40 na lang platelet ng anak ko nagalit pa kasi bakit bago lang. Inaway ko nga." [I argued with the nurse because they did not attend to our needs even if we had been there for so long. She even got mad when she discovered that my son's platelets reached 40. So, I fought with her.] –Gina

"Nainis ako sa nanay nila kasi may sakit na nga di pa nagpadala ng pera pangpagamot kaya yong isa di na nadala sa hospital dito na lang sa bahay." [I was irritated with their mother because she didn't send money even though they were sick. That's why one of them stayed here at home instead of at the hospital.] –Nora

Because of the problems they experienced, the participants did not know how to vent their stresses. They got annoyed easily. They also tended to blame the situation on other family members or their partners to get it off their system. In this vein, the study of Kazemi et al. (2021) revealed that caregivers with a higher burden of care used more negative coping strategies, such as escape avoidance and distancing. Those two coping strategies are somehow related to blaming others as they suggest avoiding the responsibility and putting it on others instead.

4. Discussion

The findings and results of this study show that the participants were burdened by the challenges of being caregivers to their dengue patients in terms of physical, financial, and psychological aspects. Similarly, Given et al. (2001) reported that caregivers experience challenges in pain management, patient mobilization, daily life activities, communication with health personnel, symptom management, home medicine treatment, the management of emotional reactions of the patients and often feel helpless and useless, especially when they cannot control the patient's pains. Caregivers should be prepared for home care to provide accurate and complete patient care (Ugur et al., 2014).

Moreover, home care has gradually gained more importance, and it is a great burden on the shoulders of caregivers. They help with directed care activities such as physical care, symptom management, and monitoring of changes. They also perform in-house activities such as shopping, childcare, house care, cooking, laundry, patient handling, and ensuring patient safety (Wen & Gustafson, 2004).

The related studies mentioned above support the findings of this study that participants are burdened by the challenges of being caregivers to their dengue patient(s). The challenges were financial difficulty, lack of knowledge about dengue, fulfilling too many roles, patient behavior, physical and psychological health, and strained relationships with spouses. Data reveal that the caregivers' perceived challenges stemmed from the lack of awareness of dengue, including handling patients with dengue. In addition, this study dealt with the possible reasons behind those challenges. For example, it looked into why most caregivers first gave patients herbal medicines to relieve dengue symptoms. This study found that it was because of the caregivers' lack of knowledge about dengue and the financial issues they were going through. They chose an alternative way of treating the disease than sending their patients to a doctor.

To overcome these challenges, the participants utilized positive coping strategies such as finding solutions to their problems, keeping a positive outlook, persevering, maintaining faith, and sustaining family or social support. These strategies made them persist amid the problems they had to face. Faith was considered one of the caregivers' primary sources of strength among these strategies. Furthermore, their family and social support proved to be essential. With their family members' help, they could obtain assistance with concerns such as financial aid. This was reinforced by the study of Kazemi et al. (2021), which stressed that support is needed to enable informal caregivers to continue performing their role without compromising their physical or mental health.

Aside from the said positive coping strategies, the participants also employed negative coping mechanisms, which were incurring multiple debts and blaming other people. It is not uncommon to borrow money in times of need. It is one of the fastest and easiest ways. However, it is not all right and easy to borrow money all the time, and sometimes it also comes with consequences, especially if a person has multiple debts. False accusations or blaming others were also ways for the participants to vent their frustration about their situation. Instead of trusting the professionals, they tended to doubt their practices and falsely accused that whatever they were going through was underestimated. This was related to the study of Kazemi et al. (2021), which reported that caregivers with a higher burden of care used more negative coping strategies.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The informal caregivers of dengue fever patients dealt with several challenges. Most of the challenges they encountered stemmed from the lack of prior knowledge of the illness. The caregivers were not aware of such diseases that they were taken aback or caught off guard. They were alarmed that such a disease would strike their household and cause ordeals. They also experienced hardships in terms of finances, performing too many roles, and patient behavior. The said outbreak also affected the caregivers' physical condition or health and their psychological well-being. They were also unaware of how to handle and properly care for sick family members. Thus, this resulted in the caregivers experiencing stressors that made the experience more challenging. The participants' emotional involvement in the situation also affected their relationship



with their spouses. The feeling of anger or resentment was demonstrated by blaming their partners.

The caregivers faced multiple challenges and problems that resulted in various coping strategies fueled by their own beliefs and knowledge. Fatalistic attitude, assistance, and moral support from friends, relatives, and neighbors allowed them to pull through their situation. Through these, the caregivers of the dengue fever patients coped with the dengue fever outbreak that significantly affected their households.

Considering the results of this study, it is recommended that the local government units intensify the information dissemination campaign regarding the prevention and treatment of dengue. It is also recommended that emotional, psychological, and social support be provided to the informal caregivers of dengue patients.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare that no conflict of interest is involved in the study.

Funding

The authors received no financial support from any individuals or groups for this article's research and/or authorship.

References

- Ahmad Zubaidi, Z., Ariffin, F., Oun, C., & Katiman, D., (2020). Caregiver burden among informal caregivers in the largest specialized palliative care unit in Malaysia: A cross sectional study. *BMC Palliative Care*, 19, 186. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-020-00691-1>
- Bouldin, E. D., Shaull, L., Andresen, E. M., Edwards, V. J., & McGuire, L. C. (2018). Financial and health barriers and caregiving-related difficulties among rural and urban caregivers. *The Journal of Rural Health: Official Journal of the American Rural Health Association and the National Rural Health Care Association*, 34 (3), 263–274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12273>
- Formosa, C. A. (2018a, April 27). Palawan remains No. 1 in dengue cases in Mimaropa: DOH. *Philippine News Agency*. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1033328>
- Formosa, C. A. (2018b, September 7). Palawan posts 239% increase in dengue cases. *Philippine News Agency*. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1047247>
- Frank, A. L., Beales, E. R., De Wildt, G., Meza Sanchez, G., & Jones, L. L. (2017, September 05). We need people to collaborate together against this disease: A qualitative exploration of perceptions of dengue fever control in caregivers of children under 5 years, in the Peruvian Amazon. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, 11(9), e0005755. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0005755>
- Given, B.A., Given, C.W., & Kozacki, S. (2001). Family support in advanced cancer. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, 51, 213-231. <https://doi.org/10.3322/canjclin.51.4.213>
- Kazemi A, Azimian J, Mafi M, Allen K, & Motalebi SA. (2021) Caregiver burden and coping strategies in caregivers of older patients with stroke. *BMC Psychol* 9, 51. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-021-00556-z>
- Legorreta-Soberanis, J., Paredes-Solis, S., Morales-Pérez, A., Nava-Aguilera, E., Serrano-de los Santos, F. R., Dimas-García, D. L., Ledogar, R. J., Cockcroft, A., & Andersson, N. (2017, May 30). Household costs of dengue illness: Secondary outcomes from a randomised controlled trial of dengue prevention in Guerrero State, Mexico. *BMC Public Health* 17, 411. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4304-x>
- Magdayao, A. G. (2019a, March 8). Quezon town under 'state of calamity' for dengue outbreak. *Palawan News*. <https://palawan-news.com/quezon-town-under-state-of-calamity-for-dengue-outbreak/>
- Magdayao, A. G. (2019b, July 4). Palawan tops anew MIMAROPA list of dengue cases. *Palawan News*. <https://palawan-news.com/palawan-tops-anew-mimaropa-list-of-dengue-cases/>
- Mandap, B. (2000). Prioritizing needs using the CBMS: The case of Southern Quezon, Palawan. *Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Adjustment Policies: Project Updates*, 7(4), 1-8.
- Nguyen, L., Evans, S., Wilde, W. D., & Shanks, G. (2011). Information needs in community aged care. *PACIS 2011 - 15th Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems: Quality Research in Pacific*, 1–12.
- Palacio, G.C., Krikorian, A., Gómez-Romero, M.J., & Limonero, J.T. (2019). Resilience in caregivers: A systematic review. *The American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Care*, 37(8), 648-658. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049909119893977>
- Pe-Pua, R., & Protacio-Marcelino, E. (2000). Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 3(1), 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-839X.00054>
- Reinhard, S. C., Given, B., Petlick, N. H., & Bemis, A. (2008). Supporting family caregivers in providing care. In R. G. Hughes (Ed.), *Patient Safety and Quality: An Evidence-Based Handbook for Nurses*. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US).
- Udawatte, U., Udayanga, J., Chophel, U., & Hettiarachchi, D. (2020). Knowledge, attitudes, and practices on dengue patient management among caregivers of inward dengue patients. *Sri Lanka Family Physician*, 35(1), 12-20.
- Ugur, O., Elcigil, A., Arslan, D., & Sonmez, A. (2014). Responsibilities and difficulties of caregivers of cancer patients in home care. *Asian Pacific Journal of Cancer Prevention*, 15(2), 725–729. <https://doi.org/10.7314/APJCP.2014.15.2.725>

Wen, K. Y., & Gustafson, D. H. (2004). Needs assessment for cancer patients and their families. *Health and quality of life outcomes*, 2, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-2-11>

World Health Organization. (2021). *Dengue and severe dengue*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dengue-and-severe-dengue>.

About the Authors

Gregorio S. Naldo Jr. is an aspiring clinical psychologist and a registered psychometrician. He also writes articles about psychology and mental health in one of the local news companies in Palawan. He has been working as an online mental health professional for almost two years and provides therapy (under the supervision of a senior psychologist) and counseling for issues related to depression, anxiety, stress, and other psychological concerns. He is also one of the provincial coordinators of the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP), CALABARZON-MIMAROPA Chapter.

Maria Khryzza Nova E. Gacosta graduated with a BS in psychology from Palawan State University. She is interested in researching religion, psychology, interpersonal relationships, and the environment.

Karen E. Arevalo is a graduate with a BS in psychology from Palawan State University. Her advocacy is to help those abused women and children by providing them with mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Her research interests include depression, anxiety, and resiliency.

Loida Y. Orcales graduated with a BS in psychology from Palawan State University. She works as a frontline staff member under the Department of Health at Quezon, Palawan. She is also preparing for further studies in the field of education. She is keenly interested in children with special needs and dreams of becoming a SPED teacher. Her research interests include healthcare, special education, and developmental psychology.



Issues Related to Lesbian and Gay Students' Experiences: Implications to the Promotion of Gender-Safe Spaces

John Paul D. Reloj



Date Received: 08 May 2021
Date Revised: 22 May 2021
Date Accepted: 30 Dec 2021

Abstract

Harassment based on sexual orientation still happens in many schools. This study investigated the diverse issues and experiences of lesbians and gays as viewed by both heterosexual and lesbian and gay groups based on the data from a mixed-method study. The participants of this study were students from an external campus of a state university, involving 281 heterosexual and 40 lesbian and gay students. The participants were selected using the snowballing method. The researcher employed a structured questionnaire, focus group discussions, and observations. Using descriptive techniques and thematic analysis, the researcher found that most lesbians and gays who participated in this study received equal treatment from teachers and staff, and the activities of the campus promoted safe spaces for lesbian and gay students. On the other hand, other students encountered problems such as peer rejection and homophobic remarks, as well as parental rejection expressed in different ways. As a coping technique and coming-out process, they skipped school and joined groups that offered support. The findings imply that fostering gender-safe spaces should be integral to a student development program.

Keywords

safe spaces, lesbians and gay, inclusive student development program

Corresponding Author:

John Paul D. Reloj
Palawan State University
Puerto Princesa City 5300
Palawan, Philippines
Email: jpreloj@psu.palawan.edu.ph

Greece – 48%, Cyprus – 56%, Lithuania – 61%, felt discriminated against based on sexual orientation (Kiapoka, 2020).

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is present even in school settings. Russel (2011) reported that LGBT youth are not inherently at risk – the environments they grow up in are the problem. The author asserted the risk of homophobia in schools. His finding affirmed the study of Evans et al. (2017), as cited in Ferrer et al. (2021), who stated that lesbians and gays are often at high risk of violence. In contrast, discrimination, isolation, and avoidance are the extraordinary experiences of gay students on campus. The study of Russel and Horn (2016) reiterated that harassment based on one's actual or perceived social identity, such as sexual orientation, remains a prominent concern in many schools. Homophobic harassment is the most common harassment evident in schools, which may even result in more negative treatment. In the study conducted by Kiapoka (2020), about one in seven children had been subjected to some form of physical harassment and/or physical violence because of their sexual orientation (14.6%), gender (12.6%), and/or gender expression (19.3%).

1. Introduction

What causes a person to have a particular sexual orientation? Scientists disagree on the exact reasons why someone acquires a heterosexual, gay, or lesbian inclination. Many people believe that both nature and nurture play important roles and that most people have little or no control over their sexual orientation (American Psychological Association [APA], 2008). Children who were born males but are sexually attracted to the same sex as theirs often self-identify as gays. Children who were born as females and are sexually attracted to females are self-identified as lesbians according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). People with the said sexual orientations are often mentioned as members of the LGBT group.

According to American Psychological Association (APA, n.d.), LGBTQ is shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. It also refers to an individual's sense of personal and social identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions and behaviors. Ferrer et al. (2021) stated that these people are at high risk of violence. In the study of Michael and Kleden (2018, as cited in Neviyarni et al., 2020), 89.3% of Indonesian people who were members of the LGBT community suffered from violence because of their sexual identity. According to LGBT Survey in the EU, around half of participants in all three countries, namely,

Nevertheless, it does not mean that the school is completely not safe for lesbians and gays because, beyond teaching and some academic requirements, schools can foster the development of student's social and personal well-being. Thus, students are taught relevant knowledge and skills through their courses to improve their personal and emotional capacities and overall well-being. However, just like any other school on the campus where this study was conducted, lesbian and gay students still experienced problems and issues related to homophobic remarks and unfair treatment made by other students and, on a few occasions, other teachers, and staff.



Creative Commons CC BY: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits any use, reproduction, and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified in the Asian Journal of Resilience (<http://asianjournalofresilience.com/index.php/ajrj>).

This finding is related to the study of Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2016), which tried to know teachers' reactions to homo-transphobic bullying. They found that teachers joined in the mockery, rather than taking a stand against the bullying. Similarly, teachers seemed unwilling to help lesbian and gay students. In the cases in which some teachers attempted to take anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic actions, these usually led to confrontations between teachers and students (Kiapoka, 2020).

Furthermore, verbal harassment among lesbians and gays, as expounded in the study of Pizmony-Levy and Kosciw (2016), had been the most common form of discouragement in schools: almost half of the U.S. lesbian and gay students (46.4%) were verbally harassed often, and lesbian and gay students were more vulnerable to school violence. According to the EU LGBT survey (2013), more than eight in 10 of all respondents in each LGBT group witnessed negative comments to a schoolmate who was perceived to be LGBT. According to the Colour Youth Greek National School Climate Survey, one in three children received some form of verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation (32%), gender (31.1%), and/or gender expression (50.3%) (Kiapoka, 2020).

In the Philippines, LGBT people continue to face violence and discrimination. This discrimination is manifested in the form of bullying and harassment directed toward young LGBT people from various organizations, including families, schools, and communities (Psychological Association of the Philippines [PAP], 2011, as cited in Ferrer et al., 2021). Religious affiliations, cultural norms, and family expectations are the dominant elements that influence gay individuals in dealing with their sexuality in a typical Filipino setting of a conservative and traditional family (Nadal & Corpus, 2013, as cited in Ferrer et al., 2021).

During the 106th session of the human rights committee for the fourth periodic review of the Philippines, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) submitted a report to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee. The said Commission asserted that police raids on LGBT venues occurred regularly without warrants. During these raids, police unlawfully detained individuals and then verbally abused and extorted money from them (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission [IGLHRC], 2011). These violations were unlawful; thus, those police faced charges according to the provision of the Revised Penal Code. However, the provision does not clearly define the conduct for which it is required. This results in disproportionate and discriminatory applications against lesbian and gay individuals. There have been bills that were lobbied to pass in Congress, such as the Anti-Discrimination Bill, which was introduced in 2000 but still has not been passed after 12 years. Hence, the Philippines still does not have anti-discrimination legislation up to this date.

Issues of discrimination encountered by lesbians and gays are still common in schools in the Philippines. Casey and Levesque (2018), as cited by Ferrer et al. (2021), stated that some gay college students experienced discrimination. Ferrer et al. (2021) showed that two out of 10 participants shared their stories of discrimination at school and in society. One of the participants verbally experienced discrimination because of gender. The prejudices and

discrimination against lesbians and gays can cause suppression and changing identities and expressions, including immediate consequences such as fear, sadness, alienation, anger, and internalized stigma (PAP, 2011).

Several mental health professionals through the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2011) agreed that to eliminate stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and violence against lesbians and gays, there is a need to repeal discriminatory laws and policies and support the passage of legislation at the local and national levels that protect the rights and promote the welfare of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, even in schools. Mental health professionals consider teachers' role central to the prevention of discrimination and gender-based violence in the school environment.

Therefore, schools that are expected to provide a place of hope for proper education among the youth must step forward to create policies and programs that promote safe spaces for lesbians and gays. Why? The number of lesbians and gays is dramatically increasing. Neviyami et al. (2020) cited three recent studies that show the number of lesbians and gays in different countries, that is, data from the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) in England in 2020. One percent of adults, or 481,000 people identified themselves as gays or lesbians. A survey in the United States also revealed that 3.5% of adults in the United States identified their sexuality as lesbian and gay. In the Philippines, there are 50 LGBT organizations actively participating in discussions on the human rights of LGBT people (UNDP, USAID, 2014). On the external campus of a state university where the present study was conducted, among 1267 students in 2018, 2.5% of the total population of the campus perceived themselves as lesbians or gays.

In the study of Ncanana and Ige (2014), it was reported that the number of gay and lesbian students had been steadily increasing over the last three years, with new students identifying as homosexual or lesbian every year. This highlights the need to increase awareness among the gay and lesbian community, as well as the public, about the human rights violations experienced by homosexuals and lesbians at the university. Prejudice, bullying, and cruelty toward lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people (LGBT people) are still rampant in society and tertiary institutions. While the primary fear of lesbian and gay parents (and parents with lesbian and gay children) is that their children will be bullied in school, their second concern is a lack of an inclusive curriculum (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016). This involves encouraging respect for everyone and supporting a student's capacity to empathize, connect, and cooperate with diverse peers. All students, especially lesbians and gays, need to see themselves reflected in their curriculum. As a result, inclusive curricula can have a big influence. Gay students, for example, report feeling safer, missing school less frequently, and feeling more connected to their schools where an inclusive curriculum is used; they also report feeling more accepted by their peers. (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016).

However, just a few previous studies have investigated the circumstances and characteristics of schools that foster negative attitudes and behaviors toward lesbian and homosexual students (Russell & Horn, 2016). Taking this into account, the researcher of the current study hopes to learn more about lesbians' and gays' experiences, which will serve



as a foundation for developing various interventions to establish a safe space for them. Educators can help by creating an environment where contentious ideas can be discussed respectfully, openly, and honestly. Safe space is a term used to describe these discursive contexts (Arao & Clemens, 2013, as cited in Ghemmour, 2022). As a result, another study recommended safe space training. Safe space training is an educational program aimed at equipping straight, cisgender allies with the fundamental knowledge and skills needed to help LGBT people. This improves attitudes towards creating a safe space (Gacita et al., 2017).

Given the foregoing, this study aimed to identify the issues regarding academic and school performance, school activities and organization, and challenges faced by gay and lesbian college students. It also aimed to determine the coping mechanisms, the coming out process, and participants' recommendations for safe spaces.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The mixed-method evaluation was used in this study. It has been referenced as "empirical research that involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data" (Allan, n.d., Slide 4, as cited in Almalki, 2016). Greene et al. (2005, as cited in Abma, 2005) stated that combining various methods leads to a better, more comprehensive, and more insightful understanding. In this study, the quantitative methods used were the survey questionnaire and classroom observation since they used numerical measurement to infer. Specifically, in the questionnaire, the questions were grouped according to the profile of the respondents and the issues that confront promoting safe spaces for lesbian and gay students on campus. Afterward, visits were made to the classrooms to observe selected classes and activities to verify the gathered data and obtain further information. This study also used the qualitative method through focus group discussion (FGD), which primarily gathered information from the group of heterosexual students and lesbian and gay students regarding the issues related to the promotion of safe spaces. This also verified the gathered data from the questionnaire and group observation. The study was conducted before the pandemic when face-to-face classes were held.

2.2. Research Participants

The participants for this study were heterosexual, lesbian, and gay students enrolled in the second semester of the school year 2015 to 2016 at the external campus of a state university. Using Slovin's Formula, the researcher distributed questionnaires to 321 students, representing a sample size of 20% of the total population of 1603 students. Utilizing a snowballing approach, the researcher administered questionnaires to the participants consisting of 40 lesbian and gay students and 281 heterosexual students.

2.3. Instruments

The researcher used the following methods in the study: survey questionnaire, focus group discussion, and observation.

2.3.1. Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first part was composed of the personal profile of the respondents that included age, gender preference, program, and year level for both the heterosexual and lesbian and gay students. The second part covered three areas of concern to elucidate the issues: academic and school performance, school activities and organization, and challenges faced by lesbians and gays.

As regards academic and school performance, five statements were included (e.g., *Lesbian and gay students excel academically in their courses when they perceive classrooms as being a safe space; Lesbian and gay students are treated equally by teachers or staff*). There were also five statements for school activities and organizations (e.g., *School activities on the campus provide a safe space for lesbian and gay students; Lesbian and gay students' organizations are acceptable to the campus*). The third area, which focused on the challenges of gay and lesbian college students, included seven statements (e.g., *Heterosexual students prefer a lesbian or a gay student to be a leader; Heterosexual students are comfortable with lesbian and gay students*).

To answer the second part of the questionnaire, a five-point scale was used: 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Agree), 3 (Neutral), 2 (Disagree), and 1 (Strongly Disagree). The survey questionnaire was researcher-made and was validated by several professionals, researchers, and guidance counselors.

2.3.2. Focus Group Discussion

Initially, the researcher sent a letter to selected participants for the focus group discussions (FGDs) indicating the objectives of the FGD, the risks and benefits of participating in the study, the time, and the venue. The participants were grouped according to their preferred gender, i.e., heterosexuals, lesbians, and gays. Their real names were not used in the data. Instead, they were coded as "hetero-participant 1, lesbian or gay participant 1, etc.". In the FGD for heterosexual students (with eight participants), the researcher presented the survey questionnaire results where participants discussed other issues to confirm or elaborate on the results. Similar procedures were conducted in the FGD for lesbians and gays (with 12 participants). In addition, they discussed other concerns and issues based on their observations and experiences with faculty and other students and eventually proposed some programs and interventions.

2.3.3. Observation

The researcher selected five classes to be observed where there were at least four lesbian and gay students, according to the observation and recommendation of the instructors. During the observation, the researcher used two sets of checklists. The first set was given to the course instructors to observe the behavior of the heterosexual, lesbian, and gay students in their classrooms. The second set included additional indicators to be observed, which focused on the behavior of the instructors toward their lesbian and gay students.

The first set specified six behaviors that were given attention during the classroom observation (e.g., *The heterosexual students respect the ideas and opinions of the lesbian and gay classmates during the class discussion; The heterosexual students respect a lesbian or gay classmate*

being their leader during classroom activities; The heterosexual students respond with consideration whenever lesbian and gay issues are raised in the discussion). The observers were asked to check the corresponding box indicating that the behavior was “observed” or “not observed”. The researcher was present in the classroom; however, the instructors only knew the intention of classroom observation.

The second set of checklists included five indicators of behaviors displayed by instructors (e.g., *The teacher has favoritism toward lesbian and gay students; The teacher includes information about lesbians and gays who made significant contributions in the past; The teacher discusses current events, including lesbians and gays' issues; The teacher uses examples of lesbians and gays in lectures and discussions*). This set was used by the researcher only to observe the instructors.

2.4. Research Procedure

The researcher asked permission from the director of the campus, through the campus research coordinator, to conduct a survey. The research study started upon approval. Similar requests were also made for the selected heterosexual, lesbian, and gay students while emphasizing the strict confidentiality of the data. As for the distribution of the survey questionnaire, the researcher considered the class schedules of the students and instructors. The researcher used the snowball approach to identify the gender preference of the respondents before the questionnaire was given, and their answer in some parts of the profile in the questionnaire affirmed their gender preference. The same procedure was used for lesbian and gay students. Further, those who did not check any from the gender preference might be considered “missing”. To verify the data, the researcher conducted classroom observations. Classes with at least four members of lesbians or gays were considered for observation. A checklist was used in the observation. Finally, the researcher conducted separate focus group discussions with the selected groups of lesbian and gay students and heterosexual students using the results of the above-mentioned questionnaires. Before the discussion, the researcher explained the objectives, risks, and benefits of participating in the study while emphasizing the strict confidentiality of the data. Data gathered were analyzed, and themes were generated to come up with a Student Development Program (SDP).

2.5. Data Analysis

2.5.1. Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage, mean, and interpretation. Frequency and percentages were applied to describe the community's acceptance of lesbian and gay students and the support for the input programs and services related to promoting safe spaces for them. Mean was used to determine the centrality of the data in the problem of heterosexism and the support to the lesbian and gay students' concerns in the school setting. The weighted mean was used to convert the quantitative data to a qualitative

one. Data in observation were analyzed using frequency and rank.

2.5.2. Qualitative Data

The data gathered from the FGD with heterosexuals, lesbians, and gays were coded to generate themes through thematic analysis. The qualitative data in FGD were described and analyzed through content analysis.

2.6. Ethical issues

The researcher considered the ethical issues of the study by assuring the utmost confidentiality of the participants and the data provided in the questionnaire and focus group discussions. The researcher used pseudo-names for participants, such as hetero-participant 1, gay-participant 1, etc. The researcher secured the questionnaires, and only the researcher could access them. During the focus group discussions, the researcher explained the objectives, risks, and benefits of participating in the study. In addition, participants were informed that if any of them wished to withdraw their participation, their data would be deleted and would not be included in the research report.

3. Results

This section discusses the issues related to the promotion of safe spaces for lesbian and gay students as perceived by both heterosexual and lesbian and gay students in terms of the following: academic and school performance, school activities and organization, and challenges faced by gay and lesbian college students. For the presentation of the data, mean and overall mean were utilized. Further, in the qualitative results, themes are used to present the data. Themes are categorized as challenges encountered and participants' recommendations for safe spaces.

3.1. Issues Related to Academic and School Performance

Table 1 shows the mean and interpretations of the indicators observed in terms of the academic and school performance of the heterosexual respondents compared with that of the lesbian and gay groups. The heterosexual ($\bar{x}=3.92$) and lesbian and gay groups ($\bar{x}=3.96$) agreed that teachers and staff treated lesbian and gay students equally and that having a safe classroom space could help them excel academically in their courses. Moreover, instructors had no prejudices against lesbians and gay students.

The current finding is in coherence with the study of Pearce and Cumming-Potvin (2017), who conveyed the teachers' perception of an increased acceptance by their peers of those students who were openly exploring their sexuality and of greater ‘tolerance’ of students with diverse sexualities. The findings of Aguirre et al. (2020) also reported that 66% of teachers answered that they respected the students' decisions and addressed them according to their choice (being a boy who wants to be treated as a girl or vice versa). The school's culture where teachers treat well lesbians and gays can lead to greater acceptance and openness.



Table 1
Observed Indicators along with Academics and School Performances

Observed Indicators	Mean	
	Hetero Group	Lesbian & Gays Group
1 Lesbian and gay students are treated equally by teachers or staff.	3.92	3.96
2 Lesbian and gay students excelled academically in their courses when they perceived classrooms as safe space.	3.68	3.92
3 The current pedagogy or methods in the teaching of instructors provide safe space to lesbian and gay students.	3.35	3.27
4 Lesbians and gays are bullied during class discussions.	2.86	2.98
5 Instructors have prejudices against lesbian and gay students, resulting in having low grades.	2.36	2.54

Legend: Strongly Agree (4.01-5.00), Agree (3.41-4.20), Neutral (6.21-3.40), Disagree (1.81-2.60) Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80)

3.2. Issues Related to School Activities and Organization

Table 2 presents the observed indicators' results in school activities and organization as perceived by heterosexual, lesbian, and gay respondents. Among the observed indicators, item 1 got the highest mean. The heterosexual ($\bar{x}$ =3.71) and lesbians and gays ($\bar{x}$ =3.58) agreed that an organization for lesbian and gay students was acceptable on the campus. This implies that lesbian and gay students were allowed to create their own organizations.

However, both groups, the heterosexual ($\bar{x}$ =2.29) and lesbian and gay groups ($\bar{x}$ =2.56) disagreed that there were activities and seminars that focused on the welfare of lesbian and gay students. This implies that the activities intended for lesbian and gay students on the campus were lacking. The 2016 to 2019 accomplishment reports submitted by the Gender and Development (GAD) coordinator of the campus where this study was conducted showed that most of the programs and activities implemented focused mostly on women's empowerment, women's laws, and men's gender studies.

The findings of the current study are consistent with the study of Santos and De Jesus (2020). In their study, lesbians and gay students strongly believed that they were unable to participate in school activities. This means that being a lesbian or gay student did not prevent them from participating in school activities. However, some challenges of lesbians and gays may be addressed if there are activities and seminars for the welfare of lesbian and gay students. Moreover, the current findings also suggest the creation of an organization for lesbians and gays. The school-based organizations can be a place for lesbian and gay youth to spend time with peers and may increase social support for sexual minority youth (Jordan, 2000, as cited in Heck et al., 2011).

Table 2
Observed Indicators Along with School Activities and Organization

Observed Indicators	Mean	
	Hetero Group	Lesbian & Gays Group
1 Lesbian and gay students' organization is acceptable in the campus.	3.71	3.58

Table 2 cont.

Observed Indicators	Mean	
2 School activities on the campus provide safe spaces for lesbian and gay students.	3.27	3.14
3 There are school activities that discriminate against the role of lesbian and gay students.	2.64	2.78
4 Lesbian and gay students have limited opportunities to join school activities and programs.	2.58	2.74
5 There are activities and seminars for the welfare of lesbian and gay students.	2.29	2.56

Legend: Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00), Agree (3.41-4.20), Neutral (2.61-3.40) Disagree (1.81-2.60), Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80)

3.3. Observed Indicator Along Propriety

Table 3 shows different indicators regarding the challenges faced by lesbian and gay students. Both groups agreed that having a safe school environment could help lesbians and gays grow socially and that heterosexual students were comfortable with them.

The current findings affirm that lesbian and gay adolescents benefit from inclusive school practices. This is consistent with O'Shaughnessy's (2004, as cited in Russel, 2011) study, which found that students felt safer at school and reported less anti-LGBT harassment when their schools had inclusive policies. Furthermore, children who reported inclusive policies were more likely to identify various resilience aspects, including having a voice to contribute at school and feeling cared for by adults and instructors. Moreover, according to the 2007 National School Climate Survey, students who attended schools with comprehensive safe school policies reported less hostile and more supportive environments: they heard fewer homophobic remarks, experienced less victimization or bullying, and had more teacher intervention when the harassment occurred (Greytak et al., 2009). Finally, students who attended schools with comprehensive policies reported fewer suicide attempts (Goodenow et al., 2006, as cited in Russell, 2011).

Table 3
Observed Indicator Along Propriety

Observed Indicators	Mean	
	Hetero Group	Lesbian & Gays Group
1 Lesbian and gay students grow socially when they perceive the school community as a safe space for them.	3.68	3.80
2 Heterosexual students are comfortable with lesbian and gay students.	3.53	3.67
3 Heterosexual students prefer a lesbian or a gay student to be a leader.	3.41	3.38
4 Groups of heterosexual students call lesbian or gay student names.	3.13	3.12
5 A bullied lesbian or gay student withdraws from classes.	3.11	3.08
6 Lesbian and gay students who feel unwanted by their peers of the same sex may commit tardiness and absenteeism.	2.98	2.80
7 My lesbian and gay classmates hesitate to come out for fear of meeting prejudices and discrimination.	2.93	2.74

Legend: Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00), Agree (3.41-4.20), Neutral (2.61-3.40) Disagree (1.81-2.60), Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80)

3.4 Challenges Encountered

Lesbians and gays had unpleasant encounters with their classmates, instructors, and staff, according to both groups of participants (heterosexual and lesbian and gay students). They heard homophobic comments from their instructors, staff, and some of their classmates. They also claimed that there were no school-based support groups or programs. They were unsure where to turn because their families were unsupportive of their sexual orientations, gender identities, and manifestations; hence the different challenges encountered by the lesbians and gays within and outside the campus.

3.4.1. Homophobic Remarks

Upon analysis of participants' descriptions, some gay students heard teachers being insensitive to lesbians and gays in classroom discussions. Renn (2000) explained that students told of occasions when faculty made derogatory jokes. In the present study, most participants shared their stories or experiences regarding their teachers' remarks during classroom discussions. The participants said that, during class discussions, instructors used examples that made homosexuals and gays uncomfortable.

Kasi pag nagbibigay sila ng examples tungkol sa mga bading, lalo na yong mga instructor na lalaki, sa kanila parang nakakatawa. Kunwari natatawa na rin kami, pero sa loob-loob ay nasasaktan kami. [Because when they give examples about homosexuals, especially the male instructors, to them it seems funny. We pretend to laugh too, but inwardly we are hurt] - Gay Participant 1

One gay participant added that he also experienced from a staff member some homophobic remarks before his clearance was signed.

Nakaraan naka-experience ako nyan (homophobic remarks) eh. Parang bago ka mapipirmahan ng clearance, kailangan niya muna na insultuhin ang pagkatao mo... katulad ng "150 muna, presyong alaga lang. lang." [I experienced that before (homophobic remarks). Before my clearance was signed, it was like he needed to insult me first like "150 first, for a pet price. Just kidding"] - Gay Participant 7

Another gay participant experienced bullying from a staff member.

Nagkaroon lang ng mga pang-aasar sa amin ng isang staff. Kagaya ng "gays are animals too". [One staff member teased us like "gays are animals too."] - Gay Participant 12

Gay participants even shared some names being called to them by their peers:

Akin, "chaka ka." [Mine, "ugly."] - Gay Participant 3

Akin, "baklang itim." [Mine, "black gay."] - Gay Participant 5

"Bitukon" minsan. ["Big tummy", sometimes.] - Gay Participant 2

According to gay participants, they just laughed whenever they were called such names.

However, some gay participants heard that some students and teachers used the words 'gay' or 'lesbian' in a negative way.

Narinig ko yung magbabarkada, sabi nila "... para kang bakla, ang hina mo naman". Totoo, kahit mga instructors minsan, narinig ko "bakla lang ang umiiyak." [I heard a group of friends, they said... you look gay, you're weak. It's true that even instructors sometimes, I heard them say "only gays cry."] - Gay Participant 6

A participant also said that a gay student was questioned unconstructively when trying to join a pageant.

Dati, sir, mayroong gustong sumali (in a pageant as Mr. Intramural) na bisexual. Kaso ang tanong sa kanya, "Bakit ka sasali? Alam mong bakla ka. Maya sabihin nila nagdadaya tayo." So hindi napasali yon. [There was a bisexual who wanted to join (in a pageant as Mr. Intramural); but they questioned him, "Why would you join? You know you're gay. They might accuse us of cheating." So, he was not allowed to join.] - Hetero Participant 3

Another participant said that a gay student could not participate in the pageant for Mr. Intramurals unless he concealed his real gender identity.

Mr. Intrams, kailangang "totoong" lalaki lang. Kung maglilihis lang o makakapasok man, parito lang. At yun talaga na tinatago nila ang sarili nila. [In Mr. Intramural competitions, the participants must be 'real' men. If they hide their gay identity, only then they can participate. And that's really what they're doing.] Hetero Participant 1

This was confirmed by other heterosexual participants when asked if they were in favor of lesbians and gays expressing their gender through crossdressing or the wearing of clothes designed for the opposite sex.

Masagwa man kasi bakla sila eh. [Not appropriate, because they are gay.] - Hetero Participant 5

Ayoko yung bakla na maglaladlad. Nireespeto ko yung bakla, pero kung maglaladlad. [I don't want gays to crossdress. I respect gays, but if they cross-dress, I don't like it.] - Hetero Participant 7

The current findings are in coherence with the study of Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2014), who reported that lesbian and gay students were forced to behave as heterosexuals.

Hearing homophobic remarks at school was a common occurrence. In the United States, nearly three-quarters (72.2%) of respondents said they frequently heard



the word gay used in a negative way (such as “That’s so gay” or “You’re so gay”), and slightly more than two-fifths (44.8%) heard other types of homophobic remarks such as “faggot,” “dyke,” or “queer” used in a negative manner (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016).

In the Philippines, according to Ferrer et al. (2021), most respondents suffer from verbal bullying by mocking or making fun of them, and six out of 10 of them suffer from classmates’ or schoolmates’ discrimination by teasing or making fun of them. Sometimes, they feel left out or out of place just because they are gay.

3.4.3. Lack of Support from the Family

The difficulty of coming out emerges because of fear of rejection and punishment from the parents. This affirms the study of Roe (2016) that parents’ initial reactions are most often not positive; however, coming out is necessary, and lesbian and gay youth want explicit support from parents and family members. The descriptions of the participants in the current study revealed otherwise.

The participants said that sometimes the reason for not coming out is the family:

Minsan, sir personal reason talaga nila ay dahil sa pamilya. Hindi naman sa environment nila. [“Sometimes, sir, their personal reason is because of family. Not in their environment.”]
- Lesbian Participant 8

They were concerned that some of their parents’ friends would criticize them for coming out.

Kasi sasabihin sa pamilya natin, may “anak ka palang ganito. [“Because our family will be told, “you have a child like this.”]
- Lesbian Participant 6

One gay participant shared his experience with his father when his friends made remarks about him being gay. His father was really upset and disciplined him to become a real man.

Kasi minsan... once na may anak ka na beki lalo na sa part ng tatay ko, magkakabarkada yan, sasabihin sa kanya “anak mo beki”, at napakasakit yon. So talagang im’ mold nya ako para maging tunay na lalaki. So madalas, sinasaktan niya ako para maging tunay na lalaki. [Because sometimes... once you have a gay child, especially on the part of my father, of course he has many friends, they will say “your child is gay”, and it will be very painful to him. So, he hurts me physically to be a real man.] - Gay Participant 1

Participants reported that a student was beaten at home when his father learned that he was gay.

May kapitbahay tayo di ba? Nung nalaman ng tatay niya na gay siya, nagalit talaga. [We had a neighbor, right? When his father found out that he was gay, he was really angry.] - Hetero Participant 3

Oo, tapos pag-uwi nya pinalo siya. [Yes, then when he came home, his father beat him.] - Hetero Participant 4

3.4.4. Lack of Support Programs for Lesbians and Gays

Grossman et al. (2009) asserted that schools must be safe and exhibit supportive learning environments. These included the need for policies and rules, peer education, planned educational activities, and in-service training for school personnel about lesbian and gay youth to create inclusive school communities. Five participants said that the school did not have programs that support lesbians and gays. The participants claimed that there were no support programs for lesbians and gays, and lesbian and gay topics were not even addressed in the subjects:

Wala pa naman talagang (matibay at tuloy-tuloy na) support programs para sa mga lesbian and gay dito sa campus. Kahit sa mga subjects natin di ba, wala naman naituturo tungkol sa lesbian and gay. [There really aren’t any (strong and consistent) support programs for lesbian and gay people. Even in our subjects, no issues are taught about lesbian and gay people.] - Gay Participant 3

One participant also said that outside of school, there were events for lesbians and gays, but she had not come across any support programs for lesbians and gays on campus.

Sa labas ng campus, tingin ko may mga activities para sa kanila, pero dito, wala naman kaming nae-encounter. [Outside the campus, I think there are activities for them, but here, we haven’t encountered anything.] - Hetero Participant 7

The GAD Office’s accomplishment reports from 2017 to 2019 did not reflect support programs or activities for lesbian and gay students, thus confirming the foregoing findings. Most of the programs and activities implemented were connected to women’s empowerment, women’s laws, and men’s gender studies. Indeed, it was very difficult on the part of those students going through identity issues. What made the matter worse was their inability to understand their issues because there was insufficient guidance from the teachers and school through its curriculum and support programs. The participants’ descriptions are consistent with the study of Lopez and Chims (2010), who stated that the discussion of gay and lesbian student issues in the literature on college teaching had been almost non-existent. At the University of Massachusetts, a clear majority of those surveyed said that they did not feel safe disclosing their sexual identity in class, did not find that gay, lesbian, or bisexual topics were dealt with adequately in class or academic programs, did not feel that there were appropriate library resources, and felt that faculty did not support research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual topic (Yeskel, 1991).

The abovementioned challenges and the difficulty of coming out made lesbians and gays think of alternative ways to deal with such stressful situations; hence their coping mechanisms and coming out process.

3.5. Coping Mechanisms and Coming Out Process

Some techniques emerged as part of the revelation process of the sexual identity of lesbians and gays. In a qualitative study on the coping mechanisms and coming out process of gay college students in a fraternity, the first is the member–

specific strategy, in which gays initially expose themselves to a group member who is closest to them and with whom they have the deepest friendship bond (Trump, 2003, as cited in Ferrer et al., 2021). This is similar to the study of Grossman et al. (2009), who asserted that lesbians and gays escaped and avoided stressors by distancing themselves from school, thereby involving themselves in the gay community or other homosexual peer groups that offer support that is especially needed during the coming-out period. Because no one will support and guide them in coming out, they tend to look for groups and places that will make them feel safe and motivated to do things they want without judgment and prejudices.

The participants of the current study affirmed the said finding. According to a gay participant, his friend disliked going to school; thus, instead of going to school, he worked at the parlor:

*Hindi niya talaga feel na safe siya sa school...
So instead na pumasok kami sa school, sa kanya nag sa 'sideline sya sa bayan ng parlor.
[He didn't really feel that he is safe at school...
So instead of going to school, he worked in beauty parlors.]*- Gay Participant 1

In the study of Santos and De Jesus (2020), respondents who identified themselves as lesbians or gays skipped school to avoid being bullied. There were 33.3% of lesbian and gay students in the United States who reported skipping a day of school. Similarly, 16.5% of lesbian and gay students in Israel disclosed skipping a day of school. This suggests that a bad school climate was linked to lesbian and gay students' absenteeism. Furthermore, being exposed to homophobic slurs regularly raised the chance of absenteeism (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016).

Another gay participant admitted that he used to skip school and spend time outside with his gay friends, who helped him develop his gender identity and expressions.

Hindi alam ng family ko na hindi na ako pumapasok sa school... sa labas ko na lang nadevelop na ganito pala ako (gay). [My family doesn't know that I don't go to school anymore... I just developed (my gender identity) outside.]- Gay Participant 7

Another gay participant also said that he would rather join the company of those who like him, instead of getting stressed by people who keep on judging his identity.

Kasi alam mo naranasan ko to. Kasi nagsama ako sa criminology sa Taytay, syempre mga true friend ko yan. Alam mo ba, pag kasama nila ako don, mas masaya ako at alam ko na masaya din sila, kasi nagpapasaya yong baka diyan mas gumaganda ang bonding ninyo. Kesi sa iba na pagtatawanan lang ako, ka-stress. [I actually have experienced this. I went to Taytay with my friends from the criminology program. Of course, they are my true friends. You know, when I am with them, I am happier, and I know they're happy, too, because gays can make the group happy. Being with my friends is better compared with others who just laugh at me. That is stressful.]- Gay Participant 5

The coping mechanisms and coming out process of college lesbian and gay students are part of their adjustments to somewhat stressful situations. However, the school can create a more accepting environment regardless of gender and sexual orientation. Thus, the participants recommended some actions and programs for safe spaces.

3.5. Participants' Recommendations for Safe Spaces

Lesbian and gay students can do well in some school activities, from the preparation to the actual competition – indoor and outdoor games. They are flexible and competitive in many programs and activities. The statements and descriptions of the participants affirmed that the schools have the potential to promote gender-safe spaces, that is, by encouraging the participation of lesbians and gays in school activities without fear of homophobic remarks, integrating gender studies in the curriculum, and promoting gender equality in the classroom.

3.6.1. Joining School Activities Without Fear of Homophobic Remarks

Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2014) proposed that programs for social behavior change should focus on advocacy, education, and support to ensure equal access of all qualifying students to university activities, including sports and recreation, without discrimination. The descriptions of some heterosexual participants and lesbians and gays affirmed the aforementioned study. A heterosexual participant said that she had a gay classmate who was extremely adaptable and competitive in a variety of sports, even if it was a manly sport, and he excelled in them; therefore, it was unfair when they received some homophobic remarks even before they could show their skills in sports and other activities.

May klasmeyt kami na bakla. Flexible po siya. Marunong siya sa larong panlahi at sa volleyball malakas po siyang maglaro. Kasi kaya niyang gawin yung panglalaki kahit bakla siya. Mas magaling pa nga sila. [We have a classmate who is gay. He is flexible. He knows how to play traditional Filipino games and he plays volleyball well. And he can do what men can actually do even if he is gay. They are even better.]- Hetero Participant 3

This was supported by another participant when he said

Kami, sir, may nakalaro (gay), pero malakas. Kuya ko pala, gay talaga siya. Lakas maglaro ng basketball yon. Six-footer kasi, sir. [We played against a gay who played well. My older brother is gay. He is good at playing basketball. He is six-footer.] - Hetero Participant 6

Nevertheless, homophobic remarks were still common, as observed by some participants.

Kaso minsan, lalo na sa basketball, minsan nasabihan ang isang ano (gay), ng kasamahan namin na "wag na pasalihin baka matalo tayo, lambot eh." [Sometimes, especially in basketball, our colleague once said, 'don't let him



(referring to a gay player) in or we will lose; he is a wimp.] - Hetero Participant 6

Gay participants confirmed that they were extremely competitive in a variety of sports, including pageants.

Kasi, sir, karamihan sa amin pagdating sa ibang activities, competitive talaga kami, o kahit sa mga beauty pageant na yan. [Because, sir, most of us when it comes to other activities, we are competitive, or even in those beauty pageants.] - Gay Participant 11

Gay participants also argued that leaders who are said to be “real” men do not do women’s work, but gays are more adaptable. They can multitask and do well on projects regardless of gender.

Kasi di ba, sir, may mga leaders kasi na sabihin man natin sila na mga hetero o mga tunay, minsan kasi hindi nila kayang gawin ang obligasyon nila kasi pag lalaki, panlalaki lang, pag babae, pambabae lang. Kami naman mga bakla multi-tasking kami. Kaya nga di ba kami mapababae o mapalalaki ay magagawa. [Because, sir, there are leaders because whether hetero or real men, sometimes they can’t do their obligations because they are ‘men’ and they can only do tasks intended for ‘men’. Same for women. But in our part, we are gays, and we are multi-tasking, that’s why we can do the work of a man or a woman.] - Gay Participant 1

Talking about leadership, on the campus where the study was conducted, the President of the Student Government Organization (SGO) was gay. He was elected not because of his sexual preference but because of his performance.

SGO president natin si MK (not his real name) ... Ayos din naman sya mag-lead. Kaya siya binoto, di ba? Tsaka kung baga nae-express din nila ang personality nila at skills na rin sa mga tasks na binibigay sa kanila, katulad ng sa acquaintance party o sa intramural. Magaling siya sa decoration. [Our SGO president is MK (not his real name) ... He is also good at taking the lead. So, he was voted, right? Certainly, they can also express their personality and skills in the tasks given to them, such as at an acquaintance party or intramural. He is good at decorations.] - Hetero Participant 4

3.6.2. Integrating Gender Studies in the Curriculum

The school management has a central role in establishing a gender-responsive environment, especially in a classroom setting. They are responsible for understanding what is happening in the school and taking a proactive role in bringing about positive change (UNESCO Bangkok Office, n.d.). The participants suggested that if there were programs designed specifically for them (lesbian and gay students), they would be prouder of themselves and have higher self-esteem.

Mas mabuti if may mga programs para sa amin. Alam mo yung pride ng lesbian and gay mas gusto namin, mas high, yung tingin namin mas standard. [It is better if there are programs for us. You know our pride as lesbian and gay people if

there are programs, we will feel ‘high’ or with a standard.] - Lesbian Participant 4

The participants also expressed that they wanted the inclusion of the discussion of issues about gays and lesbians, as well as seminars and programs.

Kahit sa mga subjects natin di ba, wala naman naituturo tungkol sa lesbian and gay. [Even in our subjects, no issues are taught about lesbian and gay people.] - Gay Participant 3

Oo nga no, sana may mga seminars tungkol sa amin... para sa amin. Para maintindihan din namin yung sarili namin. Pero seryoso, para alam namin kung paano namin susuportahan ang katulad namin. [Yes, I hope there are seminars about us... for us. So that we can also understand ourselves. But seriously, so that we will know how we will support one another.] - Gay Participant 6

Programs for lesbians and gays, especially the gays. *Sila talaga yong kawawa. Maa-appreciate namin kung may pa-seminar para sa amin [hetero groups], para maging bukas yung isip namin tungkol sa kanila.* [Programs for lesbians and gays, especially the gays. They are really unfortunate. We would appreciate it if there were more seminars for us (hetero group) so that we can be open-minded about them.] - Hetero Participant 2

The current study’s findings agree with the study of Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019), who reported that the participants noted that a classroom as a safe space might be created by educating other students about the history, lives, and experiences of gay and lesbian people. Kintner-Duffy (2012), on the other hand, stated that the participants in his study were able to express the importance of being encouraged to use curriculum materials that included lesbian and gay families in the classroom. This experience helped the students understand the social construction of stories regarding sexuality.

3.6.3. Promoting Gender Equality in the Classroom

Furthermore, for the students to feel motivated and thrive in society and schools, they must receive physical and emotional support from all the relevant stakeholders. (Ioverno et al., 2016, as cited by Hanimoğlu, 2019). In the survey data, “individuals have favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gay men as people, liking them as friends” (Manalastas, 2005, p2).

In this connection, some participants stated that they had not experienced any bullying from heterosexual instructors or staff.

Hindi naman po namin na-experience na binully kami ng mga teachers at staff. [We have not experienced being bullied by teachers and staff.] - Gay Participant 2

Hindi naman lahat ng instructors ay bully. [Not all instructors are bullies.] - Gay Participant 5

Lesbians and gays become more confident and prouder of themselves because of having a safe environment. They

are even encouraged to participate in and excel in sporting events.

Pasok din naman tayo sa athletics. Joining activities ay hindi naman limited. I am proud to be a gay athlete. Lagi ako sinasali simula elementary hanggang college. [We also go into athletics. Joining activities is not limited. I am proud to be a gay athlete. I was always involved from elementary to college. - Gay Participant 9

Two Research Center surveys found that society has become more accepting of gays and lesbians (Drake, 2013). Teachers, on the other hand, play an important role in ensuring that every girl and boy, including lesbian and gay, obtains proper education. They also should ensure that all elements of education are non-discriminatory, including guaranteeing gender equality in the classroom. As a result, it is necessary to assess teachers' ability to advocate and practice gender equality. On the campus where the study was conducted, the researcher observed that teachers were very considerate of the opinions of lesbians and gays, specifically on the topic of same-sex marriage and relationships. Teachers also mentioned in some of their lectures different success stories of lesbians and gays in the country. When the teachers discussed these topics, the lesbians and gays paid attention consistently.

If lesbians and gays perceive that there is constant support from the school community, it can reduce stereotyping and misconceptions and can help others develop a more accepting viewpoint. Thus, schools can develop procedures and activities that foster a peaceful atmosphere for all students, including lesbians and gays (Russell et al., 2016, as cited in Hanimoglu, 2019).

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study were interpreted within the limitations of mixed-method research to emphasize the experiences and challenges related to the promotion of gender-safe spaces for lesbian and gay students. Heterosexual, lesbian, and gay students took part in the study. Academic and school performance, school activities and organization, and challenges of lesbian and gay students were among the key areas covered in the survey. Significant themes emerged as the data gathered through discussions were further analyzed. These were coping mechanisms, the coming out process, and participants' recommendations for safe spaces. These major themes were then subdivided into sub-themes presented in the preceding section.

Even though lesbians and gays were frequently targeted for discrimination, bullying, and other homophobic remarks, they also had positive experiences on and off campus. According to them, the instructors and staff members treated them equally. Lesbians and gays were welcome to participate in school events, and they could even form an LGBT organization. Heterosexual students also stated that they were comfortable in the company of lesbians and gays, enabling them to lead their group. However, it is of major importance that instructors and staff receive training on lesbian and gay students' difficulties to provide a safe, loving, and supportive environment for them (Kiapoka, 2020).

Such opposing emotions were addressed in depth through group discussions and observations, which led to a consideration of further issues associated with being gay or lesbian. According to them, heterosexual students made fun of gay students by calling them names. This is consistent with a prior study, which indicated that most respondents were subjected to verbal bullying by mocking or making fun of them (Ferrer et al., 2021). They also noticed that some gay students who had been bullied based on their sexual expressions had dropped out of school. Moreover, in the present study, activities intended for lesbians and gays were lacking.

Lesbians and gays endured numerous difficulties simply because they were homosexuals. They had some unpleasant experiences, including homophobic remarks from classmates, instructors, and staff. They also reported that there were no school-based support groups or programs on campus and that coming out was extremely difficult for them. Coming out was tough for them because they feared rejection from their classmates and punishment from their parents. Their families, they claimed, were not accepting of their sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions. As a result, lesbians and gays revealed their sexual orientation to a group member who was closest to them and with whom they had the strongest friendship bond. Some of them skipped classes and avoided stressors by distancing from school and getting involved in the gay community or other homosexual peer organizations that provided support during the coming-out process. The current findings are in line with previous research, which found that it was difficult for lesbians and gays to reveal their sexuality and be accepted in society, but that they always had the courage to deal with the situation thanks to their friends (Katz-Wise et al., 2016, as cited in Ferrer et al., 2021).

College lesbian and gay students' coping techniques and coming out processes are part of their unique adjustments to difficult situations. However, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, the school can promote a more welcoming environment. Thus, the participants suggested several measures and strategies for creating safe spaces.

The suggestions or recommendations contribute to the advocacy of promoting gender equality in education. Schools in certain education systems are given the authority to develop policies following national criteria. When this occurs, school policies should include a proclamation of gender equality, a clear statement against gender-based discrimination, and a zero-tolerance policy for violence (UNESCO Bangkok Office, n.d.). For this reason, gender-safe spaces can be promoted in schools by initially normalizing the participation of lesbians and gays in school activities without fear of homophobic remarks. The participants' descriptions revealed that lesbian and gay students are adaptive and competitive in some sports and other school activities; nonetheless, it is unfair to subject them to homophobic remarks before they can demonstrate their abilities and capabilities.

Lesbian and gay students reported that gender-safe environments in programs could help them be more self-assured and prouder of themselves. They also expressed a desire for the conduct of seminars and the inclusion of gender studies in the curriculum, to help them understand their sexuality and educate them on how to support their homosexual classmates. Heterosexual students could also



benefit from attending seminars and learning from the course Gender Studies, which teaches them how to assist lesbians and gays. The current findings are consistent with the argument that LGBT curricular inclusion could promote the well-being of LGBT students (Lipkin, 1999, as cited in Russell, 2011). Gender studies in the curriculum ensure that all areas of education are non-discriminatory, including gender equality in the classroom.

If lesbian and gay students believe that their school community is always behind them, stereotypes and preconceptions can be reduced, and others can acquire a more welcoming mindset. As a result, schools may create policies and programs that promote a peaceful environment for all students regardless of sexual orientation.

While gays' experiences are undeniably mixed, one thing that stands out is the prevalence of positivism that pushes them to accept their sexual orientation. Some gay students stated that they have not been bullied by heterosexual instructors or staff and that not all teachers are bullies; they were even encouraged to engage in and excel in sporting activities, making them happy to be gay athletes. They believed society has become more accepting of gays and lesbians. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that all students, including lesbians and gays, receive an adequate education. Further, the school administration is critical in achieving gender equality, particularly in the classroom. They are responsible for being aware of what is happening in the school and being proactive in effecting positive change.

5. Conclusion

The current study aimed to comprehend the experiences of college lesbian and gay students within the limitations of mixed-methods research. This study identified the issues specifically in terms of academic and school performance, school activities, and organization, and challenges faced by lesbian and gay students concerning the promotion of safe spaces for them. Furthermore, this study determined the challenges, coping mechanisms, coming out process, and participants' recommendations for safe spaces. Participants in the study were students from an external campus of a state university, consisting of 281 heterosexuals and 40 lesbian and gay students. Participants were randomly selected using the snowball method. Researchers used structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and observations.

The results of the survey showed several issues but most of which turned out to be positive experiences for lesbians and gays. Thus, although the researcher attempted to outline problems and concerns among lesbians and gays, the current findings in the survey proved otherwise. As observed by both groups, lesbians, and gays were treated equally by instructors and staff, and they could achieve academically in their courses because of the safe classroom environment. They were also allowed to create their organization and participate freely in the school activities on campus.

However, findings in group discussions revealed that other students still faced certain obstacles. Some lesbians and gays were subjected to homophobic slurs in the classroom. For instance, instructors making unconstructive examples about lesbians and gays caused some students to laugh but made the lesbians and gays uncomfortable. These experiences made them skip school and involve themselves in gay groups that offered support, especially during the coming-out period. This was part of their coping mechanism and coming-out process because support programs were also

lacking for students whose families were opposed to their sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions.

These led to a realization that the student development programs must be updated consistently and, if necessary, revised to ensure that the programs and activities, including the policies, consistently promote safe spaces for all students regardless of preferred gender. Indeed, schools can help support lesbian and gay families by fostering an atmosphere where students and staff understand and respect differences. Learning about diversity can decrease prejudice and prepare children to live in a multicultural society. It can reduce stereotyping and misconceptions and help others develop a more accepting viewpoint.

It is therefore suggested that concerned units, such as the GAD office, devise and implement an inclusive student development program to achieve this goal. The establishment of policies and practices, specifically in normalizing the participation of lesbians and gays in all school activities without fear of homophobic remarks, the development of an inclusive curriculum as part of gender mainstreaming, seminars in understanding lesbian and gay youth, and support groups for lesbians and gays must all be part of the student development program.

References

- Abma, T. A. (2005). Responsive evaluation: Its meaning and special contribution to health promotion. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 28(3), 279-289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalproplan.2005.04.003>
- Aguirre, A., Moliner, L., & Francisco, A. (2020). "Can anybody help me?" High school teachers' experiences on LGBTphobia perception, teaching intervention and training on affective and sexual diversity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(14), 2430-2450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2020.1804265>
- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, text revision (DSM-5-TR(tm))* (5th ed.). Author.
- Drake, B. (2013). How LGBT adults see society and how the public sees them. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/25/how-lgbt-adults-see-society-and-how-the-public-sees-them/>
- Ferrer, A. K., Maranan, L., Luntaga, J., Del Rosario, A. D., & Tus, J. (2021). The exploration on the lived experiences and challenges faced of the gay college students amidst COVID-19. *International Journal of Advance Research and Innovative Ideas in Education*, 7(1), 795 – 815. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13724512.v1>
- Gacita, A., Gargus, E., Uchida, T., Garcia, P., Macken, M., Seul, L., Brucker, J., & Wayne, D. B. (2017). Introduction to safe space training: Interactive module for promoting a safe space learning environment for LGBT medical students. *MedEdPORTAL*, 2017;13:10597. https://doi.org/10.15766/mep_2374-8265.10597

- Ghemmour, R. (2022). There is no 'safe space' - A critical insight to frame conversations around social justice education. *Transformation*, 7(1), 54-59. <https://doi.org/10.47967/tor2022trans.vol7.09>
- Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Diaz, E. M. (2009). *Harsh realities: The experiences of transgender youth in our nation's*. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.
- Grossman, A. H., Haney, A. P., Edwards, P., Alessi, E. J., Ardon, M., & Howell, T. J. (2009). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth talk about experiencing and coping with school violence: A qualitative study. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 6(1), 24-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361650802379748>
- Hafford-Letchfield, T., Cocker, C., Ryan, P., & Melonowska, J. (2016). Rights through alliances: Findings from a European project tackling homophobic and Transphobic bullying in schools through the engagement of families and young people. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(8), 2338-2356. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw104>
- Hanımoglu, E. (2019). Stigmatization and suicide vulnerability in LGBT students: Inquiry and recommendations. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, 6(2), 45-51. <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509.2019.62.45.51>
- Heck, N. C., Flentje, A., & Cochran, B. N. (2011). Offsetting risks: High school gay-straight alliances and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(2), 161-174. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023226>
- Horn, S.S. & Russell, S.T.(2016). Sexual orientation, gender identity, and school: Learning from the past, envisioning the future. In S.T. Russell, & S.S. Horn (Eds), *Sexual orientation, gender identity, and schooling: The nexus of research, practice, and policy* (pp. 377-390). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780199387656.003.0021>
- International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. (2011). Human rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and homosexuality in the Philippines. *BRILL*. https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_hrd-9815-0077
- Kiapoka, A. S. (2020). Preventing homophobic and transphobic violence through inclusion education programs. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience & Mental Health*, 3(2), 126-132. <https://doi.org/10.26386/obrela.v3i2.168>
- Kintner-Duffy, V. L., Vardell, R., Lower, J. K., & Cassidy, D. J. (2012). The changers and the changed: Preparing early childhood teachers to work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 33(3), 208-223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2012.705806>
- Lopez, G., & Chims, N. (1993). Classroom concerns of gay and lesbian students: The invisible minority. *College Teaching*, 41(3), 97-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.1993.9926788>
- Manalastas, E. J., & Pilar, G. E. H. D. (2005). Filipino attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: Secondary analysis of 1996 and 2001 national survey data. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 38 (2), 53-75. <http://www.tinyurl.com/yx9u8pnq>
- Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H., (2014). Experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex students regarding sports participation in a South African rural-based university, Sabinet. *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 20(22), 710-720. <https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC155209>
- Ncanana, Z., & Ige, K. (2014). Aversion toward homosexuals among tertiary education students in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(10), 569 -579. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n10p569>
- Neviyarni, N., Netrawati, N., Ahmad, R., & Delfita, W. (2020). Students' sexual identity based on interest, style and behavior. *International Journal of Research in Counseling and Education*, 4(1), 51-54. <https://doi.org/10.24036/00264za0002>
- Pearce, J., & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2017). English classrooms and curricular justice for the recognition of LGBT individuals: What can teachers do? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(9), 77-92. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n9.5>
- Pizmony-Levy, O., & Kosciw, J. G. (2016). School climate and the experience of LGBT students: A comparison of the United States and Israel. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 13(1-2), 46-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2015.1108258>
- Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP). (2011). Statement of the Psychological Association of the Philippines on non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 44 (2), 229-230. <http://www.tinyurl.com/yd67gbmc>
- Renn, K. A. (2000). Including all voices in the classroom: Teaching lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. *College Teaching*, 48(4), 129-135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567550009595829>
- Roe, S. (2016). Family support would have been like amazing. *The Family Journal*, 25(1), 55-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480716679651>
- Russell, S. T. (2011). Challenging homophobia in schools: Policies and programs for safe school climates. *Educator em Revista*, (39), 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0104-40602011000100009>



- Santos, K. E., & Jesus, C. D. (2020). Prevalence of bullying among LGBT students in Nueva Ecija. *Open Access Library Journal*, 7: e6066, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1106066>
- Tshilongo, T., & Rothmann, J. (2019). A sociological exploration of the need for safe spaces for lesbian and gay students on a South African university campus. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 4(0)a77, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v4i0.77>
- UNDP, USAID (2014). *Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report*. Bangkok.
- UNESCO Bangkok Office. (n.d.). Mainstreaming gender at the whole-school level. Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/article/Education/publications/GENIA2019/19_Dec_GENIA_Toolkit_11.pdf
- Yeskel, F. (1991). Dealing with lesbian, gay, and bisexual concerns: Multicultural organizational development in higher education. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst). *Doctoral Dissertations* 1896 - February 2014. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1/4825

Acknowledgments

The author expresses his utmost gratitude to God the Almighty for His guidance and provisions making this research possible. The author also acknowledges the support of Dr. Maila N. Lucero and Dr. Flornita N. Ferrer. Special thanks are extended to his former professors and mentors: Sr. Ascencion L. Domugho, Dr. Anna Mylene F. Natividad, and Sr. Rosalinda V. Guerrero. Further, he is grateful to the participants of this study for their remarkable participation during the data gathering.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares that no conflict of interest is involved in the study.

Funding

The author received no financial support from individuals or groups for this article's research and/or authorship.

About the Author

John Paul D. Reloj teaches social science courses at Palawan State University. He is a graduate of AB Philosophy and MAEd in Guidance and Counselling. He is a registered guidance counselor completing his Ph.D. in Educational Management.



PSU VISION

An internationally recognized university that provides relevant and innovative education and research for lifelong learning and sustainable development

PSU MISSION

Palawan State University is committed to upgrade people's quality of life by providing education opportunities through excellent Instruction, research and innovation, extension, production services, and transnational collaborations.