Sa Piling ng mga Yumao: Lived Experiences of Individuals Residing in Cemeteries in Rural Areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200149

Received: 06 February 2026; Accepted: 11 February 2026; Published: 27 February 2026

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of individuals residing in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. Using in-depth interviews with carefully selected participants, the study seeks to understand the complex interplay of socioeconomic challenges, psychological well-being, coping mechanisms, and sources of support that shape their daily lives. Findings indicate that cemetery dwellers confront persistent poverty, insecure and unstable livelihoods, and widespread social stigma, yet they display remarkable resilience, adaptability, and resourcefulness in navigating these hardships. Participants highlighted the central role of faith, prayer, and "diskarte" (practical resourcefulness) as primary coping strategies, often reinforced by strong family bonds and a tightly knit sense of community solidarity. Despite the limited, inconsistent, and often inadequate aid from government and non-government organizations, participants reported that their sense of belonging, mutual support, and shared experiences within the cemetery community fostered emotional strength, perseverance, and acceptance of difficult circumstances. The study further revealed that enduring social marginalization and economic vulnerability shaped participants' perceptions of hope, selfefficacy, and personal growth, underscoring the dynamic ways they adapt to adversity. Themes of endurance, faith, resilience, and social connectedness emerged consistently, highlighting the delicate balance between struggle and optimism in their everyday lives. Overall, the study emphasizes the urgent need for sustained institutional support, community-based interventions, and inclusive social policies that recognize and uphold the dignity, resilience, and human potential of marginalized populations living in unconventional and often overlooked residential spaces.

Keywords: cemetery dwellers, resilience, socioeconomic challenges, coping strategies, community support

INTRODUCTION

While most people have a home to return to each night, some find shelter in a place where the living and the departed coexist—where gravestones stand as silent witnesses, and where a final resting place also becomes a place to live.

Cemeteries have traditionally been regarded as places of mourning and respect for the deceased. But for some, such burial grounds have become more than just an eternal resting place—they serve as homes. Poverty, housing crises, and forced evictions have driven many families to seek shelter in graveyards, rendering it a widespread but largely unreported phenomenon (Algura, 2019). In the Philippines, poor communities have taken over cemeteries as temporary residences in the face of economic poverty and lack of affordable housing. The status of such residents goes beyond economic uncertainty since they are also exposed to health hazards, social stigmatization, and ambiguity in the eyes of the law (Amnesty International, 2023). According to Descalsota

(2023), in the Philippines, several thousand people live in graveyards. In addition to that, thousands of people live in graveyards in Cebu. These people have turned graveyards into informal settlements, wherein they live without title or without the consent of the owners.

While literature has described the existence of cemetery residents in urban metropolitan cities such as Manila and Cebu City little information exists about those who live in rural cemeteries (Casas et al., 2024). In

comparison with the urban setting, where there is greater access to resources and services, rural cemetery settlers may encounter specific issues affected by their spatial and social context (Fahmi & Sutton, 2014). Limited research has been conducted on rural cemetery residents (Dizon & Donguiz, 2023). Past research has centered on slums of big cities where homelessness is more visible (Revista de Estudios Sociales, 2018). Rural graveyard dwellers may suffer other forms of marginalization because they do not have easy access to social services, employment, and government programs (Leng, 2014) A failure to study these populations results in policies that are largely urban-driven, which might miss the unique issues of the residents of neighborhoods that are not as densely occupied (Fahmi & Sutton, 2014).

Although previous studies have documented the existence of individuals and families living in cemeteries, most of this research has focused on urban areas such as Manila and Cebu City, where the phenomenon is more visible and data are more accessible (Casas et al., 2024; Revista de Estudios Sociales, 2018). These urban-focused studies tend to emphasize economic deprivation, housing insecurity, and the broader issue of slum settlements, often overlooking the specific conditions and experiences of those living in rural cemetery settings (Fahmi & Sutton, 2014; Dizon & Donguiz, 2023).

Furthermore, current literature often frames cemetery dwellers primarily through the lens of poverty or informal housing, without fully exploring the multidimensional challenges they face. Notably lacking is a deeper understanding of their psychological well-being, social relationships, and coping mechanisms in the face of social stigma, instability, and legal ambiguity (Brandt et al., 2020; Leng, 2014). As a result, interventions and policies that emerge from this urban-centric and issue-specific focus may fail to address the unique realities of rural cemetery residents.

Building on the following concerns, this study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of individuals residing in cemeteries in Rural Areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. Specifically, the researchers aimed to investigate (1) socioeconomic challenges, (2) psychological well-being (3) coping mechanisms, and (4) social support of cemetery dwellers.

Through this study, deeper insights from the realities and experiences of people living in cemeteries were built. This shed light on the lived experiences of this marginalized group who are often overlooked. By examining the day-to-day challenges faced by cemetery dwellers, this research provided valuable information regarding the social, economic, and psychological issues they encounter. Understanding these realities helped inform policies and intervention programs that suit their particular requirements, especially when it comes to housing, public health, and social welfare. Additionally, the study adds to the general discussion on poverty and informal settlements by highlighting the interconnected nature of these issues. Also, this research serves as a foundation for future studies, calling for an even holistic resolution of situations of vulnerable populations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of individuals residing in cemeteries in rural Southern Cebu, Philippines. This approach allowed the researchers to capture participants' subjective meanings, emotions, and coping strategies in the context of socioeconomic challenges and social support (Neubauer et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect rich, detailed data while allowing flexibility to probe deeper into participants' narratives.

Participants

Eighteen adults, aged 25 and above, who had lived in cemeteries for at least five years, were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. This approach ensured inclusion of individuals with extensive lived experiences while reaching participants who were otherwise hard to access. Three participants were selected from each municipality: Sibonga, Argao, Dalaguete, Alcoy, Boljoon, and Oslob.

Setting

Data collection occurred at the cemeteries where participants resided. Interviews were conducted in settings chosen collaboratively with participants to ensure comfort, privacy, and confidentiality.

Instruments

Data were collected using:

- Informed consent forms outlining study purpose, procedures, confidentiality, and participants' rights.
- Semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions covering socioeconomic challenges, coping mechanisms, psychological well-being, and social support.
- Audio recorders to ensure accurate documentation of responses.

Procedure and Data Collection

Participants provided informed consent before participating in in-depth interviews. Each interview was audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. Methodological triangulation was applied by interviewing two individuals familiar with the participants' daily lives to enhance data richness and validity.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) following a seven-step process: (1) reading and re-reading transcripts, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across themes, (5) analyzing subsequent cases with bracketing, (6) identifying patterns across cases, and (7) deeper interpretative analysis integrating literature and theoretical frameworks (Charlick et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and sensitivity to participants' emotional well-being. Anonymity was maintained, and participants could withdraw at any time. Referrals to local support services were provided if distress arose.

Reflexivity

Researchers engaged in self-reflection to minimize bias, remain aware of their influence on data collection and analysis, and foster transparency. Sensitivity to participants' emotional experiences was maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS

This section discusses the themes and subthemes that surfaced from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of individuals residing in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. By closely examining their stories, the researchers gained insight into how the participants experienced and interpreted their socioeconomic challenges, how they perceive their psychological well-being, how they develop and apply their coping mechanisms to adapt to their living conditions, and how they experienced and perceived the support they had received. This synthesis transforms the participants' narratives into structured and meaningful findings, offering a clearer view of the complex realities of individuals living in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. This provides insight into how they make sense of their daily experiences, sustain their well-being amid socioeconomic and emotional challenges, and adapt to the demands of their living environment.

Table 1. Socioeconomic Challenges

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Unstable or Low-Paying Jobs	Irregular Informal Work Fishing as a Limited Income Source Small-Scale Vending or Services

	Shared Income Efforts Within the Family
Major Challenges of Living in the Cemetery	Exposure to Natural Disasters Health Difficulties Daily Financial Strain
Food and Basic Needs	Inconsistent Meals Maximizing Limited Resources Dependence on Occasional Assistance
Access to Healthcare and Services	Delayed Medical Care Reliance on Pensions and Family Support Reliance on Barangay or Free Service
Stigma and Social Perception	Curiosity and Misconceptions Discrimination and Judgements Pity and Token Recognition Absence of Discrimination
Safety and Security	Environmental Hazards Potential Crime or Threats Familiarity Reduces Fear General Perception of Safety
Living Conditions	Improvised Housing Poor Sanitation and Utilities Vulnerability to Weather Conditions

Table 1 presents the socioeconomic challenges of individuals residing in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. The table organizes the participants lived experiences into seven themes which are Unstable or Low-Paying Job, Major Challenges of Cemetery Living, Food and Basic Needs, Access to Healthcare and Services, Stigma and Social Perception, Safety and Security, and Living Conditions. Each theme is further divided into subthemes that capture specific aspects of daily life, survival strategies, and the challenges participants face in sustaining their livelihoods and well-being.

The first theme, Unstable or Low-Paying Job, demonstrates the participants' experiences which show that their lives are shaped by unstable incomes and informal work. They rely on small, irregular, and low-paying jobs, reflecting the ongoing financial struggles often faced by marginalized groups. Living in the cemetery adds to their difficulties, as survival depends more on being resourceful, patient, and cooperative than on having steady jobs. Despite these challenges, they remain resilient, taking on different kinds of informal work and helping one another within their families to get by.

The subtheme, Irregular Informal Work, reveals that participants depend on occasional low-wage work like cleaning tombs, cutting grass, or washing clothes due to a lack of stable employment. This reflects their economic vulnerability and a survival mindset where any available task is vital for daily living.

[…] Maswerte ra gyud kung nay mu-hire nako nga makakwarta ko keda adlaw. Manlimpyo ko usahay unya hatagan ko ug 200 (I'd be lucky if someone hire me… Sometimes I clean here in cemetery and they give me

200.) – Participant A

[…] Mangguna ug garden, palibot sa balay pagunahon, pasilhigon, pasalibohon ug tanom,mao rana akoa ay hatagan man pud ko nila ug tag 200 maka palit nako ug pagkaon. (I clean a garden, cut grasses, sweep the roads, water plants. Sometimes they give me 200 which I use to buy food) – Participant P

The subtheme, Fishing as a Limited Income Source, highlights fishing as an unstable yet primary income source affected by weather and limited resources. This uncertainty pushes participants to take on secondary jobs, showing both their adaptability and the fragile state of their rural economy.

[…] Manadagat kung di maka panagat tungod sa hangin..naay ginagmay construction. (I'm a fisherman but if the weather is bad for fishing, I do a little construction in the cemetery.) – Participant I

The subtheme, Small-Scale Vending or Services, shows that selling items like candles and cigarettes or offering small services reflects the participants' effort to gain control in an unstable economy. While these activities show creativity and determination, they remain low-income and seasonal, revealing the limited economic opportunities in their community.

[…] Mamaligya ug kandila, manupi, managat. (I sell candles, cut hairs, and fish.) – Participant O

The subtheme, Shared Income Efforts Within the Family, shows that earning a living in the cemetery is a shared task between spouses—men often do physical labor like construction or fishing, while women engage in vending or household work. This reflects family cooperation and resilience, though some still rely on community help due to ongoing financial hardship.

[…] Sweldo namong duha sa ako bana, tagsa mi. Manlimpyo, manilhig tibuok sementeryo (Me and my husband's salary sustain us. We clean and sweep the entire cemetery) – Participant C

The second theme, Major Challenges of Living in the Cemetery, demonstrates the participants' stories which show a life of constant hardship caused by natural disasters, poor health, and lasting poverty. Living in the cemetery makes them more vulnerable, as they face unsafe conditions, limited access to healthcare, and unstable income. Yet, their experiences also reveal endurance and acceptance, showing both the difficulties and quiet strength of surviving in a marginalized environment.

The subtheme, Exposure to Natural Disasters, shows that natural disasters like Typhoons Odette and Pablo caused severe damage to homes and forced families to seek temporary shelter in mausoleums or evacuation centers. Living near the coast in fragile houses makes them more vulnerable, and they often rely on donations and improvised materials to recover, highlighting how environmental risks deepen their marginalization.

[…] Diri kay katong odette kay halos guba man tanan to ang balay. Diri ra mi sa menteryo, daghang building ari sa menteryo. Mga concrete diha, diha ra mi. (During typhoon Odette… everything was destroyed. We stayed in mausoleums.) – Participant D

The subtheme, Health Difficulties, demonstrates that illness, especially among children, is a major source of stress and financial strain for participants, who face difficulty accessing medical care and the loss of loved ones. Poor living conditions, unstable income, and limited sanitation worsen health problems, forcing families to rely on endurance and prayer rather than proper medical treatment.

[…] Kanang magkasakit niya walay trabaho basta mag ulan. (Getting sick and lack of job during rainy seasons.)

– Participant L

The subtheme, Daily Financial Strain, describes poverty as the most pressing challenge for cemetery residents, with participants struggling to meet basic needs like food and shelter. Chronic deprivation shapes their lives and mindset, leaving them dependent on unstable jobs and external aid to survive.

[…] Usahay naa, usahay wala. (Having nothing. Sometimes we have, sometimes we don't have) – Participants H

The third theme, Food and Basic Needs, shows the daily struggles of the participants to secure food and other basic needs amid poverty and unstable work. Their survival depends on irregular jobs, fishing affected by the weather, and shared family income, creating a fragile balance between getting by and going hungry. Still, they remain resilient and resourceful, managing limited funds, finding different ways to earn, and relying on family support to endure life in hardship.

The subtheme, Inconsistent Meals, shows that participants often have irregular meals, sometimes eating only once a day or just rice with salt. This reveals the severity of poverty and constant hunger, showing how food insecurity is a daily reality in the cemetery.

[…] Usahay di magka parehas, kanang naa bitaw usahay naa, usahay wala gyud, usahay mag sula nalang ug asin ug wala nami maka on. (Sometimes it's never constant. Sometimes we can afford, sometimes we cannot. Sometimes we have nothing and we only eat rice with salt if we have nothing else to eat.) – Participant K

The subtheme, Maximizing Limited Resources, shows that despite limited resources, participants carefully budget and divide their small income to cover basic needs. Their ability to manage scarce earnings shows resilience and adaptability in maintaining even minimal stability amid ongoing poverty.

[…] Ibudget amo kwarta nga masakto namo, pangunsumo, budget gikan pangisda. (I budget our money for our needs. The budget came from selling fish.) – Participant J

The subtheme, Dependence on Occasional Assistance, shows that some sruvival relies on donations from community or extended family.

[...] Niya naa pud maghatag-hatag namo diri og ginagmay, nay bugas, naay mga sud-an, pero wa pud mi kaila kung kinsa nang maghatag-hatag namo. (There are also people who gives us donations like rice, viands, but we don't know who they are.) – Participant Q

The fourth theme, Access to Healthcare and Services, describes the participants' experiences which shows that access to healthcare and social services is limited and uneven for those living in the cemetery. While some receive minor help from health centers or government programs, many are excluded because of poverty, distance, and complicated requirements. Despite these challenges, they remain resilient, drawing strength from faith, education, and family support to cope with difficult living conditions.

The subtheme, Medical Care Delayed by Cost, shows that participants experience uncertain access to healthcare, which depends on income and available doctors. While some receive free medicine, many must pay due to service gaps, showing how poverty worsens their health vulnerability.

[…] Kanang magkasakit akong anak niya maninghanglan mi ug serbisyo sa health center namo diri. Usahay muingon sila nga walay doctor niya ipasa mi sa laing lugar, maninghanglan na ka ug kwarta na imong i-kuan..kay para gasto. Imbis naay libre, maka gasto na lang ka. (Sometimes when my kid gets sick and we need the service of the healthcare here, they say that the doctor is not available then they'll pass us to different place… Instead of free healthcare, we'd have no choice but to spend.) – Participant L

The subtheme, Reliance on Pensions and Family Support, shows that without steady government support, some participants depend on small pensions or help from relatives. These provide short-term relief but are not enough for daily needs, showing how fragile family-based support systems are in place of formal assistance.

[…] Karon lang, ako bana kay senior cetizen, naa na madawat. Unya ako wala pa. Member na ko sa senior pero wala pa ko napensyonan (My husband is a member of senior citizen, he is also receiving pension but me, I recently become a member but I haven't received my pension.) – Participant C

The subtheme, Reliance on Barangay or Free Service, shows that faith, community, or government programs provide intermittent support.

[…] Kalouy sa Ginoo, wala raman nangasakit, talagsa raman. Unya akong anak naka eskwela ra, naa pud to siyay scholarship (In God's mercy, so far, we haven't experienced sickness. We only experience it sometimes. My child was also able to study and has already graduated. She was also a scholar.) – Participant F

The fifth theme, Stigma and Social Perception, demonstrated the participants' experiences which showed different social views toward those living in cemeteries, ranging from pity and curiosity to judgment or indifference. Some feel subtle stigma, while others experience acceptance or neutrality. These mixed reactions show how they navigate between being included and being marginalized, using humor, gratitude, and emotional strength to cope with how society sees them.

The subtheme, Curiosity and Misconceptions, shows that participants often faced curiosity from outsiders who found cemetery life strange or frightening, asking about ghosts or safety. They responded with humor and practicality, saying "living people are scarier," which helped challenge misconceptions and show that life in the cemetery feels normal and peaceful to them.

[…] Mo ana ra sila nga ngano man sa menteryo oi! Murag matingala ra sila. Mo inggon sila nga nganong mo puyo man ka dira, ana ko ngano man diay, unsa may naa diri mi namoyo, total kana sila di ranama manghilabot, di pata mahadlok, mas mahadlok pata ug mga dautan, kaysa sa mga ingon ana, mas mahadlok pako ug mga buhi na tawo, kana sila nangatulog naman, nag bantay mana sila kanamo. (They say about why we live here in the cemetery. Some even wonder. Sometimes they say that it's scary to live here but I just brush it off because living people are scarier than them. They're just sleeping and guards us.) – Participant K

The subtheme, Discrimination and Judgement, shows that some participants felt judged or looked down on by people who saw cemetery living as improper or linked to poverty. These experiences show how place and class create stigma, yet their acceptance of being "used to it" reflects emotional resilience and adaptation.

[…] Naa jud ingon ana, naay ubang tawo na down kaayo ka sa ilaha, kay naa silay nindot na trabaho. (There is sometimes. There are people who look down on us because they have better jobs.) – Participant H

The subtheme, Pity and Token Recognition, shows that participants felt that others viewed them with pity instead of discrimination, often shown through small acts of help like paid tasks or donations. Though this reflects social inequality, they remain grateful and see pity as a chance to earn rather than something to be ashamed of.

[…] Kanang maluoy ra pud sila na nganong naa mi diri. Kanang naay "dong, ilimpyo ko ari" pasalamat ra pud tawn nga naa sila kay manghatag man pud. (Sometimes they pity us because we're here… Some would ask us to clean. I'd be thankful because they pay me.) – Participant A

The subtheme, Absence of Discrimination, shows that several participants said they had not experienced discrimination, possibly due to limited contact with the wider community or focusing on positive interactions. This sense of acceptance may serve as a coping mechanism that helps them maintain self-worth and emotional stability.

[…] Wala ra (I never experienced any discrimination.) – Participants B

The sixth theme, Safety and Security, shows that participants generally viewed the cemetery as a safe place to live because they were familiar with the area and faced few major threats. However, their safety is sometimes challenged by theft, environmental dangers, and isolation, showing that it depends on how they adapt and interact with their surroundings.

The subtheme, Environmental Hazards, shows that some participants linked safety concerns to flooding and storms rather than crime, while others felt unsafe when alone, especially women and caregivers. This shows that safety depends on both physical conditions and emotions, reflecting the fragile sense of security in marginalized settings.

[…] Dili gyud, di gyud nako feel didto mo puyo, kay tungod sa panahon, mudako baya nang tubig dira. Duol siya sa katalagman kay coastal area ba, ug mu taub siya, musaka gyud sa balay, kinadak an taob maabot gyud sa

akong balay (No, I don't feel safe… that place is susceptible to calamities because it's in the coastal area… if the tide is high, the water would reach the house.) – Participant F

The subtheme, Potential Crime or Threats, shows that few participants reported theft or break-ins, showing that safety is not absolute. However, they see these incidents as rare and manageable, viewing them as occasional disruptions rather than constant threats.

[…] Okay ra kaayo pero naa sad siguruy time nga nay musulod diri kay usahay naay panahon nga naay kawatan, kanang mga balas, ing ana. (Safe… but sometimes people enter at night to steal things like sands.)– Participant C

The subtheme, Familiarity Reduces Fear, shows that hearing eerie sounds like dogs howling or distant cries has become normal for participants over time. Their ability to ignore such things shows emotional resilience and how they have adapted to their surroundings.

[…] Sa amo, na anad na. Natural man gyud na. Ang iro muuwang man gyud na. Pero okay ra (We are not scared because we are used to it… dogs howl but it's okay.) – Participant D

The subtheme, General Perception of Safety, shows that most participants saw the cemetery as a safe place, even at night, because of their long stay and close community ties. Their experiences challenge the usual belief that cemeteries are dangerous, showing how familiarity can create a sense of home and security.

[…] Safe ra. Sa gabii sad, okay ra. (It's safe. At night too, it is safe.) – Participant D

The seventh theme, Living Conditions, describes the participants' experiences which show that life in the cemetery involves fragile housing, few resources, and exposure to natural hazards. Despite these hardships, many still feel comfortable and content, showing how they adapt and remain grateful even in difficult conditions.

The subtheme, Improvised Housing, shows that participants reported sleeping in hammocks or makeshift cottages, showing the lack of proper housing in the cemetery. Their situation reflects severe housing insecurity, forcing families to adapt to whatever shelter they can build or find.

[…] Wala man mi ingon na naay mi katulgan na tarong, mag duyan rako kay wa may balay diha. Akong pares ug akong mga bata, naa ra sa payag. (We don't have a proper place to sleep… I sleep on a hammock… my children sleep in the cottage.) – Participant A

The subtheme, Poor Sanitation and Utilities, shows that lack of electricity and basic amenities affects comfort and hygiene.

[…] Komportable ra pud, alimoot lang. Wala man mi kuryente diri. (It's comfortable although it's hot. We have no electricity here.) – Participant R

The subtheme, Vulnerability to Weather Conditions, shows that participants often faced leaking roofs, flooding, and exposure to harsh weather, showing their physical vulnerability. These fragile living conditions disrupt their rest and safety, adding to their daily struggle for comfort and security.

[…] Komportable ra man mi diha. Kung mag ulan, mutulo mana ang ako atop diha, giguba man sa Odette. Magmata gyud mi ana labi na kilat ug dalugdog. Kung in ana, dili komportable. Mao ra gyud na ako kahadlokan. (Comfortable but the roof got destroyed by Odette… there's also water leaks… it would keep us awake. lightning/thunder makes it uncofortable.) – Participant G

The findings presented in Table 1 illustrate the socioeconomic realities of individuals living in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu. Their experiences revolve around unstable and low-paying work, constant challenges in daily living, and limited access to basic needs and services. Most rely on irregular informal jobs— such as cleaning tombs, fishing, small-scale vending, and other low-wage tasks—highlighting ongoing financial insecurity. Major challenges such as natural disasters, poor health, and daily financial strain intensify their

vulnerability, while food insecurity and inconsistent meals reflect the depth of poverty they endure. Access to healthcare and government services is also limited, often hindered by cost, distance, or unavailable personnel, pushing families to depend on pensions, barangay support, or relatives. Social perceptions toward cemetery residents vary, ranging from curiosity and pity to discrimination or acceptance, yet participants cope through resilience and emotional strength. Despite occasional theft, environmental hazards, and fragile living conditions marked by makeshift housing, lack of electricity, and exposure to severe weather, many still perceive the cemetery as a safe and familiar home. Overall, the themes reflect a life shaped by hardship but also by adaptability, cooperation, and an enduring sense of resilience.

Table 2.1. **Autonomy**

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Sense of Personal Control	Feeling Limited by Circumstances Gradual Adaptation to Challenges High Confidence and Autonomy

Table 2.1 shows the perceived autonomy of cemetery dwellers, highlighting how participants balance feelings of limitation due to age, health, and resources with confidence and self-reliance in managing their daily lives.

The theme, Sense of Personal Control, describes the participants' sense of control and adaptation that shows different levels of confidence in managing life in cemetery communities. Some feel limited by health, age, or financial challenges, while others demonstrate resilience, independence, and self-reliance. This shows that psychological well-being is linked to how much people believe they can handle difficulties and influence their own lives.

The first subtheme, Feeling Limited by Circumstances, shows that participants with low perceived control felt limited by age, health, and financial difficulties. They saw much of their life, including income, safety, and living conditions, as beyond their control, leading to feelings of helplessness.

[…] Gamay ra man gyud. Mga 25%. Ang akoa, kay pirmi man ko lisod. Tiguwang na baya ko. Lisod mangita ug trabaho. (A little. Around 25%. It's always difficult here. I am old and it's difficult to find a job.) – Participant G

The second subtheme, Gradual Adaptation to Challenges, shows that participants recognized challenges but were able to adapt and cope. Their use of practical strategies and acceptance shows moderate confidence in handling difficulties.

[…] 50% ra guro, di jud ko kauntok gyud kay dili ta sure baya, duol ta sa peligro, kay menteryo baya ni, daghan baya ug adik dinhi. (Around 50% I think, I am not sure. I live in the cemetery and danger is near. There are so many addicts here.) – Participant H

The third subtheme, High Confidence and Autonomy, shows that participants with a high sense of control showed confidence, independence, and optimism. They used family support and personal effort to manage challenges, demonstrating strong resilience and active engagement with their surroundings.

[…] Mga 100%, ma-control man nako dayon, bisag unsa nako kalisod, kay ug mag hunahuna ka sa kapaet, ma down ka, mao nang huna hunaon gyud ug tarong. (Around 100%. I can control my life. Even if how hard it becomes, I just don't think about the bitterness because it would make me feel very down that's why I only think positively.) – Participant B

Table 2.1 shows cemetery dwellers' perceived autonomy, ranging from feeling limited by age, health, and finances, to gradually adapting to challenges, and finally to high confidence and resilience. Overall, the findings show that psychological well-being among cemetery residents is closely linked to their perceived ability to influence and cope with life circumstances.

Table 2.2. Environmental Mastery

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Adaptation to Surroundings	Environmental Satisfaction Coping with Environmental Challenges Adaptation of Livelihoods

Table 2.2 presents participants perceived environmental mastery, illustrating their contentment with their surroundings and their ability to cope with environmental challenges such as storms, flooding, and other daily hazards.

The theme, Adaptation to Surroundings, describes how participants adjust to life in cemetery communities. They find comfort and peace in their environment, despite challenges like natural hazards or social stigma. Participants also adapt their work and daily routines to fit cemetery life, such as taking informal jobs or finding alternative ways to earn a living. This shows that environmental mastery involves flexibility, resilience, and the ability to maintain stability and well-being in a challenging setting. This theme highlights that environmental mastery is closely tied to the ability to adjust to one's surroundings, maintain stability, and achieve a sense of comfort and emotional well-being even in unconventional or challenging living situations.

The first subtheme, Environmental Satisfaction, shows that participants feel calm and safe in their familiar, conflict-free community and find happiness in simplicity, focusing on what they have rather than what they lack. This reflects gratitude, emotional well-being, and a sense of stability.

[…] Komportable ra gyud kaayo ko sa ako pamuyo (I'm very comfortable here…) – Participant B

The second subtheme, Coping with Environmental Challenges, shows that participants cope with challenges like wind, rain, and other natural difficulties by accepting and adjusting to their surroundings. Their flexibility and resilience demonstrate effective strategies for managing external stressors.

[…] Ang nakaapekto kay usa ra gyud, kanang bagyo o hangin, ulan kusog ug hangin. Puyo ra gyapun mi diri (The only thing that affects us here a lot is the wind and rain but we chose to live with it.) – Participant J

The third subtheme, Adaptation of Livelihoods, shows that participants adapted their work and income strategies to the cemetery context, modifying traditional jobs or creating new ways to earn a living while coping with the physical and social challenges of their environment.

[…] Ako trabaho diri kay manghabwa. Kanang mga parehas aning mga remains kanang bukog, dili na angay na kayaga-yagaan kay Sagrado man ang lawas sa tawo. (My work here in the cemetery is digging the remains or bones of people… it has to be respected.) – Participant D

Table 2.2 shows cemetery dwellers' perceived environmental mastery, ranging from finding comfort and satisfaction in their surroundings, to coping with natural and social challenges, and finally to adapting their livelihoods to fit cemetery life. Overall, the findings indicate that psychological well-being is closely linked to participants' ability to adjust, remain resilient, and maintain stability in a challenging environment.

Table 2.3. Personal Growth

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Learning and Life Skills	Skill Acquisition and Learning Through Experience Endurance and Perseverance Emotional Adjustment and Contentment

Table 2.3 displays participants' perceived personal growth, showing the skills, resilience, and perseverance they develop through everyday survival and adaptation in the cemetery environment.

The theme, Learning and Life Skills, describes that participants show personal growth and adaptability despite the hardships of living in cemetery communities. They build resilience, acquire practical skills, and find contentment, demonstrating that these experiences contribute to both personal and emotional development.

The first subtheme, Skill Acquisition and Learning Through Experience, shows that participants gain skills and knowledge from daily tasks like fishing, cleaning, or digging graves. These experiences foster responsibility, honesty, and a strong work ethic, supporting personal growth.

[…] Kanang pagpanagat. Diri na ko nakat-on ana, astang pagpanghabwa. (Fishing. I only learned that livelihood when I arrived here as well as digging graves) – Participant N

The second subtheme, Endurance and Perseverance, shows that participants persevere through hardships, continuing daily routines and accepting challenges. Their endurance reflects resilience and the ability to manage adversity.

[…] Ug wala koy kanang trabaho nga permanente, ari ko diri mangita. Magpadayun lang gyud, dili magpadala sa problema (If I have no permanent job, I just look for some little work here. I just keep on going and never allow for problems to control me) – Participant A

The third subtheme, Emotional Adjustment and Contentment, shows that participants often feel content with their living conditions, adapting to limitations and finding peace in simplicity. This shows emotional adjustment and acceptance.

[…] Kalinaw, peaceful kaayo among pagpuyo diri, wala kaayo motor na akong madungog, layu layu sad sa mga marites. (Living here is peaceful…no noisy motorcycles and there's also no people who gossips.) – Participant K

Table 2.3 shows cemetery dwellers' perceived personal growth, ranging from acquiring skills through daily tasks, to persevering through hardships, and finally to achieving emotional adjustment and contentment. Overall, the findings indicate that psychological well-being is closely linked to participants' resilience, adaptability, and ability to find peace and satisfaction despite challenging living conditions.

Table 2.4. Positive Relations with Others

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Social Harmony and Cooperation	Peaceful Coexistence Community Support and Collaboration
	Conflict Resolution and Empathy

Table 2.4 shows participants' perceived positive relations with others, highlighting cooperation, mutual support, and effective conflict resolution within their community.

The theme, Social Harmony and Cooperation, shows that participants keep supportive and harmonious relationships within their cemetery communities, showing strong social bonds. Cooperation, respect, and resolving conflicts help their emotional well-being and create a sense of belonging despite difficult living conditions.

The first subtheme, Peaceful Coexistence, shows that participants value living without major conflicts and prioritize peace in their interactions. Their calm approach shows commitment to stability and mutual respect within the community.

[…] Okay ra. Wala ray away. Samok mana (It's peaceful here, no fights. It's troublesome.) – Participant A

[…] Okay ra, wala ray away, malinawon ra mi. (There's no fight because we're peaceful here.) – Participant B

The second subtheme, Community Support and Collaboration, shows that participants rely on neighbors for help, sharing resources and assisting those in need. This collective support reflects strong social bonds and helps them manage hardships together.

[…] Ah okay ra. Mag tinabangay ra. (It's okay. We help each other.) – Participant D

[…] Magtapok mi, pasiaw ra mi bisag una kalisod (If we gather together, we just have fun even if we are having difficult situations on our own.) – Participant C

The third subtheme, Conflict Resolution and Empathy, shows that some participants faced teasing or minor conflicts but responded with patience and understanding. This shows emotional maturity and the ability to maintain social harmony despite challenges.

[…] Feeling nako ang uban nagpuyo diri, pamilya ra tanan. Magkasinabot ra gyud. Usahay nay away pero mauli ra dayun. (I feel like everyone who lives here is family. There are fights sometimes but it can easily be resolved.)

– Participant J

[…] Okay ra man. Naanad na pud ko nila. Usahay, naa'y sungugon, naa pud usahay awayon ug naa pud usahay matinagdanon. Iampo ra nako sila. (It's fine. I am used to them. Sometimes, they tease me because of my situation, sometimes they fight, sometimes they treat me well but I just pray for them.) – Participant Q

Table 2.4 shows cemetery dwellers' perceived positive relations with others, ranging from maintaining peaceful coexistence, to supporting and collaborating with the community, and finally to resolving conflicts with empathy. Overall, the findings indicate that psychological well-being is closely linked to strong social bonds, cooperation, and the ability to maintain harmony despite challenging living conditions.

Table 2.5. Purpose in Life

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Sources of Motivation	Family-Oriented Motivation Spiritual Motivation Self-Driven Motivation

Table 2.5 presents participants' perceived purpose in life, emphasizing motivation drawn from family responsibility, spiritual faith, and inner determination to overcome hardships.

The theme, Sources of Motivation, shows that participants maintain their psychological well-being by drawing on sources of motivation that help them cope with the challenges of cemetery living. Family, faith, and personal determination provide emotional strength, resilience, and a sense of purpose.

The first subtheme, Family-Oriented Motivation, shows that participants gain energy and determination from their loved ones, especially their children. Caring for family motivates them to keep going and maintain daily routines despite difficulties

[…] Ako pamilya ug anak (My family and children.) – Participants B

The second subtheme, Spiritual Motivation, shows that spirituality and devotion to God provide hope, courage, and emotional support. Prayer and religious practices help participants cope and maintain a positive, resilient outlook.

[…] Kanang ako giampo sa ginoo kay tagaan kog maayong panlawas, taas na kinabuhi, nga makasugakod ra gyud ko sa mga pagsulay na gihatag sa ginoo sa ako (God because I pray for him for good health, long life, and that I can endure the challenges given to me.) – Participant C

The third subtheme, Self-Driven Motivation, shows that some participants rely on their own drive and selfreliance. Their personal determination helps them overcome challenges, stay focused on goals, and maintain a sense of purpose.

[…] Ang akoa ra gyud kaugalingon kaugalingon nga gusto pa gyud lugyawon ang kinabuhi sa kalibutan. Nga dili gyud ko magpaapekto sa kalisod. (Myself because I want to live a long life. I just don't allow myself to get affected with the difficulties.) - Participant G

Table 2.5 shows cemetery dwellers' perceived purpose in life, ranging from drawing motivation from family, to relying on spiritual faith, and finally to self-driven determination. Overall, the findings indicate that psychological well-being is closely linked to having sources of motivation that provide resilience, emotional strength, and a sense of purpose despite challenging circumstances.

Table 2.6. **Self-Acceptance**

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Emotional Balance	Managing Stress and Worry Gratitude and Acceptance Emotional Expression

Table 2.6 shows participants' perceived self-acceptance, reflecting their emotional balance, ability to manage stress, and gratitude for life despite difficult living conditions.

The theme, Emotional Balance, describes that participants show strong emotional resilience even when facing stress, uncertainty, and daily challenges. By managing negative emotions, accepting their situation, and practicing gratitude, they maintain psychological stability and well-being.

The first subtheme, Managing Stress and Worry, shows that participants accept that stress and worry are inevitable due to financial, health, or environmental challenges. They cope by focusing on what they can control, practicing relaxation, and maintaining a realistic outlook, showing emotional awareness and self-regulation.

[…] Naa gyuy usahay nga stress pero di lang gyud magpadala (Yes, there are times but we just make sure to not be controlled by it.)– Participant A

[…] Oo. Kanang mga depression, di man kaayo gyud kay ang importante kay kung unsay kahimtang nimo, (Yes. Depression, not so much because what's important is your current state.) – Participant D

The second subtheme, Gratitude and Acceptance, shows that participants maintain contentment and gratitude despite hardships. By valuing health, family support, and simple pleasures, they foster emotional balance and support their psychological well-being.

[…] Bisan pag naa koy highbood, malipayon ra ko na pagkatao (Even if I have high blood, I'm still a happy person.) – Participant B

[…] Okay ra gyud. Ako lisod man gyud ko pero okay ra man jud kay ako, (It's fine. For me, life is very hard but

I'm just fine.) – Participant C

The third subtheme, Emotional Expression, shows that participants maintain emotional balance despite the difficulties of living in cemetery environments. They feel sadness, fear, and worry, but also experience happiness, contentment, and gratitude, showing resilience and the ability to find positivity in challenging situations

[…] Naa gyuy emosyon nga kanang maguol usahay labi na gamay na lang amoang konsumo pero malipayon ra man kay kompleto ang pamilya (There are times I feel sad especially if we no longer have our needs but I'm still happy that my family is complete.) – Participant A

Table 2.6 shows cemetery dwellers' perceived self-acceptance, ranging from managing stress and worry, to practicing gratitude and acceptance, and finally to maintaining emotional balance through positive expression. Overall, the findings indicate that psychological well-being is closely linked to emotional resilience, realistic coping, and the ability to find contentment despite difficult living conditions.

Table 3. Coping Mechanism

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Spirituality and Faith as Primary Coping	Prayer/God as Daily Anchor Prayer in Adversity/Loneliness
Family as Central Motive & Support	Family as emotional/practical anchor Family as a reason to stay
Economic Survival and Daily Routine as Coping	Sideline jobs, selling, caretaking, as survival Small savings/budgeting practices Following daily routines/scheduled work to conserve energy
Contentment, Acceptance and Habituation	Staying by Choice or Habituation ("Kontento," "Anad")
Desire to Relocate: Conditional & Constrained	Would leave if safe/affordable option available Pushed to stay by material constraints & family proximity
Emotional Regulation & Loneliness (Denial, Endurance, Expressive Outlets)	Denial or no loneliness Endurance/"agwanta" (resignation) as strategy Expressive outlets-singing, crying, prayer, talking
Leisure, Media & Social Distraction as	Radio, music, cellphone, TV, gossip as
Relief	acceptable relief
Crisis Responses-Resourcefulness, Passive Acceptance, & Risk	Resourceful active coping during disasters Passive acceptance/"go with the flow"/limited agency
Unhealthy/Risky Coping (Minority Pattern)	Smoking, drinking
Social Experience: Stigma, Harassment, & Community Dynamics	Harassment/Stigma from neighbors (push to leave) Mutual help, neighborly aid, community solidarity

Table 3 presents the coping mechanisms of individuals residing in cemeteries located in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. This variable is explored through ten emergent themes: Spirituality and Faith as Primary Coping; Family as Central Motive and Support; Economic Survival and Daily Routine as Coping; Contentment,

Acceptance, and Habituation; Desire to Relocate but Constrained by Reality; Emotional Regulation and Loneliness; Leisure, Media, and Social Distraction as Relief; Crisis Response and Resourcefulness; Unhealthy or Risky Coping; and Social Experience through Stigma and Community Dynamics**.**

Each theme includes several subthemes that capture the participants' lived experiences, survival strategies, and emotional adaptations. Spirituality and Faith as Primary Coping includes Prayer and God as Daily Anchor and Prayer in Adversity and Loneliness. Family as Central Motive and Support consists of Family as Emotional and Practical Anchor and Family as Reason to Stay. Economic Survival and Daily Routine as Coping includes Sideline Jobs, Selling, Caretaking as Survival, Small Savings and Budgeting Practices, and Early Routines, Scheduled Work, and Energy Saving. Contentment, Acceptance, and Habituation include Staying by Choice or Habituation.

Desire to Relocate but Constrained by Reality consists of Willingness to Leave if a Safe or Affordable Option Exists and Being Pushed to Stay by Material Constraints and Family Proximity. Emotional Regulation and

Loneliness include Denial or No Loneliness Reported, Endurance or "Agwanta" as Strategy, and Expressive Outlets — Singing, Crying, Prayer, and Talking. Leisure, Media, and Social Distraction as Relief covers Radio, Music, Cellphone, TV, and Gossip as Accessible Relief. Crisis Response and Resourcefulness includes Resourceful Active Coping during Disasters and Passive Acceptance and "Go with the Flow" Attitude. Unhealthy or Risky Coping Comprises Substance Use as a Form of Temporary Relief. Finally, Social Experience through Stigma and Community Solidarity consists of Harassment and Stigma from Neighbors and Outsiders and Mutual Help, Neighborly Aid, and Community Solidarity.

The first emergent theme, Spirituality and Faith as Primary Coping, encapsulates the participants' reliance on prayer and their relationship with God as a core survival mechanism. Faith emerges not only as a source of comfort but also as an active psychological tool for endurance and meaning-making amid hardship. It serves as a guiding force that helps them regulate emotional distress and maintain hope despite adversity.

The subtheme, Prayer and God as Daily Anchor, demonstrates that prayer is an essential emotional and spiritual ritual that sustains participants' well-being. It is through prayer that they express surrender, seek strength, and find peace within their difficult living conditions.

[...] "Padayon lang gyud ko, i-ampo lang gyud nako sa Ginoo." (I just keep going, and I always pray to God.) – Participants A

[...] "Musalig ra gyud ko sa Ginoo permi." (I just put my trust in God always.) – Participants B

These statements reveal how prayer functions as an emotional lifeline, a ritual of surrender and renewal that provides a sense of stability and control in uncontrollable situations. Prayer allows participants to channel fear and exhaustion into spiritual trust, fostering endurance and hope. Through this repetitive act of faith, participants internalize strength, transforming uncertainty into courage and helplessness into calm determination.

The subtheme, Prayer in Adversity and Loneliness, illustrates how participants use faith to manage feelings of solitude and disconnection. In the absence of social support, prayer becomes an intimate form of conversation with God, a spiritual companionship that alleviates loneliness.

[…] "Ug makasinati ko'g kalisod, ako ra gyud e-ampo." ("When I experience difficulties, I just pray.") –

Participants K

[…] "Kung mugrabe akong gibati, mohilom ra ko ug ampo." ("When the heaviness gets too much, I just stay quiet and pray.") – Participants F

This subtheme demonstrates that faith transforms isolation into spiritual reflection. Prayer becomes a means of emotional regulation, where silence turns into sacred dialogue and vulnerability evolves into resilience. For participants, faith is not passive acceptance but an active coping resource that transforms suffering into inner peace.

The second emergent theme, Family as Central Motive and Support, emphasizes that family is the emotional core and primary source of strength for the participants. Family represents love, stability, and meaning in the midst of deprivation. Their narratives reveal that family is both a motivation to survive and a source of emotional and practical support.

The subtheme, Family as Emotional and Practical Anchor, reflects the deep interdependence between family members, who serve as both comfort and inspiration. Participants describe their families as their primary reason to keep going and as their source of joy and identity.

[…] "Akong mga anak ang nagdasig nako pirmi." ("My children always encourage me.") – Participants F

[…] "Importante nga kuyog ra ko sa akong pamilya." ("What matters is that I'm with my family.") – Participants

E

These quotations show that survival is not an individual act but a shared, familial commitment. Family gives participants emotional grounding and a reason to continue striving despite hardship. Their love and sense of duty transform adversity into meaningful endurance, anchoring their resilience in care and belonging.

The subtheme, Family as Reason to Stay, illustrates that many participants choose to remain in the cemetery because of their family ties. The space becomes not just a home but a site of emotional connection and protection. […] "Naa man diri akong pamilya, mao dili ko ka larga." ("My family is here, so I can't leave.") – Participants

A

[…] "Dool ra sila sa akong ginikanan, mao diri ra mi." ("They're close to my parents, that's why we stay here.")

– Participants R

These statements reveal that the decision to stay, despite material hardship, is rooted in familial devotion. Family proximity provides emotional safety and prevents fragmentation. This attachment shows that endurance is sustained by love and that belonging outweighs material limitations.

The third emergent theme, Economic Survival and Daily Routine as Coping, highlights participants' proactive engagement in small-scale work as both a survival strategy and a psychological stabilizer. Work provides structure, dignity, and a sense of control, allowing participants to cope with uncertainty while sustaining their families.

The subtheme, Sideline Jobs, Selling, and Caretaking as Survival, depicts how participants rely on informal labor such as selling candles, vending, caretaking, and construction to meet their basic needs. […] "Mag-sideline ko kung naay mu-offer." ("I take sidelines whenever someone offers.") – Participants A

[…] "Manilhig ko ug lubnganan para naa koy kwarta." ("I clean graves so I can earn money.") – Participants D These quotations highlight perseverance and resourcefulness as central traits of coping. Work allows participants to reclaim agency in a context of instability, transforming struggle into self-worth. Their actions demonstrate resilience rooted in determination and routine.

The subtheme, Small Savings and Budgeting Practices, reveals that participants maintain financial prudence despite limited resources.

[…] "Kung naa'y sobra nga kwarta, akong ihipos." ("If I have extra money, I save it.") – Participants L […] "Sa among pagbaligya kandila, maka-eskwela among mga anak." ("Through selling candles, our children can go to school.") – Participants M

These reflections show that even amid poverty, participants retain future-oriented values. Their efforts to save small amounts or invest in education embody hope and agency. Through economic coping, they cultivate a sense of purpose, resilience, and long-term vision despite material deprivation.

The subtheme, Early Routines, Scheduled Work, and Energy Saving, illustrates that establishing daily structure helps participants manage fatigue and maintain focus.

[…] "Manilhig ko sayo para dili init." ("I sweep early so it won't be too hot.") – Participants C

[…] "Ma-andam ra ka sa adlaw-adlaw nga trabaho." ("You just get used to the daily routine.") – Participants D

These accounts reveal that routine not only organizes physical activities but also regulates emotional responses. Establishing a predictable daily structure allows participants to avoid overthinking, reduce anxiety, and find rhythm in hardship. Routine serves as a psychological anchor, turning repetitive labor into a stabilizing force that sustains both body and mind.

The fourth emergent theme, Contentment, Acceptance, and Habituation, underscores participants' emotional adaptation to their environment. Over time, discomfort transforms into acceptance, and struggle becomes

normalized as part of daily life. Their statements suggest that acceptance is not resignation but an emotional strategy that helps preserve mental peace and resilience.

The subtheme, Staying by Choice or Habituation ("Kontento," "Anad"), reflects the process of becoming emotionally and mentally accustomed to living in hardship.

[…] "Kontento ra gyud ko diri." ("I'm content living here.") – Participants B

[…] "Sa una lisod, pero naanad na mi ug nalipay ra mi diri." ("At first it was difficult, but now we're used to it and happy here.") – Participants C

These quotations demonstrate how prolonged exposure to hardship cultivates acceptance and emotional stability. Through habituation, participants reinterpret their environment as "home," reframing limitations as normal life. This acceptance acts as a psychological buffer against stress, fostering emotional endurance and peace despite external deprivation.

The fifth emergent theme, Desire to Relocate but Constrained by Reality, captures participants' ambivalent feelings about leaving the cemetery. While many express a strong desire to move, their economic limitations and family circumstances prevent them from doing so. This theme reveals an emotional conflict between aspiration and acceptance, between the hope for change and the reality of survival.

The subtheme, Willingness to Leave if a Safe or Affordable Option Exists, highlights conditional optimism among participants who wish to relocate to a better living environment.

[…] "Oo, kung naay kabalhinan." ("Yes, if there is somewhere to move to.") – Participants A

[…] "Mobalhin mi kung mas luwas ug barato." ("We'll move if it's safer and affordable.") – Participants L These accounts reveal that the desire to relocate reflects hope for improvement, not dissatisfaction alone. Participants express awareness of better life possibilities, yet recognize their limitations in achieving them. Their tone suggests a longing for change constrained by practicality.

The subtheme, Being Pushed to Stay by Material Constraints and Family Proximity, illustrates how poverty and family responsibilities restrict their mobility.

[…] "Wala mi materyales, mao diri ra mi." ("We have no materials, so we stay here.") – Participants H […] "Lisod kay wala mi kaugalingong yuta." ("It's hard because we don't own land.") – Participants A

These statements reflect an acceptance of their restricted situation. Staying is often less a choice than a necessity, shaped by economic hardship and the need to remain close to family. This subtheme illustrates the complexity of resilience, the coexistence of hope and limitation, aspiration and endurance.

The sixth emergent theme, Emotional Regulation and Loneliness, explores how participants manage feelings of solitude, emotional strain, and sadness. Their responses reveal different coping forms, ranging from denial and endurance to expressive outlets such as crying, singing, and prayer. These strategies indicate emotional resilience developed through both suppression and expression.

The subtheme, Denial or No Loneliness Reported, reflects how some participants avoid acknowledging loneliness as a psychological defense. This denial helps them maintain composure and mental stability in a setting where expressing vulnerability may not be adaptive.

[…] "Wala ra ko nakasinati'g kasubo." ("I haven't felt lonely.") – Participants A

[…] "Wala ra, naanad ra ko." ("Nothing much, I'm used to it.") – Participants I

These short responses reflect emotional detachment as a form of coping. By denying loneliness, participants preserve a sense of normalcy and self-sufficiency. This psychological mechanism prevents feelings of helplessness from overwhelming their day-to-day functioning, reflecting a quiet strength rooted in practicality.

The subtheme, Endurance or "Agwanta" as Strategy, illustrates the participants' ability to tolerate emotional suffering through stoicism and patience. "Agwanta," a local term for enduring without complaint, signifies moral strength in adversity.

[…] "Gaantos ra gyud ko sa kasubo." ("I just endure the sadness.") – Participants P

[…] "Giagwanta ra namo ang among kahimtang." ("We simply endure our situation.") – Participants C

These expressions embody emotional endurance, a central Filipino value tied to patience and acceptance. Their use of "agwanta" reveals an internalized form of resilience, one that prioritizes survival through quiet persistence rather than protest.

The subtheme, Expressive Outlets — Singing, Crying, Prayer, and Talking, shows that some participants release emotions through expressive activities that transform pain into relief.

[…] "Bisan maghilak ko, mag-kanta ko para di sakit." ("Even when I cry, I sing so it won't hurt.") – Participants

F

[…] "Makahilak ko usahay pero e-ampo ra nako." ("Sometimes I cry, but I just pray about it.") – Participants G

These narratives show that emotional expression is both cathartic and relational. Singing, crying, or sharing feelings with family members provides an avenue for self-healing and reconnection. Such expressions represent emotional regulation through release rather than repression, transforming heaviness into resilience and peace.

The seventh emergent theme, Leisure, Media, and Social Distraction as Relief, demonstrates how participants use accessible forms of leisure to cope with emotional exhaustion. Activities like listening to radio dramas, watching videos, using cellphones, and chatting with neighbors offer temporary emotional reprieve. Leisure provides a sense of normalcy and joy that counterbalances their difficult environment.

The subtheme, Radio, Music, Cellphone, TV, and Gossip as Accessible Relief, reflects how small, everyday forms of entertainment become therapeutic outlets.

[…] "Maminaw ko'g drama sa radyo." ("I listen to radio dramas.") – Participants A

[…] "Mag YouTube ko para malingaw." ("I watch YouTube to entertain myself.") – Participants F

These quotes reveal that leisure is an emotional escape, a coping strategy that allows participants to disconnect temporarily from the heaviness of their environment. Leisure activities evoke positive emotions such as laughter, relaxation, and enjoyment, which in turn reduce stress and loneliness.

Through such distractions, participants experience a brief sense of agency, choosing moments of happiness even in conditions of poverty. These seemingly ordinary activities symbolize self-care and psychological preservation.

The eighth emergent theme, Crisis Response and Resourcefulness, captures the participants' adaptive responses to crises, particularly natural disasters such as Typhoon Odette. Their accounts show creativity, self-reliance, and cooperation as central elements of survival. In moments of crisis, participants display both practical problemsolving and emotional strength.

The subtheme, Resourceful Active Coping during Disasters, reflects participants' ingenuity and calm action during emergencies.

[…] "Pag-Odette, nanago mi sa nitso." ("During Odette, we hid inside the tombs.") – Participants B

[…] "Gigamit namo ang mga kahoy diri para ayo sa among balay." ("We used materials from here to repair our house.") – Participants D

These experiences demonstrate resourcefulness in crisis situations. Participants used their environment creatively to protect their families, repurposing cemetery materials and shelters to ensure safety. Their behavior reflects adaptability, problem-solving, and courage in the face of danger.

The subtheme, Passive Acceptance and "Go with the Flow" Attitude, reveals the coexistence of acceptance and endurance during uncontrollable crises.

[…] "Lisod pero mao ra gyud na." ("It's hard, but that's just how it is.") – Participants B

[…] "Wala may mahimo, dawaton ra." ("There's nothing we can do, we just accept it.") – Participants C

These statements express a calm surrender to circumstances that cannot be changed. Such acceptance conserves emotional energy and allows them to continue functioning without panic. Together, resourcefulness and acceptance form a balanced crisis response, showing that resilience can emerge both through action and stillness.

The ninth emergent theme, Unhealthy or Risky Coping, captures coping behaviors that provide temporary emotional relief but carry negative physical or psychological consequences. Some participants resort to smoking and drinking as short-term methods to reduce stress, reflecting both vulnerability and the search for momentary comfort. These actions serve as accessible forms of self-soothing in an environment where healthier outlets are limited.

The subtheme, Substance Use as a Form of Temporary Relief, illustrates how participants turn to alcohol and cigarettes to manage their distress.

[…] "Sigarilyo, inom—mao ra gyud akong lingaw." ("I smoke and drink—it's the only way I cope.") –

Participants R

[…] "Makainom ko para mawad-an gamay'g hunahuna." ("I drink to clear my mind a little.") – Participants O

These quotations show that substance use becomes an improvised coping mechanism, an immediate, if temporary, way to regulate emotions or promote rest. Participants express an awareness that drinking or smoking is not ideal, yet it remains one of the few accessible ways to alleviate tension or loneliness.

This behavior can be interpreted as an emotional shortcut, one that eases discomfort in the moment but risks dependency or health problems in the long term. The subtheme thus reflects how limited access to psychological support or stress-relief resources pushes individuals toward short-term relief mechanisms, highlighting the intersection between poverty, environment, and emotional regulation.

The tenth emergent theme, Social Experience through Stigma and Community Solidarity, reveals the dual nature of the participants' social environment. On one hand, they experience rejection and discrimination from outsiders who stigmatize them for living in a cemetery; on the other hand, they find strength in unity, cooperation, and shared hardship within their own community. This theme captures the tension between social exclusion and internal solidarity as both external challenge and internal coping mechanism.

The subtheme, Harassment and Stigma from Neighbors and Outsiders, highlights how participants face judgment, ridicule, and harassment because of their living situation.

[…] "Ingon sila dili mi normal kay diri mi nagpuyo." ("They say we're not normal because we live here.") – Participants A

[…] "Usahay tamayon mi sa silingan." ("Sometimes neighbors belittle us.") – Participants Q

These statements reveal experiences of social stigma, where residents of the cemetery are perceived as deviant or inferior. Such treatment not only undermines self-esteem but also reinforces feelings of exclusion. The participants' tone conveys both frustration and emotional weariness, though beneath it lies quiet resistance, the resolve to endure judgment and persist with dignity.

The subtheme, Mutual Help, Neighborly Aid, and Community Solidarity, emphasizes how participants rely on each other for material and emotional support. In contrast to external rejection, their internal community becomes a sanctuary of belonging and cooperation.

[…] "Bisan sa kalisod, magtinabangay mi diri." ("Even in hardship, we help each other.") – Participants O

[…] "Kung naay problema, magtinabangay ang tanan." ("When problems come, everyone helps each other.") –

Participants C

These quotations demonstrate that mutual support functions as a collective coping mechanism, offsetting the emotional damage caused by social stigma. Solidarity replaces isolation, restoring dignity through shared humanity. Within this supportive network, acts of kindness, such as sharing food, shelter, or emotional comfort, serve as healing responses to external discrimination.

Interpretatively, this theme reflects how social belonging serves as both shield and strength. While societal stigma isolates them, community solidarity fosters resilience and pride. Their experiences underscore that survival in marginalized spaces is not merely individual but deeply communal, sustained by empathy, cooperation, and collective endurance.

Table 4. Social Support

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Patterns of Government and NGO Assistance	Regular Beneficiaries of Programs (4Ps, AICS,
	TUPAD, AKAP, etc.) Only Received During Calamities (e.g., Typhoon Odette) Never Benefited or Excluded from Programs
Mixed Perceptions of Support: Gratitude, Acceptance, and Feelings of Exclusion	Gratitude and Appreciation for Received Support Acceptance and Resilience Despite Lack of Support Feelings of Exclusion and Unfairness
Sources of Support in Times of Need	Self-Reliance and Absence of Support Reliance on Family, Relatives, Close Friends Reliance on Mayors and Counselors Spiritual Reliance on God
Experiences of Social Acceptance and Belongingness in the Community	General Feeling of Acceptance and Inclusion Acceptance with Minor Exclusions or Stigma Strong Social Ties with Neighbors

Table 4 presents the forms of social support experienced by individuals residing in cemeteries located in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. This variable is explored through five emergent themes: Patterns of Government and NGO Assistance, Mixed Perceptions of Support: Gratitude, Acceptance, and Feelings of Exclusion, Sources of Support in Times of Need, and Experiences of Social Acceptance and Belongingness in the Community. Each theme includes several subthemes that reflect the participants' lived realities in navigating survival, belongingness, and reliance amid poverty and social marginalization.

Patterns of Government and NGO Assistance includes Regular Beneficiaries of Programs (4Ps, AICS, TUPAD, AKAP, etc.), describing how some families sustain their daily needs through formal aid and social welfare programs. Only Received During Calamities (e.g., Typhoon Odette) and Never Benefited or Excluded from Programs, highlighting unequal access and temporary assistance. Mixed Perceptions of Support: Gratitude,

Acceptance, and Feelings of Exclusion is composed of Gratitude and Appreciation for Received Support, Acceptance and Resilience Despite Lack of Support, and Feelings of Exclusion and Unfairness, reflecting complex emotional responses toward aid distribution. Sources of Support in Times of Need encompasses SelfReliance and Absence of Support, Reliance on Family, Relatives, Close Friends, Mayors, and Counselors, and Spiritual Reliance on God, which emphasize how personal networks and faith serve as key survival mechanisms. Finally, Experiences of Social Acceptance and Belongingness in the Community includes General Feeling of Acceptance and Inclusion, Acceptance with Minor Exclusions or Stigma, and Strong Social Ties with Neighbors, portraying how participants maintain social connection, dignity, and a sense of community despite their marginalized living conditions.

The first emergent theme, Patterns of Government and NGO Assistance, captures the varying degrees of support received by individuals and families living in the cemetery communities. This theme reflects how external aid—whether regular, occasional, or entirely absent—shapes their capacity to cope with daily struggles.

The first subtheme, Regular Beneficiaries of Programs (4Ps. AICS, TUPAD, AKAP, etc,), under the emergent theme Access to Government and NGO Assistance, reveals that consistent aid offers a sense of comfort and continuity amid economic uncertainty. The participants' accounts show how regular access to government programs allows them to meet their basic needs and maintain a sense of normalcy.

[...] Nakadawat-dawat mi kadtong mga AICS, TUPAD, naka dawat mi adto, 4P's man ko sauna. (We've received aid before—AICS, TUPAD, and I was once part of 4Ps.) – Participant F [...] Oo, TUPAD, AKAP. (Yes, TUPAD and AKAP.) – Participant N

The second subtheme, Only Received During Calamities (e.g., Typhoon Odette), under the emergent theme Exclusion and Limited Government/NGO Support, shows how many participants recall receiving assistance only during major disasters.

[...] Oo, katu bitaw nakadawat kog 8k pag odette. (Yes, I received 8,000 pesos during Odette.) – Participant C

[...] Oh katong kuan, tag 6 thousand pag human bagyo (Odette). (Yes, that one, 6,000 pesos after the typhoon

Odette.) – Participant D

The third subtheme, Never Benefited or Excluded from Programs, reveals the deep emotional weight carried by those who have never received any form of assistance. These participants express feelings of being unseen or unrecognized by systems designed to help people like them.

[...] Dili mam mi apil sa 4P's. (Ma'am, we're not part of 4Ps.) – Participant A

[...] Wala. Wala koy apil-apil ana. wa mi naapil sa lista. (None. I'm not part of that, we weren't included in the list.) – Participant E

[...] Wala ko ana kadawat tanan, wala gyud ko ana oi. (I didn't receive any of those, not at all.) – Participant K

The second emergent theme, Mixed Perceptions of Support: Gratitude, Acceptance, and Feelings of Exclusion, reflects the participants' complex emotional experiences toward receiving or not receiving assistance. This theme captures the spectrum of responses that arise when people face unequal access to government and NGO support. While some express deep gratitude and appreciation for the help extended to them, others show quiet acceptance despite being left out, and a few reveal feelings of exclusion and unfairness.

The first subtheme, Gratitude and Appreciation for Received Support, under the emergent theme Mixed Perceptions of Support: Gratitude, Acceptance, and Feelings of Exclusion, emphasizes how participants view

the help they receive as a lifeline that eases their daily burdens. Gratitude becomes a profound emotional response, reflecting their humility and awareness that even small acts of support can make a significant difference.

[...] Nalipay mi na natabangan mi atu. Pampuno puno namo sa amo adlaw adlaw. (We were happy that we were helped. It added to our daily needs.) – Participant C

[...] Nagpa salamat pud ko kay naka dawat ko, naapil ko sa listahan. (I was also thankful that I received and was included in the list.) – Participant F

The second subtheme, Acceptance and Resilience Despite Lack of Support, conveys how participants find peace and strength even when they are excluded from receiving support. Instead of resentment, they respond with understanding and faith, believing that what they did not receive simply wasn't meant for them.

[...] Dako na unta na nga tabang na among madawat unya wala man mi apil…wala ra nay problema oy. Ilaha ra tu, basin naa pa gyuy mas nanginahanglan. (That could've been a big help for us, but we weren't included. It's fine, maybe others needed it more.) – Participant E

[...] Okay ra kung naa, gihatag na sa ginoo nako. Kung wala, wala na gihatag sa ginoo sa akoa. (It's okay if there's help, it's given by God. If there's none, then it wasn't meant for me.) – Participant J [...] Ang kato akong nadawat, nalipay ko kay kuan man..nakatabang man pud sa amoa. Okay ra ko kung wala ko nadawat. Wala ra ko nag mahay. (I was happy with what I received because it helped us. Even if I didn't receive anything, I wouldn't regret it.) – Participant M

The third subtheme, Feelings of Exclusion and Unfairness, conveys the pain of being left out despite deserving the same assistance as others. Participants express a sense of being unseen or treated unequally, which creates emotional wounds that go beyond material deprivation.

[...] Nagmahay ko, wala koy laing ikatubag, nagmahay ko kay wala ko nakadawat. Ako ra diri ang wala nakadawat nya akong mga silingan, nakadawat. (I felt regret; I have nothing else to say. I regretted it because I didn't receive anything. I was the only one here who didn't get aid, while my neighbors did.) – Participant G The third emergent theme, Sources of Support in Times of Need, reveals how individuals navigate life's difficulties through various forms of support or, in some cases, the absence of it. This theme highlights the different ways participants cope when faced with hardship: through self reliance, family connections, community leaders, or spiritual faith. It underscores that support is not always constant or guaranteed; for some, it comes from within, while for others, it flows from relationship or faith.

The first subtheme, Self-Reliance and Absence of Support, under the emergent theme Sources of Support in Times of Need, reflects how some participants have grown accustomed to facing challenges on their own. They have learned to depend solely on their strength, finding resilience in solitude. For them, help rarely comes from others—it comes from their own hands.

[...] Wala, ako ra, maningkamot. (None, it's just me. I work hard on my own.) – Participant B

The second subtheme, Reliance on Family, Relatives, and Close Friends, emphasizes the significance of interpersonal connections in sustaining emotional and practical support. In times of need, participants turn to those closest to them; spouses, children, siblings, and trusted friends—whose presence brings comfort and understanding.

[...] Ang akong bana, naa ra sad nuon koy amiga na mauri, mag-share share ra sad mi. (My husband... and I also have a good friend, we share things with each other.) – Participant C

[...] Akong mga kuan, igsoon, mga anak. (My siblings and my children.) – Participant M

[...] Ako ra gyud iyanan, si tiya Conie. Mao ra gyud akong paduolan. Mutabang to namo. (Only my aunt, Tiya Conie. She's the only one I go to. She helps us.) – Participant I

[...] Sa akong mga relative. (From my relatives.) – Participant K

The third subtheme, Reliance on Mayors and Counselors, shows how certain participants find refuge in the few local leaders who have extended genuine assistance. These figures: mayors, vice mayors, and counselors, become trusted sources of helping during difficult times.

[...] Si vice Lagahid ra gyud, mutabang man na siya bisag ginagmay lang, asta sad iyang anak na konsehal. (It's only Vice Lagahid—he helps even in small ways, and so does his son, who's a councilor.) – Participant G

[...] Ang akong maduolan kung kinahanglan kog tabang kay si Ate Ann-Ann ra gyud, konsehal namo diri. Mao ra gyud nay sige ari namo diri, konsehala. (When I need help, I go to Ate Ann-Ann, our councilor here. She's the only one who always comes around.) – Participant Q

[...] Niduol gyud ko ni mayor. Nihatag ra siya. (I went to the mayor for help, and he gave assistance.) – Participant R

The third subtheme, Spiritual Reliance on God, reveals that when all other sources of support fade, faith becomes their constant companion. Participants turn to prayer as a source of comfort and strength, believing that God will provide guidance or small blessing to sustain them.

[...] Usahay ug emergency na gyud, sampit lang ta sa Ginoo. (Sometimes, when it's really an emergency, we just call on God.) – Participant H

The final emergent theme, Experiences of Social Acceptance and Belongingness in the Community, centers on how the participants find meaning and emotional strength through their social connections despite living in a marginalized environment. This theme reveals that belongingness serves as an emotional anchor that helps them cope with social judgement. The participants' narratives show that the sense of being accepted by others restores dignity and reduces the emotional burden of living in an unconventional community setting such as a cemetery.

The first subtheme, General Feeling of Acceptance and Inclusion, under the emergent theme Experiences of Social Acceptance and Belongingness in the Community, conveys a prevailing sense of being welcomed by those around them. Most participants perceive their community as welcoming and nonjudgmental. Despite living in a place often associated with discomfort or stigma, they consistently describe being "accepted" and "included" in straightforward, unembellished ways.

[...] Oo, dawat ra. (Yes, we are accepted.) – Participants A

[...] Oo, apil mi oi. (Yes, we are included.) – Participant F

The second subtheme, Acceptance with Minor Exclusions or Stigma, shows that while many participants feel accepted, some still experience subtle forms of exclusion rooted in gossip, poverty, or social class.

[...] Usahay mabati na dili mi dawat kay naa gyud mga tsismosa. (Sometimes we feel unaccepted because there are people who gossip.) – Participant D

[...] Wala pud ko sure kong dawat bami or unsa kay diri raman ko, pero okay raman sulod ug gawas sa sementeryo. (I'm not really sure if we're accepted or not since I mostly stay here, but it's fine both inside and outside the cemetery.) – Participant H

The third subtheme, Strong Social Ties with Neighbors, highlights how familiarity and daily interaction foster a deep sense of community and mutual care among residents. Participants describe their neighbors as sources of comfort and companionship, making the environment feel less isolating despite the unconventional setting.

[...] Oo. Dawat ra nako. Kay kaila man mi tanan diha. Mao gani nadugay ko kay gatabi mi. (Yes, I feel accepted.

We all know each other there. That's why I stayed long—I was chatting with them.) – Participant E

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the study's findings by interpreting the themes in relation to the research objectives, relevant literature, and theoretical framework. It highlights how individuals residing in cemeteries experience interconnected aspects of socioeconomic challenges, psychological well-being, coping mechanisms, and social support, emphasizing both the difficulties they encounter and the strengths they display in adapting to their environment. This chapter also acknowledges the limitations that may have influenced the results as well as provides recommendations for future research and for programs that aim to support the marginalized communities.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Based on the data collected, this section presents the discussion of the study's findings. The results are analyzed and interpreted in relation to the research questions, with the insights examined alongside relevant theories and literature.

1. The findings highlight the persistent socioeconomic hardships faced by individuals residing in rural cemetery communities in Southern Cebu, reflecting patterns identified in previous research on poverty and marginalization (Hodal, 2022; Descalsota, 2023). Participants reported unstable income, limited employment opportunities, and inadequate access to necessities such as food, water, and healthcare, which mirror the informal economic activities documented by Guardians (2020) and Maretti (2018) among urban cemetery residents. Unlike urban counterparts, rural participants had limited access to institutional aid, making them highly dependent on local networks and informal livelihoods. These challenges are consistent with Structural Violence Theory, which explains how social and economic systems can unintentionally constrain opportunities and sustain poverty. Cemetery dwellers' struggles illustrate how structural inequities affect multiple aspects of daily life—from health and nutrition to housing security—yet they continue to maintain dignity and resilience despite these systemic barriers.

2. Despite the socioeconomic hardships experienced by the participants, the narratives of the participants revealed diverse aspects of psychological well-being. These dimensions, the autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, were interpreted in connection with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Each dimension is discussed below to illustrate how individuals living in cemetery communities cultivate psychological balance amid structural and environmental adversity.

2.1 Participants' autonomy was limited by financial constraints, age, and health-related challenges, yet they exhibited self-reliance and made independent decisions in their daily lives. This aligns with Inocian et al. (2019), showing that marginalized individuals exercise autonomy within the scope of their manageable environment. Social Exclusion Theory explains how exclusion from broader societal opportunities reduces autonomy, while faith and community support provide alternative avenues for exercising personal control.

2.2 Participants demonstrated environmental mastery by effectively adapting to the cemetery environment, managing limited resources, and adjusting to natural and social hardships. This mirrors findings from Lapatha et al. (2019), emphasizing that marginalized groups often develop adaptive skills to navigate challenging environments. Habitus and Field Theory clarifies that participants' routines and survival strategies are shaped by their social field, illustrating how adaptation becomes a learned practice.

2.3 Personal growth emerged through perseverance, learning, and the development of life skills such as patience, resilience, and practical knowledge. Even with stagnant routines, participants derived wisdom and maturity from lived experiences, reflecting Inocian et al. (2019). Structural Violence Theory contextualizes this growth by showing that constraints imposed by systemic inequities indirectly foster resilience, as individuals navigate challenges imposed by social structures.

2.4 Supportive interactions with family, neighbors, and community members were central to participants' social well-being. Cooperative behavior, empathy, and mutual assistance reflect strong interpersonal

bonds, echoing Magarang-Mocsanat and Salapa (2024). Social Exclusion Theory explains that while participants may be excluded from mainstream social networks, they create alternative social structures that provide belonging, emotional support, and cohesion.

2.5 Participants' sense of purpose was anchored in family care, survival, and faith, motivating them to continue striving despite hardship. This aligns with Lapatha et al. (2019), showing that meaning-making and goal-directedness support psychological well-being in marginalized contexts. The reliance on family and spirituality illustrates how individuals derive purpose despite systemic challenges, as highlighted in Structural Violence Theory.

2.6 Self-acceptance was demonstrated through gratitude, contentment, and acknowledgment of life circumstances despite material deprivation. This reflects Inocian et al. (2019) and Lapatha et al. (2019), which emphasize how marginalized individuals cultivate self-worth independent of socioeconomic status. Habitus and Field Theory help explain this acceptance as a product of longterm adaptation to their social and environmental field, shaping attitudes and perceptions that foster psychological balance.

3. Participants described diverse coping strategies that enabled them to manage life's challenges within the cemetery setting. Emotion-focused coping, such as prayer, acceptance, and positive reframing, was common and aligns with Magarang-Mocsanat and Salapa (2024), who noted that Filipino communities often rely on spirituality as an emotionally adaptive resource. Problem-focused strategies, including taking on cemetery-related jobs such as vending, cleaning, and caretaking, allowed participants to secure income and sustain their households, consistent with findings by Cabañero et al. (2019) and Inocian et al. (2019) regarding resourcefulness among marginalized groups. These coping patterns can be understood through Social Exclusion Theory, which suggests that individuals excluded from formal systems develop their own mechanisms for survival, and through Habitus and Field Theory, which explains how coping becomes a learned response shaped by one's environment. Structural Violence Theory further contextualizes these strategies by highlighting how systemic inequalities compel individuals to adapt creatively to unmet needs. Overall, coping among participants is an active, culturally embedded process that integrates personal, familial, and spiritual strategies to maintain stability and psychological well-being.

4. Social support emerged as a critical factor in buffering both emotional and socioeconomic challenges. Participants relied on family, neighbors, and approachable local officials for assistance, while faith provided emotional and spiritual strength, echoing findings from Inocian et al. (2019) and Cabañero et al. (2019). Formal programs such as 4Ps, AICS, and TUPAD offered temporary relief, yet informal networks were more consistent in sustaining daily needs and well-being. The centrality of community bonds reflects the literature emphasizing the importance of local cooperation in informal settlements (Jones, 2017; Klaufus, 2020). Social Exclusion Theory explains that despite marginalization from mainstream society, participants cultivate alternative support networks that promote belonging, emotional security, and resilience. These relational bonds, combined with faith and mutual aid, provide a reliable foundation for hope, motivation, and psychological stability, highlighting the critical role of human connection when formal support is limited.

Implications of the Study

This study provides both theoretical and practical implications by examining the lived experiences of individuals residing in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines. Insights from this research are grounded in the participants' real-life experiences, offering evidence that can inform and refine theoretical frameworks, policies, and programs aimed at marginalized populations.

By adopting an inductive approach, this study allows findings to emerge directly from the lived experiences of cemetery dwellers, rather than being predetermined by existing theories. The research provides insights that (1) extends Structural Violence Theory by showing how hidden social structures perpetuate poverty and deprivation in rural cemetery communities, (2) refines Social Exclusion Theory by illustrating the unique ways cemetery residents experience marginalization and exclusion from societal institutions, and (3) enriches Bourdieu's

Habitus and Field Theory by highlighting how residents develop adaptive behaviors and coping strategies despite structural limitations.

This study contributes to the theory by situating these frameworks within a rural context, revealing areas where current models may not fully capture the complexities of marginalized living conditions. It also encourages future research to develop new theoretical perspectives on poverty, social exclusion, resilience, and adaptation in unconventional living environments.

Moreover, the insights gained from this study are beneficial to the following key groups:

Policymakers and Government Institutions

The findings of this study provide policymakers and government agencies with empirical evidence on the socioeconomic challenges and limited access to services experienced by cemetery dwellers in rural areas. These insights imply the need for more responsive and inclusive public programs, such as affordable rural housing initiatives, targeted livelihood opportunities, and improved access to healthcare and social welfare services. The study suggests that local government units (LGUs) and national agencies must recognize cemetery dwellers as a vulnerable population requiring structured interventions and long-term development strategies that address both their immediate needs and systemic disadvantages.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)

The study's findings highlight significant gaps in external support for cemetery residents, implying that NGOs must develop more context-specific programs that directly respond to the unique challenges faced by this marginalized group. These include designing livelihood training that fits their available skills, providing educational and resource support to families, and creating empowerment initiatives that strengthen community resilience. The results suggest that NGO interventions will be more effective when rooted in the lived experiences of cemetery dwellers rather than generalized poverty-alleviation models, allowing organizations to better allocate resources and tailor assistance to actual community needs.

Mental Health Professionals and Social Workers

The insights into the psychological well-being of cemetery dwellers imply the need for mental health professionals and social workers to develop specialized support programs that address emotional distress, insecurity, stigma, and social exclusion. The findings indicate that practitioners should consider communitybased mental health services, counseling interventions, and resilience-building programs that align with the unique living conditions of cemetery residents. This study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive and context-aware mental health strategies that promote autonomy, self-acceptance, coping skills, and overall wellbeing among individuals living in structurally disadvantaged environments.

Local Communities & General Public

This study raises public awareness about the lived realities of cemetery dwellers and challenges misconceptions and stigma associated with their living conditions. These insights imply increased opportunities for communityled support, advocacy for marginalized groups, and a stronger call for inclusive local policies. The findings may motivate local residents, community leaders, and institutions to foster empathy, strengthen social cohesion, and support initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of cemetery residents.

Cemetery Dwellers

By documenting their lived experiences, this study gives cemetery residents a platform to express their challenges, strengths, and aspirations, which may lead to increased recognition of their needs in policy-making and program development. The findings imply that their voices can contribute to shaping future interventions that enhance access to essential services, secure shelter, livelihood resources, and social rights. This strengthens their visibility in policy discourse and increases the likelihood that their needs will be prioritized in future development efforts.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of individuals residing in cemeteries in rural areas of Southern Cebu. Recognizing its limitations provides context for interpreting the findings and informs recommendations for future research and interventions.

Geographical Scope

The study was limited to selected rural areas of Southern Cebu, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Experiences from other municipalities or provinces may differ, highlighting the need for future studies to include broader geographical coverage to capture variations in social conditions, coping strategies, and support systems.

Data Reliability and Participants' Response

Since the study relied on self-reported information, responses may have been influenced by memory gaps, emotional discomfort, or social desirability. This limitation underscores the importance of using mixed-methods approaches, including quantitative measures or longitudinal designs, to complement qualitative findings and strengthen data reliability.

Subjectivity in Qualitative Analysis

Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility but may result in varied interpretations of questions or researcher bias in analyzing responses. To address this, future research could include multiple researchers in data analysis and triangulate findings with other sources, such as family members, neighbors, or community leaders, to verify participants' experiences.

Population Scope

The study focused on adult participants, leaving the experiences of children and adolescents unexplored. Including younger populations in future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of developmental and emotional coping strategies in cemetery communities.

Based on the limitations, the strategies as followed are being suggested:

Community-Based Programs

Policymakers may use these findings to design community-based housing, health, and livelihood interventions tailored to rural informal settlers. Programs should address both immediate needs and structural inequalities.

Mental Health and Social Interventions

Establish counseling services, support groups, and stress-management programs to promote psychological wellbeing and resilience.

Policy and Advocacy Strategies. Advocate for inclusive social policies addressing poverty, housing, and social stigma, ensuring legal recognition and protection for marginalized communities.

Strengthening Social Support Networks

Foster collaboration among families, neighbors, and local organizations to enhance solidarity, resource-sharing, and collective coping mechanisms.

Mixed-Methods and Longitudinal Research

Combine qualitative and quantitative approaches and conduct follow-up interviews to capture changes in experiences over time.

Expanded and Comparative Sampling

Expanding the sample to include women, youth, and residents from other rural regions would enhance comparative and developmental insights. Including diverse demographic groups may reveal gendered, generational, and regional differences in resilience, vulnerability, and access to resources.

Thematic Expansion of Inquiry

Further studies may explore disaster preparedness, intergenerational adaptation, and access to public services in informal rural settlements. Examining these areas would deepen understanding of long-term structural risks and protective factors within cemetery communities.

Triangulation of Data Sources

Include perspectives from family, neighbors, or community leaders to validate findings and reduce subjectivity.

CONCLUSION

The study, "Sa Piling ng mga Yumao: Lived Experiences of Individuals Residing in Cemeteries in Rural Areas of Southern Cebu, Philippines," explored how individuals living in cemeteries cope with poverty, social exclusion, and everyday challenges. Despite facing unstable income, limited access to basic services, and social stigma, participants maintained their psychological well-being through faith, family, acceptance, and hope. They used coping strategies such as prayer, resourcefulness, and emotional endurance to manage difficulties. Support from neighbors and fellow residents provided care, solidarity, and a sense of belonging, helping them navigate life without formal assistance. The participants' resilience reflects how adaptive behaviors and strong social connections develop even under systemic inequalities, showing that life in the cemetery is shaped not only by hardship but also by faith, relationships, and human dignity. These findings suggest the need for policies and community programs that recognize their strength and support their well-being.

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