

The Defender of the Nation: Experiences of the Philippine Army Personnel in Armed Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

Armed conflicts arise when different parties or groups oppose each other's interests or objectives, often manifesting in violence and threats that instill fear in affected populations and lead to loss of life, psychological trauma, and property destruction. This study focused on the sacrifices made by Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict operations. It aimed to explore their lived experiences, identify the coping mechanisms they employed, and gather their suggestions and recommendations to mitigate the impacts of armed conflict. This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide to collect data. The findings revealed that the lived experiences of Philippine Army personnel during armed conflicts include citizen cooperation, battlefield encounters, fear, emotional anxiety, inspiration, heroism, difficulties during initial encounters, grief, loss of appetite, and psychological trauma. Coping mechanisms identified included unwavering commitment, positive thinking, faith and spiritual guidance, resilience, and prioritizing safety in military operations. The study recommends that Philippine Army personnel undergo counseling services to ensure their well-being and mental health. Furthermore, it advises the Department of National Defense to enhance the modernization and availability of protective equipment. It also encourages citizens to appreciate the work of soldiers and suggests that criminology students consider diverse career paths beyond the traditional tri-bureau.

Keywords: Philippine Army, Personnel, Armed Conflict, Coping Mechanism, Lived Experiences

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts always arise in the human world, but peace is essential to human existence. Both have benefits, but the fallout from conflicts has brought about tragedies, disasters, destruction, economic brutality, and sociopolitical backwardness (Shukla, 2023). In addition, Carpinello, (2023) states that armed conflicts result in a variety of stressful outcomes, including death, all of which negatively impact the lives of survivors.

To address such armed conflict, the Philippine army personnel are doing their duties and responsibilities to maintain peace and order in our nation. Understanding the essence of promoting peace is important. Forster (2020), explains that peace agreements serve as an established way of settling disputes between conflicting parties to achieve an end of conflicts.

Conflict occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires and it also exists through the inconsistent acts of different individuals concerning their wants, needs, or obligations. According to Tyson (2023), wars are commonly understood as violent conflicts between states or nations. Armed conflict exists if armed forces or armed groups use force or threats to promote their

interest or objectives.

In connection with promoting peace, information sharing for Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict is essential, it is a process where the systematic exchange of accurate information among military groups, collaborate forces, security organizations, and other appropriate groups to improve situational awareness, decision-making, and operational effectiveness during conflict interactions. Meanwhile, Torres (2018) states that information sharing within the Philippine Army during armed conflicts is important for efficient coordination, good decision-making, and successful operations in difficult and unpredictable situations.

This study was conducted at the 86th Infantry (Highlander) Battalion, 51D PA which is located at Balabal, Barangay 1, Jones, Isabela with a legacy of securing the sovereignty of the State and the integrity of national territory. The researchers chose the 86th Infantry (Highlander) Battalion, 51D PA in continuously supporting the different government agencies in reaching out their programs, projects, and services to the remotest areas of the Isabela and nearby provinces. They also continue to strictly observe Executive Order No. 70 or the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict and give assistance to the local government officials to continue their development activities and maintain peace and order in the province. The *Logo* represents the great challenge faced by the unit that needs the highest degree of professionalism, focus its attention wherever this unit shall be deployed, and assume responsibility to its pre-designated Area of Responsibility. The *Sword* symbolizes protection, righteousness, and justice to reinforce the concept of truth, purity, equanimity, and fairness. The *Laurel Leaves* represent long-term peace and professionalism. The *Shield* symbolizes defense which is the primary and ultimate mission of the Philippine Army. The Number “86” is the numerical number designation of the unit.

The study is conducted to highlight the sacrifices made by the Philippine army personnel during armed conflict and to support their legacy in promoting peace and security in our country. To fulfill this study, the researchers sought to determine the lived experience of the Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict to find out the coping mechanism they encountered during armed conflict and to establish their suggestions and recommendations to reduce the impact caused by armed conflict.

OBJECTIVES

This study is intended mainly in determining the lived experiences, coping mechanism and the suggestion and recommendation of Philippine Army to reduce the impact of armed conflict, the study aims to seek the following:

1. To determine the lived experiences of the members of Philippine Army during armed conflict?
2. To determine the members of the Philippine Army deals with their experiences during armed conflict?
3. To determine the participant's suggestions and recommendations to reduce the impact caused by armed conflict?

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive-phenomenological method of qualitative research. To determine the lived experiences of the Army Personnel in armed conflicts. The study was conducted at Sitio Balabal, Barangay 1, Jones, Isabela where 86th Infantry Battalion resides in this area. The researchers chose the 86th Infantry Battalion because they continuously support the different government agencies in reaching out their programs, projects, and services to the remotest areas of Isabela and nearby provinces. They also continued

to strictly observe Executive Order No. 70, or the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict and assist the local government officials to continue their development activities and maintain peace and order in the province. The study participants were ten (10) Philippine Army personnel who have already encountered armed conflict with at least 5 years of service and actively engaged in mountain patrol. The researchers believed that this number of respondents was enough to assess the validity and reliability of the study. The researchers used purposive sampling to select the respondents. Purposive sampling was the most suitable sampling technique for this study since the representative Philippine Army personnel were given based on the study's criteria. To keep the identities of the respondents confidential, they were given fictional identities such as PA "1," PA "2," PA "3," up to PA "10." PA refers to the Philippine Army. As such, the study did not disclose any personal information about the participants. The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide that was translated into English and Tagalog to gather data that were needed from the participants. The study used this type of interview to encourage the participants to engage in the interview and to be able to gather in-depth answers from them. The data analysis process used in this study was thematic analysis because it allowed them to be more flexible concerning the interpretation of the data being gathered. Thus, according to Caulfield (2022), it contains six steps. Familiarization, Coding, Generating Themes, Reviewing Themes, and Defining and Naming Themes. The study's conduct adhered to ethical guidelines. The participant's right to confidentiality and self-determination was upheld. The participants' written informed consent was sought, and participation in the study was voluntary. The information gathered from the responses was kept private. Additionally, the data collected for this study was not altered or falsified and was not biased and objectively analyzed the data. The agreements made with the participants were always respected. The participant's identities and private information remained confidential. The right to privacy was applied to the respondents. As a result, the study does not include certain research reports and documents that contain identifiable information about respondents. There was no pressure on the volunteers to take part in this study. The study expected that any risks, harm, discomfort, or inconvenience were minor and that these events were unlikely. The study properly credited or acknowledged all sources utilized in the current study and did not use unpublished data, methods, or results without permission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of Philippine Army Personnel's during Armed Conflicts

The lived experiences of Philippine Army personnel during armed conflicts are various and profoundly important. These personnel encountered serious dangers and difficulties while performing their duties in different areas. Here are the lived experiences encountered by the Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict.

Citizen's Cooperation. Citizen's cooperation with the Philippine Army means civilians actively participate and support a variety of initiatives, programs, and activities that benefit the national security, community development, and the overall state of the country. It also helps the Philippine Army by providing important information about security threats, suspicious activities, and other relevant information that can help in the maintenance of community peace and order. Cooperating with them implies that they respect and adhere to the laws and regulations they impose as well as the directives that ensure the nation's safety and security.

Citizens living in conflict-affected areas often provide valuable intelligence and information to Philippine Army personnel regarding insurgent activities, suspicious movements, and potential threats. This local knowledge helps in enhancing situational awareness, identifying enemy positions, and preventing attacks, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of military operations.

PA 2: *"syempre, isinumbong ng mga mamamayan na may NPA sa lugar kaya yun ginagawan ng aksyon"*

para mapaalis sila sa lugar.” (Of course, the citizens complain that there are NPA present in the area that’s why actions are made to get them out on the said area.)

PA 3: *“mostly nagtitip ang civilian.”* (The tip mostly came from civilians)

PA 8: *“Ang mga mamamayan sa lugar ang mismong nagsusumbong sa otoridad.”* (The residents are the ones reporting to the authorities.)

PA 9: *“Kadalasan yung mga civilian or residente ang nagsisiwalat sa amin ng information na may NPA sa Isang lugar.”* (Usually, the civilians or residence informed us that there are NPA in the area.)

PA 10: *“Dahil sa impormasyon galing sa mga civilian.”* (Through the information given by the civilians.)

According to Philippine Army personnel, they have witnessed citizens’ cooperation that was developed during armed conflict. Fostering a sense of unity among citizens, shared responsibility, and a strong partnership address common challenges, improve national security and contribute to the welfare of the Filipino people as supported by the statements of PA 2, PA 3, PA 8, PA 9 and PA 10.

Battlefield Encounters. Activities such as coordinating and planning Military operations are necessary for the armed forces to achieve military goals. These operations include combat actions, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and other tasks carried out by military forces to protect national interests, maintain security, and support international peace efforts. Promoting peace and security in remote areas is made possible in large part by the Philippine Army’s strategic deployment of remote patrols.

Through the integration of surveillance, deterrence, quick response, community involvement, infrastructure advancement, and assistance for civil authorities, these patrols significantly contribute to the protection of communities, avoidance of conflicts, and promotion of enduring peace in areas affected by conflicts.

PA 5: *“Kapag bumibisita kami sa mga liblib na lugar nalalaman namin na may mga NPA.”* (Whenever we visit secluded places, we notice that there are NPA.)

PA 7: *“Kapag hindi maganda ang approach/trato nila kapag dumadating kami sa barangay nila pag nagroronda.”* (If they approach or treat us unpleasantly when we arrive at their barangay whenever we are conducting patrol or military operations.)

In connection with the statement given by the Philippine Army personnel, it explains that through their experiences in armed conflict, military operations are needed actions that require a combination of strategic planning, operational service, and operational teamwork to achieve specific military goals, whether in conflicts, security operations, or responding to disasters. It is supported by the statement of PA 5 and 7.

The feeling of fear. Fear among Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict can be defined as a psychological and emotional response to inherent dangers challenges and threats inherent in combat situations.

The primary reason for fear among Philippine Army personnel is the constant threat of injury or death in armed conflicts. The high-risk nature of military operations exposes soldiers to life-threatening situations such as armed combat encounters and attacks, which leads to significant fear and anxiety about their safety and well-being.

PA 1: *“natatakot pero dapat laging matatag.”* (Afraid but we always need to be firm.)

PA 2: *“syempre, ang gyera, ang pakikipaglaban sa NPA andyan ang takot.”* (Of course in war, fighting

with NPA we feel fear.)

PA 4: “*nakakatakot at kaba.*” (Fright and tense.)

PA 5: “*natakot ako ng sobra tapos natataranta dahil sa encounter.*” (I’m afraid and rattled at the same time because of the encounter.)

PA 9: “*kinakabahan ako noon at Natatakot sa mga susunod mangyayari.*” (I’m nervous and afraid that time on what might happened then.)

PA 10: “*nakakakaba tapos nakakatakot kasi hindi mo alam Kung anong mangyayari sa sagupaan.*” (Nervous and scared because you don’t know what will happen during encounter.)

Philippine Army personnel have stated that fear among them was experienced through threats to their safety. Their Comrades’ safety and mission success also contribute. This also includes enemy presence and dangerous surroundings. Unpredictable combat situations further contribute to this fear. This is supported by statements from PA 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, and 10.

Emotional Anxiety. Emotional anxiety among Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict significantly impacts their mental health, performance, decision-making abilities, and overall resilience.

The Philippine Army’s mental health, resilience, and operational effectiveness are significantly impacted by addressing emotional anxiety during armed conflict. The unpredictable and volatile nature of armed conflicts creates a sense of uncertainty and stress among Philippine Army personnel. Constantly facing unknown threats, navigating challenging environments, and making split-second decisions heighten fear levels, impacting soldiers’ mental resilience and emotional stability. The pressure to perform effectively in high-stakes situations, uphold mission objectives, and trust in fellow team members can create fear of failure or betrayal among Philippine Army personnel. The fear of letting down colleagues, superiors, or the mission can be a significant source of stress and anxiety for military personnel.

PA 2: “*normal lang na malungkot ka kasi nakakalungkot na namamatay ang ating kapwa pilipino dahil sa labanan.*” (It is normal to feel sad because in armed conflict, our fellow Filipinos are died.)

In accordance with the Philippine Army personnel experience, emotional anxiety was encountered during armed conflict due to intense combat situations, resulting in fear, worry, stress, and psychological strain due to constant exposure to danger and trauma. The result of the study was based on the statement given by PA 2.

Pain, pressure, worry, fear, threat, and violence that any individual experiences due to existing destructive events such as armed conflict operations and natural disasters may lead to psychological problems such as stress and anxiety. It also existed during the times of facing challenges or problems in life, such as the deaths of loved ones, financial problems, or personal problems (Kapur, 2024). This was used in the study to determine how armed conflict impacts human beings and why such problems exist.

The “Cognitive Appraisal Theory” of Richard Lazarus explained the emotional anxiety experienced by the Philippine Army during armed conflicts. According to this theory, emotions such as anxiety are caused by the individual’s own subjective evaluation or appraisal of a situation. The Philippine Army Personnel who actively participates armed conflict may experience emotional anxiety as a result of the perceived threat, uncertainty, and stress of conflicts they encounter. This theory also explains that the soldier’s way of viewing and assessing the challenges they face during armed conflict influence their emotional responses and this includes anxiety. This theory proposes that people’s thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions all have an impact on how they feel emotionally. Studying how the Philippine Army soldiers analyze and interpret the

stressors and challenges of armed conflict may provide insights into the factors that contribute to their emotional anxiety, as well as providing different strategies for coping, psychological resilience, and mental well-being in situations that are stressful.

Feeling Inspired. The term “inspired” describes the Philippine Army Personnel serving in armed conflict. It refers to their spirit of purpose, determination, and motivation that pushes them to carry out their tasks with courage, commitment, and dedication. During this time, they demonstrate a strong dedication to serving the nation, protecting civilians, and ensuring peace and security.

The feeling of inspired encountered by Philippine Army personnel during armed combat operations is a testament to their unwavering commitment, courage, and sacrifice in service to their country. Through shared values, camaraderie, leadership, and resilience, soldiers find sources of inspiration that sustain their morale, foster unity, and drive them to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and dedication in the most challenging environments.

PA 6: “*Kapag nagkakaroon ng encounter iniisip ko nalang yung mga inspiration ko kaya habang tumatagal yun mas lalo tumitibay yung loob ko.*” (If an encounter happens i always think of my inspirations and because of that, the longer the encounter lasts the stronger become.)

According to them, being inspired during armed conflict means embodying motivation, courage, leadership, commitment, and a strong sense of purpose to carry out their military duties with honor, dedication, and excellence. The hardships and challenges they encounter to fulfill their duty are just steps they take to attain their mission to protect the nation and support fellow soldiers as seen in the statement of PA 6.

Heroic Feeling. In the context of the Philippine Army, a heroic feeling during an armed conflict is a feeling of courage, selflessness, and commitment to duty that inspires soldiers to act strong and compassionately in the face of danger and hardship. The heroic feeling among Philippine Army personnel often emerges from their unwavering commitment to safeguarding the lives and well-being of their fellow soldiers, comrades-in-arms, and civilian populations. Acts of valor, selflessness, and protection in combat scenarios underscore the soldiers’ dedication to ensuring the safety and security of those under their care.

PA 2: “*habang tumatagal mas lalong nabubuhayan ng loob mas lalong tumatayang kasi ang pinoprotektahan mo ay ang mga tao.*” (The longer the encounter gets, the more courageous I feel because I know that my actions protect the citizens.)

Feeling of being a hero in an armed conflict means, for Philippine Army personnel, fulfilling up to the principles of bravery, nationality, and heroism. Based from the statement given by the Philippine Army Personnel, the heroic feeling they felt during armed conflict involves a strong sense of responsibility to defend and serve the nation, a readiness to risk everything for the benefit of others, and an unwavering commitment to continue the values of honor and integrity. This was stated in the following statement given by Philippine Army 2.

Filipino soldiers who fight in armed conflicts exhibit psychological aspects of heroism in their attitudes, convictions, and combat behaviors. The manner in which soldiers’ bravery and selflessness in the face of danger and tragedies (Tuason, 1998). Heroism by the Philippine Army personnel was recognized in their strong courage and dedication in combat operations where they faced anything, including their fear; they sacrificed their lives in protecting their colleagues; and they defended the nation to accomplish their missions. They also exhibit selflessness in their work, which is shown by prioritizing the well-being of other people and the welfare of the country above their own interests. These kinds of soldiers serve as role models in defending freedom, peace, and security.

Difficulty in first encounter. During armed conflict, the Philippine Army personnel described “hard” as impressively strong untouchable and inescapable.

Difficulty in first encounter. Discussion-Inexperienced soldiers may face difficulties in applying their training to real-world combat situations. The gap between training exercises and the complexities of actual combat can pose challenges for soldiers during their first engagement, requiring them to adapt quickly and apply their skills effectively under pressure.

PA 7. “*mahirap lalo na yung first time ko maka encounter ng salung pero nakikinig lang din ako sa sasabihin ng superiors.*” (Its Hard, especially during my first time in encounter but I just listened to my superiors.)

PA 8: “*mahirap, mental pressure, mix emotions.*” (Hard, mental pressure, and mix emotions.)

As stated by the Philippine Army Personnel, it poses an implication of strength, resilience, perseverance, and unwavering dedication evident in their lives of the challenges, dangers, and difficulties of combats. It encompasses the bravery, certainly and decency that is shown by the members of Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict by which they comply with their mission of helping their country. This has been reflected in the aforementioned statements.

Sense of grief. A colleague’s death pertains to the tragic loss of a fellow soldier or comrade-in-arms in the line of duty. It represents the ultimate sacrifice made by a member of the Philippine Army while serving the nation in combat operations.

One of the most significant sources of grief for Philippine Army personnel is the loss of fellow soldiers in combat. The bond formed among military members is strong, and the death of comrades can evoke deep feelings of sorrow, loss, and mourning. Coping with the loss of friends and teammates can be emotionally challenging and trigger a sense of grief that extends beyond the battlefield. The Philippine Army personnel often witness traumatic events, such as injuries, casualties, and violence, during armed combat operations. These distressing experiences can lead to feelings of helplessness, sadness, and emotional pain, contributing to a sense of grief that lingers long after the immediate event.

PA 2. “*yung makita mo na may namatay or nasugatan kang kasamahan.*” (When you see that your colleague is died or injured.)

PA 3: “*noong na ambush kami sa may boundary ng mabbayad at benguet. Tinambangan kami noon at ako lang Yung nakaligtas, namatay yung mga kasamahan ko.*” (When we were ambush at the boundary of mabbayad and benguet. I was the only one who survive during the ambush, all of companions died.)

PA 4: “*may namatay na kasamahan.*” (When colleagues died.)

PA 7: “*nung namatayan kami ng kasama.*” (When our colleague died.)

PA 8: “*namatayan ng tropa at ako mismo ang nagbuhat.*” (When one of our troopmates died and I’m the one who carry the body.)

As to the statement made by Philippine Army personnel which was based on their experiences during armed conflict, it stated that it highlights the bravery and commitment of military personnel in defending the country and represents the deep significance, sacrifice, and honor associated with the loss of a fellow soldier in the line of duty of a colleague. This result was based on the given statement of the PA 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8.

Loss of Appetite. The military personnel's mental health can be significantly affected by exposure to traumatic events and combat situations. Consequently, it results in weight loss due to eating habits and appetite being influenced by conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The high-stress environment of armed combat operations can trigger stress and anxiety among Philippine Army personnel, leading to decreased appetite and changes in eating patterns. The constant exposure to danger, uncertainty, and combat situations can disrupt soldiers' normal eating routines as well as the emotional distress, post-traumatic stress, and mental fatigue resulting from combat operations can influence soldiers' appetite regulation and eating behaviors.

PA 3: "*nangayayat Kasi hindi nakakain ng maayos.*" (Weight Loss due to loss of appetite.)

PA 5: "*nangayayat ako nun kasi hindi ako makakain ng maayos isa pa nawawalan din ako ng ganang kumain.*" (I lose weight and can't eat properly i also lose the appetite to eat)

PA 6: "*pumayat ako kasi lagi kong naiisip yung nangyari sa salungatan kaya d ako makatulog at makakain.*" (I lose weight because i always think about the encounter that is why i can't sleep and eat.)

PA 8: "*oo, hindi masyadong makakain kaya pumayat.*" (Yes, I cannot really eat that is why I lose weight.)

Based on statements made by Philippine Army Personnel, anxiety and stress caused by armed conflict can influence eating habits. It can also decrease the appetite to eat. Their stress levels may also be higher than normal. This affects their eating habits. It causes them to lose weight. This was shown in the statement by the PA 3, 5, 6 and 8.

Rodriguez (2017), explains that weight loss can be a result of the psychological and physical impact experienced by Philippine Army personnel during armed conflict. It includes trauma, fear, stress, and anxiety that happen in military occurrences, where people may experience changes in their eating habits, metabolism, or overall well-being that can result in weight loss. This study is essential to determine the needed treatment or actions that must be applied to the affected personnel during or after the confrontations.

Psychological Trauma. During armed conflicts, Philippine Army personnel experience psychological trauma as a result of exposure to stressful events that can lead to long-term effects such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. This trauma can result from combat exposure, witnessing traumatic events, losing comrades, or encountering life-threatening situations.

Witnessing or experiencing traumatic events, such as casualties, violence, and destruction, can instill deep-rooted fear in military personnel. These traumatic experiences can have long-lasting psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), contributing to ongoing fear and emotional distress. Symptoms of hyper arousal, including hyper vigilance, irritability, and exaggerated startle response, are prevalent among military personnel with PTSD. The persistent state of alertness and reactivity can interfere with daily functioning, sleep patterns, and overall quality of life.

PA 3: "*oo, pag natutulog ako bumabalik sa panaginip ko Yung encounter.*"

(Yes, when I go to sleep everything that I had encountered during the armed conflict returns.)

PA 5: "*yung nakikita mo na nasusugatan yung mga kasamahan mo.*" (When you see your comrades getting injured.)

PA 6: "*yung makita mo na nahihirapan dahil nasugatan yung kasamahan mo.*" (When you experience to

see your colleague injured.)

PA 8: “*yes, 2 to 3 weeks na iba-iba ang iniisip ko, nakakaramdam ako ng anxiety at hindi makatulog.*” (Yes, 2-3 weeks I kept thinking about different things, I feel anxious and I can’t sleep.)

PA 9: “*nasugatan sa salungatan.*” (Getting injured during armed conflicts.)

PA 10: “*yung masugatan ng malubha habang nag babarilan.*” (Getting severely injured during the battle.)

As to the statement of the Philippine Army Personnel, they stated that armed conflicts affect their mental health. Their experience encompasses psychological trauma such as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) a mental health condition that is caused by experiencing or witnessing traumatic events. PTSD symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the traumatic event. These findings were supported by the statement of PA 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10.

Coping Mechanism of Philippine Army Personnel during armed conflict

Unwavering Commitment. Unwavering Commitment refers to the dedication of the Philippine Army Personnel to the task they have at hand.

The unwavering commitment to achieving mission success drives Philippine Army personnel to persevere in the face of challenges and setbacks. By maintaining a steadfast focus on operational objectives, soldiers can align their efforts, coordinate actions, and work towards achieving strategic goals, even in the most demanding and dangerous situations.

PA 1: “*Syempre maging matatag lang, inisip na pinasok Yung trabaho ko at ipagpatuloy ang serbisyo.*” (“Of course, be firm. Thinking that I choose this job and continue service”).

PA 2: “*Buong loob at Buong tapang na hinarap at haharapin upang maipagpatuloy ang ating campaign upang matapos na ang salungatan sa NPA at Philippine Army.*” (“I whole hearted and bravely face and will face to continue our campaign to end the armed conflict between NPA and Phillipine Army”).

Their passion to their worked aids their determination and will power urge them to continue. The unwavering commitment and strong sense of duty plays an important role in dealing with their experiences on armed conflict. As stated by PA 1 and 2 must be firm with their actions and to continue giving service despite the given circumstances.

Hu (2023), discussed the importance of the dedication of the Philippine Army in their work, where it results in higher values and motivation that will lead them to learn from their profession and their environment. The study mentioned above highlights that the soldiers should dedicate their work so that they can be more effective and progressive members of the Philippine Army. Even in times of challenges and danger, such as armed conflict operations that were encountered by Philippine Army personnel, their dedication will inspire their colleagues to set aside their own interests and to work accordingly to their common objectives.

Positive Thinking. The Philippine army personnel embraces positive thinking by always looking at the brighter side of life, having faith in their training and ability, and always staying motivated even when there are challenges during times of war. This allows them to remain attentive to their targets, choose well and keep a sense of concentration and determination in order for them to meet the goals set before them. The Philippine Army can enhance soldiers’ mental toughness, boost self-confidence among soldiers, and foster oneness and cohesion among its members through fostering positive thinking.

Positive thinking cultivates resilience among Philippine Army personnel, enabling them to bounce back

from setbacks, adapt to adversity, and overcome obstacles in armed conflict situations. By maintaining a positive outlook, soldiers can better navigate stress, uncertainty, and trauma, enhancing their ability to cope with the demands of military operations.

PA 4: *“Isaisip mo na maging matatag”*. (“Keep being steadfast”).

PA 5: *“Dapat maging matatag Yung ang palagi Kong inisip”*. (“I always think to be firm”).

According to the Philippine Army Personnel’s given statement, positive thinking can enable soldiers in increasing their performance levels, adjustability as well as improve mental health and physical health that would lead into higher performance during unexpected difficulties during conflict situations. The supporting statements were presented above.

Faith and Spiritual Guidance. Faith provides people with hope and purpose in life by inspiring them to believe that anything is possible and that they can accomplish their objectives. Without faith, people wouldn’t even make an effort to fulfill their goals and fulfill their aspirations. Meanwhile, spiritual guidance helps individuals grow by helping them recognize God’s presence and reflect on the path of their life.

The utilization of faith and spiritual guidance empowers Philippine Army personnel to cope effectively with the rigors of armed conflict by providing emotional support, moral guidance, resilience, unity, coping strategies, and opportunities for healing and growth. By integrating faith-based practices and spiritual beliefs into their coping mechanisms, soldiers can draw strength, comfort, and inspiration from their spiritual foundations, fostering their well-being, moral resilience, and effectiveness in navigating the challenges of combat operations.

PA 3: *“Spiritual guidance, binigyan Ako Ng bibliya ng miss ko at binabasa ko Yun araw-araw. Sumasali na rin Ako sa mga Gawain sa simbahan mas naging aktibo ako sa simbahan namin. Pakiramdam ko mas napalapit Ako sa Diyos”*. (“My wife gave me a Bible to which I read every day. I also become active in church. That actions made me feel closer to God”).

PA 4: *“Magtiwala sa Panginoon at it as mo sa kanya”*. (“Trust God and lift them all to him”).

PA 5: *“Gawin mo lang yung trabaho mo at always pray”*. (“Just do your job and always pray”).

PA 6: *“Makinig lagi sa senior officers and during encounter maging alerto at laging magdasal”*. (“Always listen to your senior officers and be alert and pray during encounters”).

PA 7: *“Dasal at tiwala sa Kasama*. (Prayer and trust to your colleagues)

PA 8: *“Hinarap ng Buong tapping, nagdarasal at the presence of mind.”* (“I bravely face them coupled with prayer and presence of mind”)

PA10: *“Dasal lang palagi tapos huwag mawawalan Ng faith”*. (“Always pray and don’t lose faith”).

PA 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 stated that faith and spiritual guidance play a huge part in coping with their experiences from armed conflict. It showed that faith is one of the things that keeps them willed during the process of recovering as shown in their statements.

Be tough. Being firm means standing on your ground and accepting the fact that the line of work they choose is dangerous and life-threatening. This was seen in military personnel’s resilience, strength, and

determination in the face of difficult and dangerous situations encountered during armed conflict. This involves being careful with every action they take because one wrong move may lead to death and injury.

Being tough fosters adaptability and flexibility among Philippine Army personnel, allowing soldiers to adjust to changing circumstances, unexpected challenges, and dynamic threats in combat environments. Tough soldiers can quickly adapt to new situations, improvise solutions, and overcome obstacles with resourcefulness and agility. The toughness of the soldiers instills courage and boldness, empowering them to face danger, take calculated risks, and engage in decisive actions during armed conflict

PA 1: *“Maging matatag at tranggapin ang nangyari huwag damdamin”*. (“Be firm and accept what happened and don’t be bothered about it.”)

PA 4: *“Pagiging Matatag”*. (“Be firm”)

As stated by P1 and 4 being firm and accepting fate and circumstances may help their colleague in overcoming their challenges about armed conflict.

Promote safety in military operations. Being self-aware and well-informed is a great advantage for a soldier, especially in battle. Gaining new knowledge and accepting new perceptions will lead to a broader understanding of a subject matter.

Promoting safety in military operations through the spread of awareness and safety initiatives is a critical aspect of ensuring the well-being, effectiveness, and preparedness of soldiers in the Philippine Army. It also helps them to be vigilant and aware of their surroundings which leads them to be an active and effective soldier during their service, especially in different locations where they are tasked with duty.

PA 8: *“Mas lalong paigtingin ang awareness on safety, proposition, kabisaduhin ang mga area na may armed conflict, mapagmasid, self-discipline, makisama, makisalamuha sa mga taong nakapaligid sa kanya”* . (Tighten the awareness on safety and proposition, memorize the areas where armed conflict mostly happens, be vigilant, self-disciplined, socialize and get along with other people that surrounds him.)

PA 8 stated that they should be stricter when it comes to their awareness and knowledge within the area they are engaging with and they should also be able to get along well with others.

Participant’s Suggestions and Recommendations to reduce the Impact caused by Armed Conflict

Promote Programs and Awareness. Promoting programs and awareness is a way to distribute information to the masses and the public. Government programs are crafted for the betterment of the nation or country. Introducing programs helps eliminate factors that may lead people to join the NPA.

Providing programs for the people from the government can help address the root causes that make individuals vulnerable to recruitment by such groups It also discusses the importance of community engagement and education to prevent radicalization as well as the role of government in providing support and opportunities for the people.

PA 2: *“Magsagawa Ng patrol sa Barangay or sa kanayunan, paliwanagan ang mga mamamayan sa NPA at tuloy tuloy na magbigay ng programa sa mga tao galing sa gobyerno”*. (“Conduct patrol in Barangay or sitios explaining to the people not to fall for the tactics of the NPA and to provide programs for the people from the government”).

PA 4: *“makisalamuha sa Barangay upang making aware”*. (“Socialize in the Barangay to be informed”).

PA 6: “*Magsagawa ng info drives sa schools at liblib na Lugar*”. (“Conduct info drives on schools and hard to reach areas”.)

PA 8: “*Ipagpatuloy Yung pagsasagawa ng Information Education Campaign (IEC) regarding deceptive recruitment of Communist Terrorist Group (CTG)*”. (“Continue conducting Information Education Campaign (IEC) regarding deceptive recruitment of Communist Terrorist Group (CTG)”.)

PA 10: “*Support the program of government tungkol sa National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC)*”. (“Support the program of government about National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC)”.)

PA 2 4, 6 8, and 10 stated that armed conflict can be reduced by promoting and supporting programs against the NPA. This includes the program National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF ELCAC). The following statements illustrate this:

The government implemented intervention programs to combat armed conflicts, boost the economy, create jobs, and mostly hinder rebels from recruiting and employing security assurances in society. This intervention program, helps individuals feel safe and secure and no longer fear the danger that communist terrorist groups or the New People’s Army bring (Cawi & Fanao, 2023). This study was used to be aware that the government was implementing an intervention program to avoid the recruiting of the NPA and to have security assurances against any threats brought by communist terrorist groups or any rebels that were looking for individuals to recruit. It is related to the study that was being conducted to gain knowledge about the threats that arise in our society, and it is a tool to build awareness and citizens’ cooperation with Philippine Army personnel to end armed conflict in our nation.

Implement and Support NTF-ELCAC program. Implementing the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) activities is a successful way to urge rebels to surrender. The government must strengthen and support NTF-ELCAC programs to persuade rebels to give up arms and return to normal society. As a result, the government should promote the NTF-ELCAC program for the benefit of everybody. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) has proven to be the most effective strategy for dealing with the decades-long communist insurgency in the country.

Continuing the NTF-ELCAC program, especially in hard-to-reach areas, is essential. These often face unique challenges that may be more susceptible to the influence of the extremist group. It also discusses strategies for reaching these remote communities, such as utilizing mobile outreach teams or community-based initiatives.

PA 1: “*Kailangang magpatupad ng mga program para hikayatin na sumuko yung mga NPA para hindi na sila maka recruit at implement yung NTF ELCAC CSP. Pumunta kaming baranggay tapos pakinggan yung mga hinaing ng mga tao sa barangay at pinaparating namin sa municipality*”. (“It is necessary to implement programs to encourage the NPA to surrender so that they can no longer recruit and implement the NTF ELCAC CSP. We go to the barangay and then listen to the complaints of the people in the barangay and we convey it to the municipality.”)

PA 2: “*Syempre, Ipagpatuloy ang programang NTF ELCAC Lalo na sa liblib na lugar*”. (“Of course, continue the program of NTF ELCAC especially in hard-to-reach places.”)

PA 3: “*Continue lang yung NTF ELCAC kasi kapag hindi yun itinuloy marami ang babalik*”. (“Just continue the NTF ELCAC because if it is not continued many will return”.)

PA 4: “*Pag implement sa NTF ELCAC*”. (“Implementation of NTF ELCAC”.)

PA 5: “*Ipagpatuloy ang tungkulin*”. (Continue the duties.)

PA 6: “*Ipagpatuloy ang NTF ELCAC*”. (Continue the NTF ELCAC.)

PA 8: “*Sa government mas magaling (maganda) dapat alam nilang kilatisin ang mga organisasyon na lumalapit sa kanila. Mas mainam kung sustentohan nila yung programang NTF ELCAC*”. (“In the government, better good they should know the organizations that approach them. It would be better if they support the NTF-ELCAC program”.)

PA 9: “*Patuloy na suportahan ang ating adhikain na mawala ang mga NPA*”. (“Continue to support our aspiration and NPA will be disappear”.)

PA 10: “*Tungkol sa NTF ELCAC*”. (About NTF ELCAC.)

According to the findings of this study, the NTF-ELCAC program is meant for the New People’s Army (NPA). The implementation of this program will help the Philippine Army aid rebels in changing their life. Based on the statement of the Philippine Army, the continuation and implementation of NTF-ELCAC will allow more militants to surrender, while discontinuing the program will cause many of them to return and revolt again. This could be shown in the statements of PA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10.

Government Accountability. Government accountability is achieved through political, legal, and administrative systems that prevent corruption and ensure public officials are accountable and accessible to citizens. Encouraging the government to support the NTF ELCAC program may benefit the citizens.

Promoting a strong system of checks and balances is crucial to hold government officials accountable. This involves independent oversight bodies such as anti-corruption commissions or ombudsman offices to investigate and address cases of misconduct. Strengthening these offices ensures that government officials are held accountable for any actions undermining the public interest.

PA 7: “*May mga nasa government kasi na sinusuportahan ang nasa kabilang grupo sana itigil nalang nila ang pag suporta sa kanila*”. (“There are people in the government who support the other group, I hope they stop supporting them.”)

As stated in the Philippine Army statement, encouraging the government to continue and support the NTF ELCAC program is desirable. According to the participants’ statements, the government should not aid any other organizations. These findings were shown in their statements.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions were drawn based on the answers of the Philippine Army personnel concerning their lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and suggestions to reduce the impact caused by armed conflicts.

Following the result of the study, the Philippine Army personnel must be tough and steadfast. A soldier’s life is difficult it is mostly composed of battlefield encounters, fear, emotional anxiety, death injury difficulty during the first encounter, a sense of grief, loss of appetite, and psychological trauma. They overcome these hardships through their unwavering commitment, positive thinking, toughness, faith, and

spiritual guidance, and promoting safety during military operations. Meanwhile, through promoting programs and programs that may hinder the extremists from recruiting people, implementing and supporting NTF-ELCAC, and government accountability, the government and its people can help overcome this problem.

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