

A Photovoice Study on Challenges and Coping Experiences of Fisherfolk Breadwinners

Abrancillo, Niña Jane V., Cabaluna, Diane S., Mamolo, Shaine Mae M.

Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explored the challenges and coping strategies of fisherfolk breadwinners in Langtad, Argao, Cebu, using the Photovoice method anchored on the Stress and Coping Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Utilizing purposive sampling, four fisherfolk breadwinners participated by capturing photographs that depicted their daily challenges and coping strategies. Guided by the SHOWED framework, their narratives were analyzed using Tsang's Analytical Framework to extract recurring themes and patterns from both visual and verbal data. Findings revealed that fisherfolk breadwinners face multifaceted challenges across four major themes: resource, seasonal, livelihood, and economic challenges. These adversities often lead to food insecurity, emotional distress, and reliance on informal lending systems such as "5-6". Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience through three coping strategies: emotional escape, livelihood diversification, and socio-economic coping. The study concludes that fisherfolk breadwinners' capacity for adaptation and solidarity reflects deep cultural resilience and commitment to family welfare. It recommends the implementation of community-based programs that promote mental health literacy and stress management, productive coping, peer support and reflection, livelihood and well-being integration, and family resilience to strengthen the sustainability and well-being of small-scale fisherfolk communities.

Keywords: fisherfolk breadwinners, photovoice, challenges, coping strategies

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Fishing communities have long been recognized as essential to food security and the local economy. However, evidence suggests that these groups are increasingly burdened with stressors such as economic instability, and environmental hazards (Smith, Doe, & Johnson, 2018). In many small-scale fishing communities, fisherfolks are primarily responsible for the economic well-being of their families. This responsibility not only deepens their exposure to various stressors but also magnifies the psychological burden carried by these primary breadwinners. Despite the acknowledged importance of these communities, there exists a significant gap in the literature regarding their experiences, particularly the challenges they face and the coping strategies they devise to overcome them. Recognizing the impact of these responsibilities on well-being is essential, as it underscores the urgent need to investigate not only the physiological challenges these communities face but as well as their mental health implications.

Recent studies highlight the vulnerabilities of fisherfolk in coastal regions. Studies have documented the multifaceted challenges fisherfolks face, such as the effects of climate change, market instability, and shifting policy landscapes. These challenges not only disrupt economic stability but also have implications on their well-being (Nguyen & Roberts, 2018). While studies have highlighted the physical and economic hardships (Martines at al., 2019; Nguyen & Roberts 2018), there remains a limited exploration of how fisherfolk translate these experiences into adaptive coping strategies.

Although there is a growing body of literature examining the challenges facing coastal communities, the specific experiences of fisherfolk who assume the breadwinner role remain underexplored. Studies often prioritized the economic aspects of fishing communities, overlooking the individual stories that highlight how

people manage psychological and emotional challenges. (Williams, Garcia, & Patel, 2020; Jones & Brown, 2017). This economic focus has left a considerable gap in the literature concerning the lived experiences and coping strategies related to psychological, emotional, and social stressors among fisherfolk. Addressing this gap is essential to inform both academic inquiry and practical interventions designed to understand and support fisherfolk breadwinners in navigating their demanding social and economic roles.

By documenting challenges and adaptive behaviors through a Photovoice method, this study seeks to explore the challenges fisherfolk breadwinners face, including environmental adversity, economic pressures, and complex psychosocial stressors related to their breadwinning responsibilities. By foregrounding the voices of those directly impacted, the study aimed to contribute to a more holistic understanding of community resilience and inform policy initiatives tailored to address both the economic and emotional needs of fisherfolk communities.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of related literature examined the experiences of fisherfolk in the Philippines, focusing on their livelihood and access to support from government and NGOs. It explored psychosocial challenges such as poverty, occupational hazards, social exclusion, and their impact on mental health and family life. The review also highlighted coping mechanisms, including cultural practices, social support, and spirituality, as well as the psychological toll experienced by rural fishing communities.

Fisherfolk situations in the Philippines

Fisherfolk in the Philippines are among the most marginalized sectors, with many relying on small-scale fishing as their primary source of income. In the Philippines, small-scale fishermen represent a demographic with one of the highest rates of poverty incidence (Aguinaldo & Gomez, 2023). According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2023), fisherfolk consistently record among the highest, with a poverty rate of 30.6% in 2021.

Demographic studies revealed that fisherfolk communities face unstable income, low education levels, and limited access to alternative livelihoods. A study of Tadeo and Mendoza (2024) stated that Fishermen in the Philippines, especially in Rosario, Cavite, are mainly middle-aged men who frequently have limited educational backgrounds. They typically have between 9 to 15 years of experience in fishing and earn less than 5,000 pesos each month.

Similarly, in Occidental Mindoro, a survey of 356 registered fisherfolks revealed that most struggle with poverty, lack of training, and declining fish stocks (Asio et al., 2024). Moreover, the degradation of marine ecosystems and poor fisheries management have intensified fisherfolk hardships. Anticamara, Go, and Go (2016) found that coastal municipal fisheries in the Philippines have experienced significant spatio-temporal declines in fish stocks, leading to reduced catch and income for small-scale fishers, primarily due to overfishing, habitat degradation, and inadequate fisheries management. These environmental issues not only threaten marine biodiversity but also directly reduce the income potential for small-scale fishers who rely heavily on nearshore resources.

In response, the Philippine government and various non-governmental organizations have implemented programs to support fisherfolk. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has established Fisherfolk Marketing Cooperatives, which aim to eliminate middlemen and increase fisherfolk's bargaining power (Cooperative Development Authority, 2021). Additionally, NGOs like Rare Philippines have also launched community-based coastal resource management initiatives to empower local fishers to take part in conservation while ensuring sustainable yields (Rare Philippines, 2022). Furthermore, NGOs for Fisheries Reform (NFR) have been advocating for policy reforms to improve fisherfolk's access to resources and sustainable fishing practices

Psychosocial Challenges of Fisherfolk

Fisherfolk encounter a range of psychosocial challenges that deeply affect their daily lives and overall well-being. One of the most pressing issues is economic struggles, as many fisherfolk experience poverty and

unstable earnings caused by changing fish stocks, unpredictable market prices, and competition with commercial fishing (Hakai Magazine, 2021). Also, harsh weather conditions, rough seas, and the physical demands of fishing increase the likelihood of injuries and accidents, creating a stressful and dangerous work environment (Hermogeno & Reamon, 2023).

Factura et al. (2021) examined the socio-economic challenges affecting urban small-scale fisherfolk in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, highlighting issues such as economic instability, social marginalization, and occupational hazards. The same study posits that limited access to modern equipment and inadequate government support further exacerbate their financial difficulties, making it challenging to sustain fisherfolk's livelihood.

According to the research of FAO Fisheries (2023), fishing-dependent households around Laguna Lake in the Philippines highlights the economic challenges faced by these communities, which indicates that food expenses represent a considerable share of household budgets, and financial security is frequently reliant on public goods.

Marginalization of fisherfolk is also a complex issue shaped by socio-economic and environmental factors. The situation is further intensified by development projects, policy decisions, and external economic forces that favor industrial expansion while overlooking the needs and sustainability of traditional fishing communities. One study by Liu et al. (2024), examined the impact of photovoltaic (PV) projects on fishing communities. It revealed that while these projects were implemented to enhance local government revenue and mitigate climate change, it inadvertently reduced fishing grounds, limited access to traditional fishing areas, and altered aquatic ecosystems, affecting fish populations and catch rates. This posits conflict that while it advances renewable energy goals, it also significantly disrupted traditional fishing processes, leading to economic and social challenges for local fishers (Kapoor, 2024).

These certain challenges have heightened stress and uncertainty among fisherfolks, impacting their livelihoods and mental well-being. Studies highlight how economic instability, and environmental threats contribute to psychological distress among fishing communities. A study by Hermogeno and Reamon (2023) emphasized the mental health struggles of fisherfolk in Masinloc, and Zambales, revealing territorial conflicts and security threats causing anxiety and emotional distress. Similarly, Andrews et al. (2021) investigate the psychosocial aspects of the livelihood behaviors of fisherfolk, highlighting the importance of emotional resilience in managing economic uncertainty.

Moreover, one study conducted by Balaan (2021) revealed that disruptions to livelihoods resulting from climate change and extreme weather events worsen the vulnerability of fisherfolk. Fishermen in Bacacay, Albay, are forced to adjust to uncertain conditions due to frequent typhoons, which frequently results in increased stress and financial insecurity, as recorded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020).

Fisherfolk face economic instability, and environmental threats leading to stress and uncertainty. Despite these challenges, they adapt, advocate for their rights, and work to sustain their communities and livelihoods.

Coping Mechanisms

Coastal fishing communities employ various coping mechanisms to navigate economic and environmental vulnerabilities. A study revealed how coastal communities rely on collective practices to sustain their livelihoods (Cadiz et al., 2024). All family members, including women, children, and the elderly participate in various roles like fishing, fish processing, mending nets, and selling. For instance, younger men fish in the sea, while older men repair equipment or boats at home, and women of all ages coordinate the salting, drying, and selling of fish. This division of labor allows the household to function effectively as a small economic unit, improving efficiency by assigning tasks based on age and gender.

In addition, Kasim et al. (2021) state that older women and daughters-in-law often work together on tasks like fish preservation and selling, facilitating both economic productivity and informal mentoring. The tasks are not only divided by age or gender but also strategically distributed to keep all members involved and socially connected. This setup allows fishermen to effectively manage and cope, reaching their target quotas easier, and

fosters skill transfer, particularly from older members to younger ones. These contributions are essential for positive outcomes, particularly in times of uncertain fishing yields.

Torreón and Tiempo (2021) revealed how fishing rituals, passed down through generations, provide a sense of security and continuity, helping fisherfolk adapt to uncertainties in their trade. Rituals that strengthen social cohesiveness and spiritual resilience include collective fishing rites and offerings to the sea deities. Similarly, in India, fisherfolks regularly engage in collective observances such as seasonal offerings to sea deities, collective prayers for safe voyages, and shared meals during religious feasts (Reddy, 2020).

In the Philippines, religious practices and communal rituals, such as family gatherings during Christian feasts, serve as important occasions for reinforcing familial bonds and collective identity (Ballaret, 2024). These non-economic shared practices help strengthen social bonds, promote cooperation, and reduce internal conflict in fisherfolks' family settings. These findings underscore the importance of preserving cultural traditions and fostering strong social support systems to enhance the sustainability of fishing communities.

Breadwinner Burden in Rural Communities

The burden of being a primary breadwinner in rural fishing communities entails economic instability, emotional stress, and deeply embedded cultural pressures. Fisherfolk communities often face fluctuating incomes due to declining fish stocks, weather unpredictability, and market volatility. The reported high poverty incidence among fisherfolk (PSA, 2023) reflects the economic vulnerability faced by primary providers. According to Ayoob and Fowsar (2020), financial providers in fishing-dependent households face chronic income insecurity, which contributes to psychological strain and mental fatigue.

Nene et al. (2023) found that in third-class municipalities, breadwinners experience heightened psychological distress due to unmet family needs, compounded by poor access to mental health services and limited emotional outlets.

Furthermore, in Filipino culture, principles such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *pakikisama* (harmonious interpersonal relations) further complicate the psychological burden of being the breadwinner (Cabrera, 2025). Liboon et al. (2024) discussed how these values reinforce self-sacrifice among breadwinners, forcing them to carry the burden and prioritize family welfare over personal well-being. Macaranas and Macaranas (2017) noted that breadwinners frequently dismiss their emotions by stating, "*Okay lang, para sa pamilya,*" in order to prioritize the needs of their family. This emotional tolerance underscores the psychological burden borne by breadwinners, who prioritize family needs over personal well-being. While family unity and communal living offer emotional support, it also reduces the autonomy of breadwinners, making them prone to emotional exhaustion.

The role of breadwinners in fisherfolk households thus extends far beyond economic contribution. Their psychological well-being is deeply intertwined with economic stress and sociocultural expectations. Addressing these challenges necessitates targeted interventions, including economic support, mental health accessibility, and policies that promote financial resilience.

The existing literature focuses mainly on economic and environmental issues, with fewer studies examining the deeper psychosocial and mental health dimensions of fisherfolk experiences. Additionally, most interventions are centered on livelihood programs, resource management, and conservation, leaving gaps in policies and programs that address emotional well-being, social support systems, and mental health services tailored to rural fishing communities. Addressing this gap is crucial in creating holistic and inclusive interventions that not only strengthen livelihood security but also promote mental health and community resilience.

Theoretical Background

This study aimed to explore the challenges and coping strategies of fisherfolk households. To understand these experiences, the study was anchored on two theoretical frameworks, namely the Stress and Coping Theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Stress and Coping Theory

The Stress and Coping Theory, developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), explains how individuals assess and respond to stress through cognitive appraisal and coping mechanisms. Stress occurs when someone feels threatened, challenged, or harmed by an occurrence, which leads them to different coping mechanisms for them to be able to deal with the challenges they face. Over time, Folkman refined the theory to incorporate positive emotions, recognizing their role in resilience and adaptation during stressful experiences (Biggs et al., 2017; Surachman & Almeida, 2018).

This theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how fisherfolk navigate the psychological and emotional challenges posed by economic instability, environmental hazards, and social marginalization. Given the dangerous nature of fishing livelihoods, fisherfolks usually use problem-focused coping strategies, such as changing their sources of income, learning new fishing techniques, or requesting financial aid to lessen financial strains, because fishing livelihoods are inherently unstable (Macusi et al., 2024). Additionally, emotion-focused coping, including reliance on social support networks and spiritual practices, helps them manage the psychological burden of uncertainty and financial strain (Garay et al., 2024).

By integrating Stress and Coping Theory into the study of the experiences of fisherfolk breadwinners, researchers can better understand how these individuals perceive, respond to, and adapt to their challenges. This theoretical lens not only validates their struggles but also informs policy interventions aimed at strengthening mental health support, economic stability, and community resilience within fishing communities.

Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), explains human development as influenced by multiple layers of environmental systems. This theory emphasizes that individuals do not develop in isolation but are shaped by interactions within their surroundings, ranging from immediate relationships to broader societal structures. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner (2000), human experiences are shaped by five interrelated systems that influence how individuals interact with their environment.

In the context of fisherfolk communities, the microsystem involves their immediate interactions with family members, fellow fishers, and community networks, which directly shape their daily routines and livelihood decisions. The mesosystem reflects the connections between these microsystems, such as how family responsibilities, community organizations, and local livelihood programs intersect to influence their economic activities. The exosystem includes external factors like government policies, NGO interventions, and market conditions, which indirectly affect fisherfolk's income and access to resources. The macrosystem encompasses broader cultural beliefs, traditional fishing practices, and societal expectations that guide their values and coping behaviors. Lastly, the chronosystem captures how historical events, climate changes, and life transitions, such as declining fish stocks or seasonal shifts, affect their long-term livelihood and well-being. This framework helps contextualize how multiple layers of influence shape the lived experiences of fisherfolk over time.

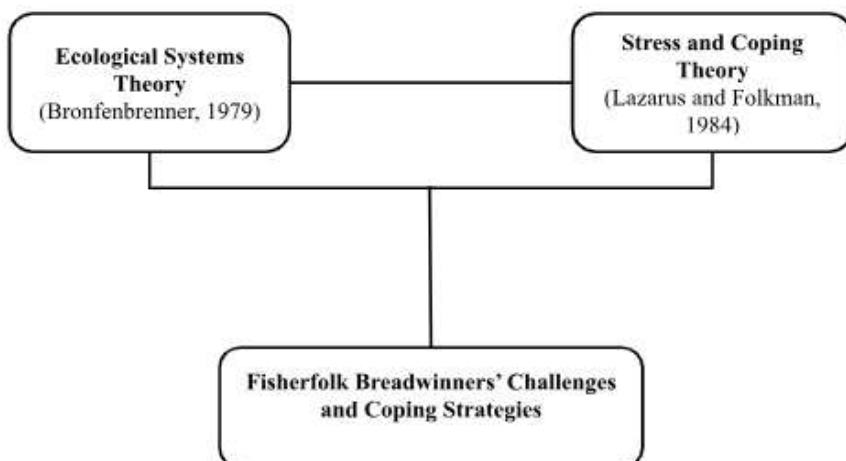


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the experiences of fisherfolk breadwinners in Langtad, Argao, Cebu, during the calendar year 2025 as the basis for an action plan proposal to be crafted.

It will specifically answer the following:

1. What are the challenges encountered by the participants relevant to their well-being?
2. What are the coping strategies adopted by the participants?
3. What proposal can be crafted based on the findings of the study?

Definition of Terms

Breadwinner - a person who earns money to support their family, often providing the primary or sole financial income who plays a crucial role in ensuring economic stability and meeting essential needs.

Coping Mechanism - strategies individuals use to manage stress, emotions, and challenging situations. These techniques can be adaptive (healthy) or maladaptive (unhealthy), depending on their impact on well-being.

Fisherfolks - individuals who engaged in fishing as their primary livelihood.

Well-being - a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. Well-being is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. In short, wellbeing could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.

Psychosocial Challenges - refer to difficulties that arise from the interaction between psychological factors (such as emotions, thoughts, and mental health) and social conditions (such as relationships, community dynamics, and societal expectations).

Photovoice Method - a qualitative research method that empowers individuals, especially marginalized communities, to document and share their experiences through photography.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents and discusses the methodologies employed in conducting this study. This chapter specifically includes the research design, participants, setting, instruments, procedure, data collection, data analysis, data management, ethical considerations, and reflexivity.

Research Design

This study employed a PhotoVoice Design- a methodology that encourages participants to express their experiences through photography and narrative. Through this design, the participants not only documented the physical and social environments where they function but also encouraged dialogue and self-awareness reflecting the emotional and psychological dimensions of their experiences.

This methodology was specifically used to investigate the challenges and coping strategies of fisherfolk breadwinners, while highlighting resilience and adaptive strategies developed in response to adversity. By employing the PhotoVoice design, this study aimed to provide answers to the research questions through a participatory methodology while contributing to community empowerment.

Research Participants

This study aimed to explore the experienced challenges and devised coping strategies of fisherfolk in Langtad, Argao, Cebu. It aimed to understand the unique experiences in the aforementioned community, focusing on the experiences of the breadwinners. Four fisherfolk breadwinners were selected through a purposive sampling

method. While the number is small, qualitative depth and contextual richness were prioritized over numeral representation.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the participants met the specific criteria set for this study. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) being the primary breadwinners of their families, with no other source of income aside from fishing, (2) having at least five years of fishing experience, and (3) their households having at least five children. These criteria were designed to focus on individuals who carry the greatest responsibility in sustaining their families' daily needs, making their experiences more reflective of the economic and emotional realities faced by many fishing communities.

This strategic method not only aligned the sample with the study's research objectives but also enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collected. By targeting individuals based on clearly established parameters, the study was positioned to yield credible findings thereby enhancing the applicability of the research findings to the real-life scenario of the phenomena under investigation.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in the fishing communities of Langtad, Argao, Cebu. The decision to choose Barangay Langtad was based on its favorable coastal geography, characterized by a significant portion of its land being adjacent to the sea. This proximity to the marine environment supports the prevalence of small-scale fishing. Given that most families in this barangay depend on fishing as their main source of income, this environment provides a clear and concentrated context for examining the dynamics of coastal livelihoods.

Furthermore, by selecting a research site with a dense population of fisherfolk, the study ensured that the community's experiences and viewpoints are well-represented. A concentrated population of individuals engaged in fishing allows for in-depth exploration of the challenges and coping strategies specific to small-scale fishing communities.

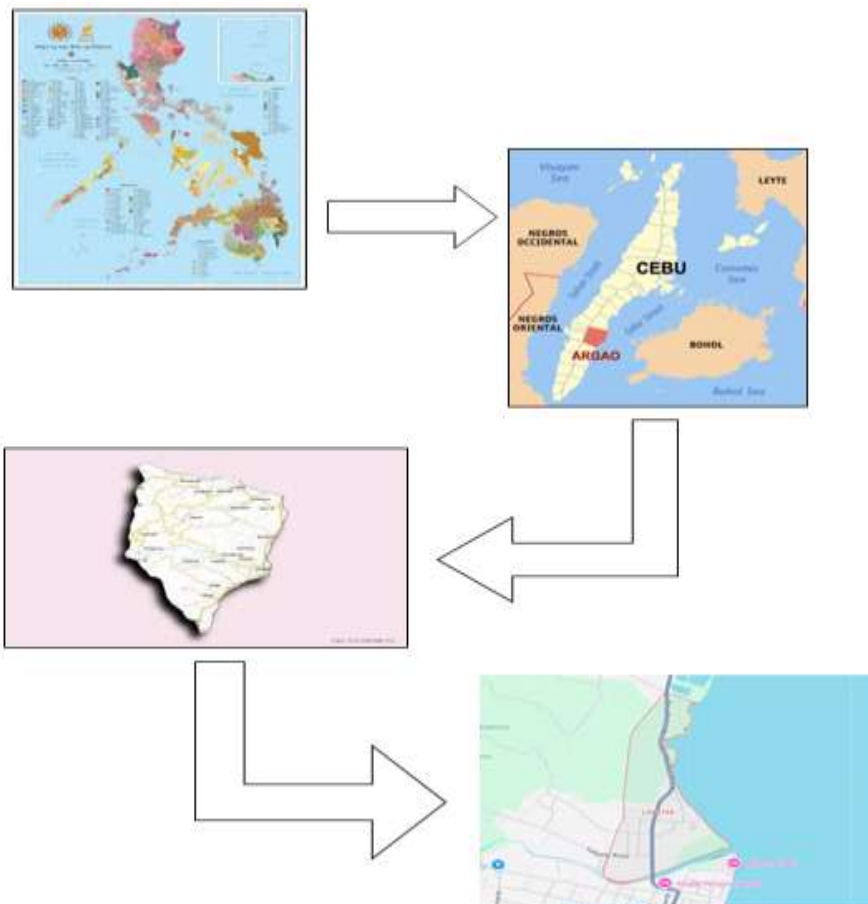


Figure 2 Map of the Research Setting

Research Instrument

This study utilized the photovoice *SHOWED* framework (Werremeyer et al.,2020) as a structured tool to guide participants during discussions about the photos they capture, which relate to their experienced challenges and coping strategies. This framework was first developed by Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988), a mnemonic that will serve as a guide for the common set of questions used to prompt participants to discuss what they see in each image, what is happening, how the image relates to their personal experiences, how the image educates others, and what can be done in response to the situation (Wang, 1999, as cited in Rai et al.,2023).

By employing the *SHOWED* framework, the study created a consistent framework for conversation that ensured all participants address similar points, such as the context of the image, the challenges depicted, and the strategies they use to cope with these challenges. This uniformity is essential for comparing and evaluating responses within the group. It allowed the researchers to systematically gather data that is rich in detail and grounded in the real-life experiences of the participants. This methodology also improved the reliability and depth of the qualitative data gathered, ultimately aiding a rich understanding of how fisherfolk breadwinners perceive and manage the challenges they encountered.

Procedures

Pre Data Gathering

During the conduct of the study, the researchers initially sent a letter of intent to the barangay chairperson of Langtad, Argao, Cebu, asking for permission and informing him of the study's purpose and objectives. This step ensured that the purpose and objectives of the study were well communicated, and all concerned individuals were equipped with the right information.

After gaining the approval of the barangay official, the researchers proceeded to the identification of the participants through a purposive sampling process. Selected participants were briefed about the nature of the study and were asked to sign an informed consent form. Once signed, the researchers proceeded to the actual data-gathering phase wherein necessary information was collected.

Actual Data Gathering

After their approval, the participants were asked to document the challenges they faced, through taking photos. Photos may be symbolic or actual events. The participants were also asked to take photos that showcased their coping strategies in response to their faced adversities. The photos were submitted via Facebook Messenger.

After the gathering and submission of photos, the participants were gathered at the barangay hall, where a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted. During this session, the researchers audio recorded the participants' responses to ensure accurate transcription and took simultaneous field notes to capture contextual observations and non-verbal cues. The participants were asked to group the photos according to their perceived meaning. The participants were also asked questions based on the *SHOWED* framework. The gathered data was used to answer the research questions presented in this study.

Post Data Gathering

Upon the conclusion of the FGD, the participants were given the chance to ask additional questions and raise their concerns, especially in relevance to their participation in the study and to the research study itself. After the session, the researchers expressed their gratitude by providing the participants with goods as a token of appreciation for their valuable time and insights. Gathered data was then subjected to data analysis using the Tsang's Framework of data analysis.

Data Analysis

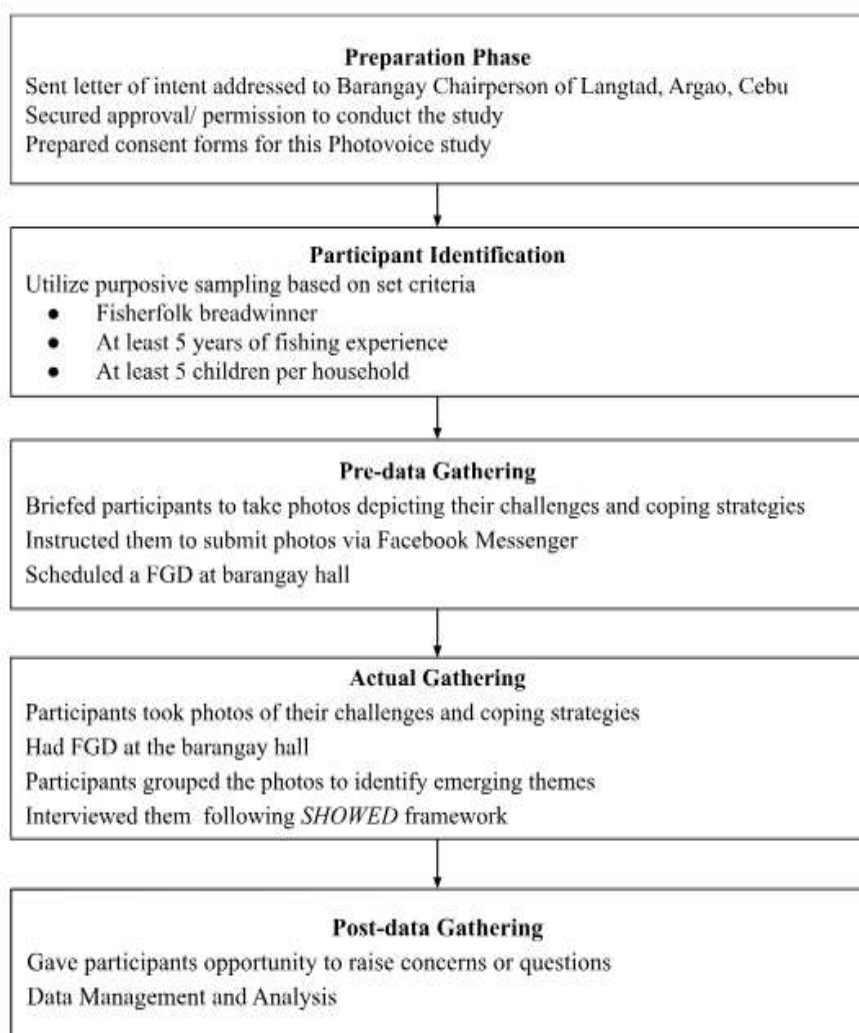
After the data gathering procedure, relevant information was extracted through Tsang's Analysis framework. By engaging with this framework, the study systematically sorted through images and visual narratives,

isolating salient themes, identifying recurring patterns, and exploring the challenges and coping strategies conveyed through the photos and the participants' narratives.

This meticulous process guaranteed that the lived experiences and personal insights of the fisherfolk breadwinners were thoroughly recognized, converting subjective visual components into substantial, analyzable data. This methodology not only boosted the credibility and depth of the research outcomes but also helped in fostering a more profound understanding of the social realities and individual viewpoints that were used in fulfilling the goals and objectives of this study.

Data Management

To safeguard the safety and privacy of the research participants, the researchers ensured that all collected data and information were kept with utmost confidentiality. Upon the completion of the study, sensitive information, including the participants' profile, will be published with anonymity, thereby shielding them from any potential degradation, stigma, or abuse. To further ensure confidentiality, the researchers will permanently delete all data and other documents that could directly link to the participants. This approach to data management guaranteed that participants' information remains confidential and protected throughout the course of the study.



Ethical Considerations

Respect for Persons

To uphold the principle of respect for persons, a comprehensive and ongoing informed consent process was implemented. Participants were provided with a written informed consent form, which was also explained

verbally in Cebuano to ensure full comprehension regardless of educational background. The consent process clearly outlined the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and participants' rights.

Participation was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed that they could decline participation or withdraw at any stage of the study without penalty. Consent was not treated as a one-time procedure but was reaffirmed throughout all phases of data collection, including pre-gathering, photo submission, and focus group discussions.

Given the use of Photovoice, image-specific consent was also secured. Participants retained the right to review, approve, or withdraw any photographs they submitted prior to analysis and dissemination. They were further instructed to obtain permission before capturing images involving other individuals, ensuring respect for third-party autonomy.

Benevolence and Non-malevolence

The study was designed to minimize potential harm and maximize participant well-being. Participants were encouraged to share only experiences they felt comfortable disclosing and were reminded that they could pause, skip questions, or discontinue participation at any time.

Considering the reflective nature of Photovoice, participants were oriented on ethical and responsible photography practices, including avoiding images that may be harmful, exploitative, or invasive of others' dignity and privacy. Emotional risks were mitigated by allowing participants full control over the depth of their narratives and by providing opportunities for debriefing after data collection sessions.

Justice

The principle of justice was ensured through the fair and appropriate selection of participants using purposive sampling based on clearly defined criteria relevant to the study. No individual was coerced into participation, and no qualified participant was excluded without valid reason.

Participants were provided with modest tokens of appreciation (e.g., snacks and basic goods) as a gesture of gratitude. These were carefully considered to avoid undue influence or coercion, ensuring that participation remained entirely voluntary.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Strict measures were implemented to protect participants' privacy, particularly due to the inclusion of visual data. All identifying information was removed from transcripts and records, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Photographic data underwent careful screening to ensure that identifiable features (e.g., faces, specific locations, or personal markers) were either excluded, anonymized, or used only with explicit consent. Participants were explicitly instructed to avoid capturing images that could reveal the identities of others without permission.

All data, including audio recordings, photographs, and transcripts, were stored in password-protected and secure digital devices, accessible only to the research team. A data management protocol was followed, wherein all identifiable data will be permanently deleted after the completion of the study.

Prior to dissemination, participants were given the opportunity to review and approve the photographs and accompanying narratives to be included in the final analysis, ensuring accurate representation and respect for their perspectives.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and integrity of the research, the study adhered to the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was established through participant validation (member checking), where participants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of interpretations.

Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through systematic documentation, including field notes and transparent data analysis procedures. This ensured that findings were grounded in participants' accounts rather than researcher bias.

Transferability was supported by providing rich, contextual descriptions of the participants' experiences, allowing other researchers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. These measures collectively ensured that the study maintained both ethical integrity and methodological rigor.

Reflexivity

In conducting this research on experienced challenges and coping strategies of fisherfolk breadwinners, it is crucial to recognize the positionality of the researchers and the potential influences of the researchers' backgrounds, biases, and assumptions may have on the study. As researchers, it was acknowledged that own perspectives, experiences, and sociocultural backgrounds shape the way the topic was crafted and interpreted.

The researchers' positionality—including academic background in Psychology and behavioral sciences—provides a framework for analyzing interactions, well-being, and social structures. However, the researchers remained mindful that theoretical perspectives and psychological constructs may not fully encapsulate the perception and experiences of fisherfolk families. The researchers understood that backgrounds may differ significantly from those of the participants, potentially influencing how data on challenges and coping strategies was interpreted.

A key challenge in this study is the insider-outsider dynamic. While the researchers may share certain cultural values with the participants, the researchers are still outsiders to their daily realities. The understanding of the experiences of fisherfolk breadwinners is shaped by secondary sources such as literature and statistical data, which may not fully capture the nuances of their perception and experiences. To mitigate this, the researchers commit to engaging deeply with the participants through active listening, and open-ended interviews. The researchers aimed to let participants' voices guide the narrative rather than imposing external interpretations.

Moreover, ethical reflexivity plays a crucial role in this study. The researchers are aware of the power dynamics inherent in research—where participants may perceive the researchers as experts or more knowledgeable. To foster an ethical and respectful research environment, the researchers emphasized collaborative knowledge production, ensuring that the participants feel empowered to share their experiences authentically. The researchers also acknowledged the responsibility to represent their narratives with integrity and accuracy while avoiding misinterpretation or the reinforcement of stereotypes.

Furthermore, the impact of biases is another consideration. The researchers may hold preconceived notions regarding the challenges and coping strategies of fisherfolk households. To minimize these potential biases, individuals involved in this study had discussions within the research team to ensure that diverse perspectives were considered, creating a more balanced and holistic representation of findings.

Lastly, the researchers approach to data interpretation was rooted in contextual sensitivity. Fisherfolk communities operate with unique social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape their experiences. Conclusions drawn from this study were examined within these contexts rather than generalized beyond them. By maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process, the researchers aimed to ensure that the findings were grounded in authentic participant experiences, ethically responsible, and culturally respectful data-gathering processes.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the research, centering on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected from the participants. It delves into the themes and patterns that emerged throughout the study, highlighting the challenges and coping strategies experienced by fisherfolk in relation to the research objectives. Through careful examination and interpretation, this aims to provide a deeper understanding of the key issues explored, offering insights that connect the participants' narratives with broader social and

contextual implications. Additionally, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive and meaningful overview of the data, serving as the foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the previous chapter.

Challenges Experienced by Fisherfolk

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges experienced by the participants in this study. It highlights the types of challenges deduced through cross-comparison analysis between the participants' and the researchers' independent analysis. Furthermore, Table 1 allows for a clearer and easier understanding of the participants' experiences. The information presented in this table is crucial for a deeper analysis and interpretation of the gathered data, relating to the challenges experienced by fisherfolk breadwinners, eventually contributing to the development of appropriate intervention strategies and support mechanisms.

Table 1 Challenges Experienced by Fisherfolk

| PARTICIPANTS' ANALYSIS | CROSS-COMPARISON ANALYSIS | RESEARCHERS' ANALYSIS |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| Unavailability of funds to purchase gasoline | Resource Challenges | High cost of fuel |
| Decline in fish catch | Seasonal Challenges | Reduced fishing yield |
| Insufficient food supply | Livelihood Challenges | Lack of income to purchase enough basic necessities |
| High cost of fishing equipment | Economic Challenges | Financial strain caused by costly fishing necessities |

Four (4) themes emerged from the participants' analysis of their grouped images. These themes include unavailability of funds to purchase gasoline, decline in fish catch, insufficient food supply, and high cost of fishing equipment. These themes reflect the challenges experienced by fisherfolk breadwinners as they face daily struggles tied to their fishing activities. Participants highlighted the unavailability of funds to purchase gasoline as one of their most pressing concerns, as it directly hinders their fishing ability. Without fuel, they are forced to fish closer to shore where fish are scarce, resulting in smaller catches and reduced income. The decline in fish catch further worsen their situation, leading to food insecurity as families struggle to put meals on the table. The participants also shared how the rising costs of fishing equipment, such as nets, baits, and boat repairs, worsen their financial instability, making it difficult to sustain their livelihood.

Meanwhile, after the researchers' analysis, four (4) themes were drawn, namely, high cost of fuel, reduced fishing yield, lack of income to purchase enough basic necessities, and financial strain caused by costly fishing necessities. Unlike the participants' firsthand narratives, the researchers' interpretation focused on the underlying structures and patterns that shape these experiences. High cost of fuel is not only a logistical problem but also reflects broader economic vulnerability, where unstable income and lack of financial resources restrict mobility and productivity. Reduced fishing yield is another concern, affecting both immediate household consumption and long-term livelihood stability. Lack of income to purchase enough basic necessities highlights how fluctuating income from fishing impacts food security and household welfare. Lastly, financial strain caused by costly fishing necessities points to livelihood instability, where high costs and maintenance needs continually strain already limited financial resources.

The cross-comparison analysis of the participants' and researchers' independent analysis led to the emergence of four (4) overarching themes: resource challenges, seasonal challenges, livelihood challenges, and economic challenges. These themes represent the intersection between lived experiences and analytical interpretation. Resource challenges capture how lack of essential materials, particularly fuel, limits fishing capacity and mobility (Asio et al., 2024). Seasonal challenges reflect how unpredictable weather conditions and environmental factors shape fishing productivity and income (Balaan, 2021). Livelihood challenges reveal how declining catches and limited resources result in food insecurity and daily struggles to meet basic needs (ICSF, 2023). Finally, economic challenges encompass the heavy financial burden of sustaining fishing activities and maintaining equipment amidst unstable income (Umengan & Maderazo, 2023).

The findings presented in Table 1 provide the basis for a deeper visual interpretation of the fisherfolk's lived realities. To provide a more comprehensive view, a series of photographs were examined to visually represent the identified themes. The succeeding section presents photographs that correspond to each of the four major themes—resource, seasonal, livelihood, and economic challenges. Each photo is accompanied by detailed explanations derived from both participant narratives and researcher analyses, highlighting how these challenges are manifested in everyday fishing practices, household conditions, and community life.

Resource Challenges



All seven coders reached full agreement that Photo 1 represents the resource challenge among fisherfolk, specifically, the unaffordability of fuel. The intercoder consensus strengthened the validity of this theme, reflecting alignment between lived experiences and analytical interpretation.

The photo depicts an empty fuel container, locally referred to as “*sudlanan sa gasolina*,” which all coders identified as a symbolic representation of *resource challenges* experienced by small-scale fisherfolk. Through intercoder consensus, this image was unanimously interpreted as capturing the economic and physical constraints resulting from the unaffordability of fuel, a vital resource that powers motorized boats and enables access to productive fishing areas. Without adequate fuel, mobility is restricted, thereby reducing fishing yield and household income.

Participants vividly described how fuel scarcity directly affects their mobility and livelihood. As Participant A shared, “No gasoline, we can’t go fishing” (*Walay gasolina, dili mi makapanagat*) and “When we fish without gasoline, we have to paddle—it’s heavy, and we can’t reach far” (*Og managat mi nga wala mi gasolina, magbugsay mi pero bug-at kaayo, dili mi kaabot sa layo*). These statements illustrate the immediate link between fuel shortage and livelihood disruption. The absence of gasoline not only limits their productivity but also increases physical exhaustion, reducing both time and energy for other livelihood activities. Participants also emphasized the cyclical nature of their struggle: “No money, so we can’t buy gasoline” (*Walay kwarta, dili mi makapalit ug gasolina*) and “We catch only a little, just enough to eat, nothing left to sell for fuel” (*Gamay ra ang kuha, pang-sud-an nalang, wala nay ikabaligya ipalit ug gasolina*). These accounts reveal a continuous cycle of poverty—no fuel means no fishing, no catch means no income, and no income means no funds to purchase fuel.

From the lens of Stress and Coping Theory (1984), the unaffordability of fuel functions as a chronic stressor that threatens both livelihood security and psychological well-being. Fisherfolk engage in various coping strategies such as paddling to nearby areas or finding alternative income sources to adapt to these stress-inducing conditions. These narratives reflect both problem-focused coping through practical adjustments, and emotion-focused coping through persistence and cultural values (*pagpaningkamot*), which provide emotional strength in times of hardship.

Moreover, the researchers’ interpretation reinforced these experiences, highlighting that the unaffordability of fuel reflects a systemic economic vulnerability among small-scale fisherfolk. The high cost of gasoline forces them to skip fishing days, directly reducing their daily income and compromising their families’ food security. Observations from field visits confirmed that fuel shortages have become a persistent constraint that affects both livelihood stability and community resilience. This finding aligns with the Langkit Journal (2023), which identified fuel scarcity as a major barrier to sustainable fishing, particularly in remote coastal areas. Similarly, Macusi et al. (2022) emphasized that limited fuel access weakens both productivity and resilience in small-scale fisheries, while Owusu (2025) found that increasing fuel prices contribute not only to financial hardship but also to emotional and psychological distress among fisherfolk breadwinners.

Furthermore, participants also expressed that this image can serve as an educational symbol for others to understand their struggles. As one remarked, “This picture can show others that gasoline is very expensive, and for small-scale fishers like us, it’s hard to afford” (*Kani nga picture, magamit ni aron mahibaw-an sa uban nga mahal gyud kaayo ang gasolina, unya kami nga gagmay nga mangisda, maglisod na og pamalit*). Their reflections reveal a social divide between small-scale fishers and larger commercial operators who can better adjust to the rising cost of resources.

Despite these hardships, participants demonstrated persistence and adaptability. Participant D shared, “We strive to raise poultry so we have something to sell and buy gasoline” (*Maningkamot nga makabuhi-buhi aron naay mabaligya palit og gasolina*). Researchers viewed this as an expression of *pagpaningkamot* (perseverance), a deeply rooted cultural value among fisherfolk. This act of resilience underscores their determination to sustain their livelihood and fulfill their responsibilities as family providers despite constant financial strain.

These challenges show how resource scarcity affects more than just economic productivity, it also impacts community resilience, cultural continuity, and overall well-being. Addressing these issues requires concrete and inclusive support systems that ensure affordable access to essential fishing resources, particularly fuel. Through better resource management and support, fisherfolk breadwinners can sustain their livelihood, provide for their families, strengthen their communities, and preserve their cultural identity for generations to come.

Seasonal Challenges



The photos depict one of the most difficult realities among small-scale fisherfolk, the absence of catch. With a level of agreement of 86% among the 4 participants and 3 researchers, these photos were commonly interpreted as representing the seasonal challenges that significantly affect fishing productivity. It symbolizes not only economic loss but also the emotional strain of returning home empty-handed after long hours at sea.

Moreover, participants explained that unpredictable weather and sea conditions often prevent them from fishing safely or reduce their catch. As Participant B stated, “One of the causes is the storm” (*Usa sa hinungdan kanang bagyo*), while Participant C added, “During windy season” (*Kanang ting hangin*). Participant D mentioned, “Strong waves” (*Balod*), and Participant A reflected, “There are times when fish just won’t eat the bait” (*Naa gyuy panahon nga dili gyud mokaon ang mga isda sa paon*). These accounts emphasize their dependence on the ever-changing temperament of the sea, where natural conditions dictate whether a day’s labor brings food or hunger. From an Ecosystem Theory (1979) perspective, these experiences highlight how human livelihood systems are deeply intertwined with environmental forces; disturbances in one part of the ecological system such as weather or marine conditions, directly affect the socio-economic stability of coastal households.

Participants further shared that the “emptiness of the ice bucket” mirrors the emptiness of their household pantry. As one expressed, “We have nothing to buy rice, no allowance for our children, and no money to buy fuel” (*Wala mi ikapalit ug bugas, walay ikapabalon sa estudyante, ug walay ikapalit ug gasolina*). This illustrates how even a single day without catch can immediately disrupt their family’s sustenance. Researchers supported this observation, noting that the absence of fish reflects not only environmental unpredictability but also the fragility of rural coastal economies. The interplay of storms, strong winds, and declining fish stocks traps fisherfolk in a cycle of income instability and food insecurity.

Beyond weather-related issues, participants pointed out that market conditions also compound their struggles. Even when catches are good, the prices remain low. Participant C expressed, “Fishing is really not easy. We depend on the weather, and there are times when even if our fish is very cheap, we’re still told it’s expensive.

We're only trying to make a living" (*Ang panagat dili gyud lalim. Mag-agad man mi sa dagan sa panahon, unya naa pay panahon nga bisan barato na kaayo amoang isda, ingnon pa gyud mi nga mahal. Igo ra man unta mi nga nanginabuhi*). This sentiment reveals the deeper socio-economic imbalance that renders small-scale fishers vulnerable to both natural and market forces.

Despite these adversities, the participants exhibited remarkable adaptability. Participant A shared, "We must really find a way. For example, if you don't have a hook and line, we'll go for the net" (*Mangita gyud og paagi. Pananglitan wala ka sa undak, ari ta sa pukot*). Participant B added, "Fishing has many different ways; if we can't catch with one method, we'll use another" (*Lain-lain og paagi man ang panagat, kung dili makakuha sa usa ka paagi, moadto sa lain nga pamaagi*). These statements reflect creativity and resilience as fisherfolk shift between fishing methods to adapt to unpredictable environmental conditions. Through the lens of Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory (1984), these adaptive responses can be seen as problem-focused coping strategies such as practical adjustments that allow them to regain a sense of control amid uncontrollable environmental stressors.

Furthermore, the researchers' interpretation complemented these narratives, highlighting how seasonal challenges exacerbate the vulnerability of small-scale fisheries. They observed that recurring bad weather, coastal degradation, and declining fish populations have disrupted traditional fishing cycles, forcing many to reconsider or diversify their livelihood strategies. Supporting this, Martin (2025) found that seasonal and climatic variations significantly influence fish distribution and catch rates, while Anticamara, Go, and Go (2016) documented declining fish stocks in Philippine coastal waters due to overfishing, habitat loss, and inadequate resource management. Similarly, Mendoza et al. (2022) and UPV-PJSSH (2021) noted that small-scale fishers exhibit moderate sensitivity and low adaptive capacity to fisheries decline, largely because of limited resources and dependence on traditional methods.

Both participants and researchers agreed that the seasonal challenges reflected in Photo 2 extend beyond mere fluctuations in weather—they represent a structural threat to livelihood stability and well-being. These conditions not only disrupt daily income but also affect psychological health, household dynamics, and food security. The 86% level of agreement reflects a shared recognition of the theme, with slight differences in emphasis: participants focused on lived hardship and immediate loss, while researchers emphasized environmental and systemic causes.

Seasonal challenges emphasize the vulnerability of small-scale fisheries to natural and environmental forces beyond their control. Addressing these concerns requires adaptive strategies and stronger support systems to help fishing communities cope with unpredictable weather and declining fish availability. By ensuring sustainable practices and community centered solutions, fisherfolk breadwinners can be better equipped to face seasonal challenges and continue their livelihood with greater security and resilience.

Livelihood Challenges



These photos powerfully represent the persistent food scarcity that mirrors the economic vulnerability of families whose daily sustenance depends solely on fishing. The participants' statements, "There's a pot but nothing in it" (*Naay kaldero pero walay sulod*), "Nothing to cook" (*Walay ikalung-ag*), and "No viand" (*Walay sud-an*), capture the painful reality of deprivation and hunger that many coastal households endure when the sea yields little to no catch.

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants and researchers, this photo was interpreted as a strong representation of livelihood challenges and the cyclical relationship between low catch, unstable income, and food insufficiency. The participants explained that their access to food is directly tied to the success or failure of their fishing activities. When fishing yields are poor, meals become uncertain, reduced, or entirely absent. This recurring condition not only affects their nutrition but also their emotional well-being and their ability to provide for their children's educational and daily needs.

Participants further explained that this challenge often stems from the instability of fishing income. As one participant reflected, "Because there is no catch, there is no money, so there is nothing to buy" (*Tungod kay walay kuha, walay kwarta, walay ikapalit*). This statement highlights the vicious cycle of poverty that traps many fishing households: no catch means no income, and no income means no food. Such experiences affirm the findings of FAO Fisheries (2023), which reported that most fisherfolk households allocate a significant portion of their income to food, making them highly vulnerable to hunger during lean seasons.

Additionally, the lack of stable income also brings emotional and psychological strain to families, especially to breadwinners. As Andrews et al. (2021) noted, these conditions require emotional resilience as families navigate uncertainty, worry, and exhaustion brought by their unstable source of living. These struggles highlight that livelihood insecurity is not only an economic issue but also a human one, affecting health, well-being, and dignity.

Despite these difficulties, the participants also displayed remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. They shared practical coping strategies such as raising livestock and cultivating backyard gardens for subsistence. Participant C remarked, "It's really an advantage if you have livestock, like chickens, because we have something to sell" (*Bintaha gyud ug naa kay mga buhi, mga manok, kay naa tay mabaligya*), while Participant A emphasized, "Those vegetables as well, that FAITH or Food Always In The Home, because in case there is no food, there is something to harvest" (*Kana pud nga mga tanom, kanang FAITH o Food Always In The Home, kay in case kung walay pagkaon, naa ray makuha*).

These adaptive practices underscore the resilience of fisherfolk families, who make use of available natural and domestic resources to mitigate the impact of hunger and economic instability. These exemplify the application of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory, which explains how individuals manage stress through problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms. The fisherfolk's actions such as diversifying food sources, engaging in home-based food production, and maintaining optimism despite scarcity, reflecting problem-focused coping, where they take concrete steps to alter or manage the stressful situation.

Overall, the unanimous agreement among participants and researchers reinforces that livelihood insecurity is not merely an economic problem but also a human and psychosocial concern, affecting the health, dignity, and overall well-being of fisherfolk families. This finding calls for sustainable interventions that extend beyond short-term aid—programs that support alternative livelihoods, food security, and income stability to help fisherfolk achieve greater economic resilience and quality of life.

Economic Challenges



The photos depict worn out fishing nets and pumpboats with visible damage and peeling paint, symbolizing economic challenges experienced by small-scale fisherfolk whose livelihoods depend heavily on the condition

and maintenance of their fishing equipment. This captures how the deterioration of essential tools directly translates to income loss and instability. As participants expressed, “This is our main source of income, fishing” (*Mao ni ang amoang main source of income, panagat*), underscoring the critical role of boats and gear in their survival.

With a level of agreement of 71.43% among the participants and researchers, this photo was interpreted as representing the economic challenges faced by fisherfolk breadwinners. Participants consistently emphasized that the rising costs of equipment, bait, and repairs have made sustaining their livelihood increasingly difficult. As Participant B noted, “The bait is really expensive” (*Mahal gyud kaayo ang paon*), while Participant D added, “The bait still has to be bought, and it’s very expensive” (*Paliton pa man ang paon unya mahal kaayo*). Frequent exposure to harsh marine conditions causes wear and tear on boats, which most families cannot afford to repair immediately. Participant C described, “When the waves are strong and last for days, the pump boat gets damaged and develops holes” (*Maguba gyud ang pumpboat, mabuslot tungod sa mga balod*).

The participants’ testimonies reveal how maintenance costs, declining income, and lack of institutional support form a cycle of dependency on debt. When faced with unavoidable expenses, fisherfolk often resort to borrowing through informal lenders or microfinance institutions. As Participant A shared, “We really turn to 5-6” (*Modangop gyud mi og 5-6*) or “We approach microfinance institutions” (*Moduol gyud mi og microfinance*). While borrowing offers short-term relief, it also leads to long-term dependency due to high interest rates and unstable earnings.

The researchers’ analysis supports these observations, identifying a recurring pattern of long-term disadvantage where fisherfolk remain trapped in a cycle of low income, limited capital investment, and deteriorating equipment. Without targeted interventions such as affordable credit, shared ownership programs, or repair subsidies, many continue working in unsafe and inefficient conditions, factors that contribute to both economic pressure and emotional distress. The Philippine Statistics Authority (2023) further supports this, reporting that fisherfolk remain among the poorest sectors, with a poverty incidence of 30.6%, highlighting their persistent economic vulnerability.

This finding is further supported by the findings of Fatura et al. (2021) and Hermogeno and Reamon (2023), who explained how limited access to fishing tools, financial aid, and the frequent damage from harsh weather conditions worsen economic vulnerability. These combined pressures result in costly repairs, unstable income, and a livelihood that is difficult to sustain.

The experiences of the participants can be understood through Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) Stress and Coping Theory, which posits that individuals manage stress through cognitive appraisal and coping mechanisms. In this context, fisherfolk breadwinners experience stress when they perceive financial challenges as threats to their family’s well-being. Their reliance on borrowing and practical problem-solving reflects problem-focused coping, while their perseverance and emotional endurance embody emotion-focused coping, enabling them to sustain hope and determination despite economic hardship.

Moreover, the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) offers a broader perspective on these challenges. The economic strain faced by fisherfolk is shaped by interactions across multiple systems. Firstly, their microsystem involves family survival that depends on daily fishing income; the exosystem, which includes limited government and financial support; and the macrosystem, which encompasses broader socioeconomic structures and policies that perpetuate poverty.

The economic challenges faced by fisherfolk breadwinners are not just issues of individual struggle but systemic problems that require stronger and more inclusive support. Ensuring better access to affordable fishing equipment, financial programs with fair terms, and protective measures against environmental risks can help reduce their dependency on high-interest loans. By addressing these economic barriers, fisherfolk breadwinners can be more empowered to sustain their livelihood, support their families, and secure a more stable future.

Coping Strategies Employed by Fisherfolks

Table 2 provides a detailed summary of the coping strategies utilized by the fisherfolk participants in response to the adversities they encountered in their daily lives. It underscores the diverse adaptive, emotional, and social mechanisms that emerged through cross-comparison analysis of the independent interpretations of both the participants’ and the investigators’ analyses.

Moreover, Table 2 enhances the understanding of how fisherfolk navigate times of financial instability, food scarcity, and environmental uncertainty through resourcefulness and community reciprocity. The data presented in this table is crucial for examining the adaptive behaviors and resilience of fisherfolk households, providing a basis for the development of sustainable livelihood programs, psychosocial support frameworks, and community-based interventions specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of small-scale fisherfolk.

Table 2 Coping Strategies Employed by Fisherfolk Breadwinners

| PARTICIPANTS’ ANALYSIS | CROSS-COMPARISON ANALYSIS | RESEARCHERS’ ANALYSIS |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| Watching TV or listening to the radio for relaxation (<i>pawala sa problema, pawala sa kalaay</i>) | Emotional Escape | Use of media as temporary stress relief |
| Engaging in family bonding and indoor games | | Strengthening family ties and maintaining emotional stability |
| Raising chickens (<i>namuhi ug manok</i>) as an alternative livelihood | Livelihood | Practical and sustainable income substitute |
| Offering household services (e.g., laundry, cleaning) | Diversification | Maintaining productivity and sense of normalcy |
| Borrowing food or money from neighbors | Socioeconomic Coping | Communal Reciprocity |
| Borrowing from lending companies (5-6) | | Short-term financial relief |

The participants’ analysis of the grouped photos yielded to six (6) themes namely, Watching TV or listening to the radio for relaxation (*pawala sa problema, pawala sa kalaay*), Engaging in family bonding and indoor games, raising chickens (*namuhi ug manok*) as an alternative livelihood, offering household services (e.g., laundry, cleaning), borrowing food or money from neighbors, and borrowing from lending companies (5-6). These responses show how fisherfolk breadwinners and their families cope with the limitations of fishing by turning to meaningful activities that help them sustain both their emotional and material needs. Similarly, Casipong, Ferolino, and Mendoza (2021) highlighted that coping responses of low-income breadwinners are shaped by their limited access to economic resources and the need to preserve emotional stability within the household.

Meanwhile, the researchers’ analysis led to the emergence of six (6) themes, particularly use of media as temporary stress relief, strengthening family ties and maintaining emotional stability, practical and sustainable income substitute, maintaining productivity and sense of normalcy, communal reciprocity, and short-term financial relief. From these interpretations, the adaptive nature of fisherfolk breadwinners was emphasized, especially with how they navigate hardship through a mix of emotional endurance, social connectedness, and practical resourcefulness. A study by Balaan (2021), also emphasized that coastal communities rely heavily on informal social systems and mutual aid to manage seasonal disruptions and environmental risks.

The cross-comparison analysis of the participants’ and researchers’ independent analyses led to the emergence of three (3) major themes, namely, Emotional Escape, Livelihood Diversification, and Socioeconomic Coping. Emotional Escape encapsulates activities directed to ease negative emotional states and temporarily ease stress brought about by their situation. Livelihood diversification includes activities aimed at finding income and food alternatives, and finally, Socioeconomic coping involves strategies that help fisherfolk breadwinners cope up with the rising economic demand through the aid for social support and network.

These themes portray how fisherfolk in coastal communities respond to the multifaceted challenges of poverty, unstable income, and environmental uncertainty, aligning with the findings of the studies conducted by Umengan and Maderazo (2023) and Asio, Ramirez, Garcia, and Guliac (2024), emphasizing that coping among fisherfolk transcends beyond survival, embodying resilience through hope, connection, and purpose despite the instability of their primary livelihood.

These insights show that coping among fisherfolk breadwinners is not only a matter of survival but a dynamic process shaped by emotional, social, and economic strategies. To further illustrate these adaptive responses, below are grouped photographs that visually captures the everyday practices and coping mechanisms of fisherfolk. These images serve as concrete representations of the themes identified linked with analytical findings of lived experiences that offer a deeper understanding of how fisherfolk navigate hardship through resilience, resourcefulness, and communal support.

Watching TV or listening to the radio for relaxation



The photo shows spending time together while watching television, symbolizing moments of relaxation, connection, and emotional relief amid the daily hardships of fishing life. Participants described these practices as “to ease our problems” (*pawala sa problema*) and “to aid boredom” (*pawala sa kalaay*), highlighting how such leisure activities have become essential coping strategies. For them, radio (“Radyo”) and television (“TV”) serve a dual function such as providing entertainment and psychological relief, while also keeping them informed about weather conditions critical to their safety. As Participant A explained, “This serves as a way for us to know the weather” (*Mga pamaagi para makahibalo ta sa dagan sa panahon*), and Participant B added, “A way for us to prepare” (*Pamaagi aron makapangandam ta*). These narratives underscore that media use is not only for their leisure but also a tool for both their emotional stability and practical preparedness.

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants and researchers, these photos were unanimously interpreted as Watching TV or listening to the radio for relaxation. All participants consistently emphasized that these practices provide comfort, relaxation, and psychological relief amid the hardships of fishing life. This shared view highlights that moments like these are necessary to maintain emotional balance and resilience. As Participant C reflected, “We really shouldn’t forget to have fun so that we don’t become sad or worried” (*Dili jud nato kalimtan na maglingaw-lingaw aron di maguol*) which aligns with the study of Andrews et al. (2021), who emphasized that emotional resilience or the capacity to adapt positively despite adversity, is essential for sustaining mental well-being under economic pressure.

Furthermore, the participants elaborated that such leisure moments ease emotional tension, particularly during times when they are unable to go fishing. As expressed, “Just relaxing because we are just at home” (*Relax-relax kay naa raman sa balay*), “We worry about what to cook, so we just entertain ourselves by watching TV or listening radio,” (*Maproblema man unsay ilung-ag, maglingaw-lingaw nalang ta tan-aw ug TV, maminaw sa radyo,*” and “*Mangita mi ug ginagmay nga kalingawan*). These viewpoints underscore that entertainment serves as both distraction and therapy, allowing fisherfolk to manage feelings of frustration, anxiety, and helplessness that arise from their unstable livelihood.

Engaging in family bonding and indoor games



The photo illustrates how fisherfolk families transform hardship into meaningful moments of connection. It depicts parents and children spending time together (family bonding), during times when fishing is halted due to bad weather or harsh seas. This scene reflects how periods of forced rest become opportunities for nurturing emotional closeness and collective resilience. As participant A noted, “For example if the rain is very heavy and we are inside, we play” (*Pananglitan kusog kaayo ang ulan unya naa mi sa sulod, magdula*), and another shared, “While there is no income because of the storm, we bond” (*Mintras walay pangita kay gabagyo, gabonding*). Such expressions reveal how fisherfolk households choose connection over despair, turning environmental adversity into an avenue for family unity.

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants and researchers, these photos were unanimously interpreted as symbols of family bonding during times of rest. The collective interpretation emphasizes how these shared practices are understood as vital for resilience. The unanimity of views shows that fisherfolk households do not see family bonding merely as casual leisure, but as a deliberate and necessary response to the challenges of fishing life.

Instead of dwelling on the absence of livelihood during storms or rough seas, fisherfolk households reframe these moments as opportunities to bond with their children and nurture family closeness. Such practices highlight how emotional warmth within the household serves as a buffer against financial strain, providing comfort, motivation, and a sense of stability amid uncertainty. By choosing connection over despair, families transform environmental adversity into meaningful experiences of resilience, reinforcing the idea that coping is not only about survival but also about sustaining relationships that foster hope and collective strength.

Emotional Escape

Watching TV or listening to the radio for relaxation and engaging in family bonding and indoor games portray how fisherfolk families cope with the challenges of unstable livelihoods by engaging in simple yet meaningful activities that foster both emotional relief and family connection. It highlights spending time together which symbolizes moments of relaxation, comfort, and normalcy amid financial stress and uncertainty.

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants and researchers, these photos were unanimously interpreted as *Emotional Escape*. All participants consistently emphasized that these practices provide comfort, relaxation, and psychological relief amid the hardships of fishing life. This shared view highlights that moments like these are necessary to maintain emotional balance and resilience. As Participant C reflected, “We really shouldn’t forget to have fun so that we don’t become sad or worried” (*Dili jud nato kalimtan na maglingaw-lingaw aron di maguol*). The study published by Springer Nature (2023) on fisherfolk resilience in Surigao del Sur confirms that family cohesion and mutual support are vital coping mechanisms when livelihoods are disrupted by natural hazards.

These narratives can highly be linked with Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), where fisherfolk manage distress through emotion-focused coping that fosters relaxation, joy, and interpersonal closeness. As Participant C expressed, “Even though we have no livelihood because of the storm, or the waves are strong, we still benefited because We got to bond with my children” (*Bisan wala ka panginabuhit tungod sa bagyo, kusog ang balod, nakapahimulos gihapon mi kay nagka bonding mi sakong mga anak*).

Likewise, this resonates with Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which explains that

individuals are shaped by different layers of interconnected systems. In this context, the *microsystem* of family interactions and the *mesosystem* of community support are especially important in shaping how they cope with challenges. These systems imply that resilience does not come only from individual strength but also from the support of families, neighbors, and the broader community. By relying on these connections, fisherfolk are able to manage stress, maintain emotional stability, and adapt to the uncertainties of their livelihood.

Raising chickens as an alternative livelihood



The photo displays a small-scale poultry setup commonly found outside the households of fisherfolk breadwinners. This photo symbolizes livelihood diversification, an adaptive coping mechanism that allows families to sustain their basic needs when fishing becomes difficult or unsafe. The participants referred to this practice as “raised chickens” (namuhi ug manok), which they consider a practical and sustainable alternative during low-catch periods or bad weather. As expressed by participant B, “Raise chickens and other animals, so that there is something to sell” (Mamuhi ug manok, mga hayopan aron naay mabaligya). This strategy reflects both resourcefulness and perseverance, enabling fisherfolk to generate food or income even when their main source of livelihood is interrupted.

The participants described poultry raising as deeply intertwined with their daily survival. Participant A shared, “This really has a big connection to our life. It helps with our daily needs (*Dako gyud kaayo ni og kalabutan sa among kinabuhi. Maayo nalang sa pang adlaw-adlaw*), while participant C said, “If someone has a birthday, there’s something to get. If there is no rice, we have something to sell, if there is no viand, we have something to butcher,” (*Og naay mag-birthday, naay makuha. Og walay bugas, naa tay ikabaligya, og walay sud-an, naa tay maihaw*). These statements demonstrate how small-scale poultry farming provides economic flexibility and food security, reducing the stress of financial uncertainty.

With a level of agreement of 75% among the participants (3 out of 4) and 100% among the researchers (3 out of 3), these photos were interpreted as raising chickens as an alternative livelihood. The majority of participants emphasized that this practice provides both food security and supplemental income, ensuring that families can endure periods of unstable fishing conditions. This shared view highlights that poultry raising is not merely an economic activity but a deliberate coping strategy that strengthens resilience, while the unanimous agreement of the researchers reinforces its importance as a sustainable means of managing uncertainty in fishing-dependent households. This finding supports the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR, 2010) emphasized that small-scale livelihood options like household labor, poultry raising, food vending, and micro-trading serve as viable alternatives for coastal communities facing environmental and financial instability.

Offering Household Services



The photo portrays resilience and perseverance among fisherfolk breadwinners. It shows engagement in

household activities such as doing laundry and cleaning, actions that reflect their ability to adapt and remain productive even during periods when they cannot go to sea. The participants described these activities as meaningful diversions from disappointment and anxiety caused by unstable fishing conditions. Participant A stated, “We just work at home, clean, do laundry because we cannot go to the sea” (*Molihok nalang sa balay, manglimpyo, manglaba kay dili mana kaadto sa lawod*). This narrative captures how they divert their energy toward constructive domestic labor, transforming inactivity into purposeful effort.

Participants also mentioned that such chores are often done collectively, as expressed in “helping each other do the laundry” (*Nagtinabangay ug panglaba*). This demonstrates how *pagtinabangay* (mutual assistance) extends beyond community relationships into the intimate spaces of family life. One participant further reflected, “It’s still a reminder that cooperation or mutual assistance is truly very important, especially within the family” (*Pahinumdom lang gihapon nga importante gyud kaayo ang pagtinabangay, labina gyud sa sulod sa banay sa pamilya*). Through these interactions, household labor becomes a venue for emotional connection, teamwork, and shared resilience.

With a level of agreement of 75% among the participants (3 out of 4) and 67% among the researchers (2 out of 3), these photos were interpreted as offering household services such as laundry and cleaning as alternative livelihood and coping strategies. The majority of participants emphasized that these practices provide both psychological relief and supplemental contributions to household needs, ensuring that families remain productive even during unstable fishing conditions.

This shared view highlights that household services are not merely domestic chores but deliberate coping strategies that strengthen resilience, while the agreement among most researchers reinforces their importance as adaptive responses to uncertainty in fishing-dependent households. This finding supports Labayo and Prena (2023), who found that families in Albay Gulf communities often rely on domestic services such as laundry and cleaning to supplement income during off-seasons, demonstrating the adaptive nature of rural households in times of economic stress.

Livelihood Diversification

Raising chickens as an alternative livelihood and offering household services illustrate how fisherfolk breadwinners turn to alternative coping strategies such as small-scale poultry raising and household services, reflecting adaptability, and perseverance in the face of unstable fishing conditions. This becomes more than just a survival tactic but rather shows how fisherfolk creatively manage uncertainty while sustaining their households. As Participant B explained, “Raise chickens and other animals, so that there is something to sell” (*Mamuhi ug manok, mga hayopan aron naay mabaligya*). Participant A furtherly shared, “We just work at home, clean, do laundry because we cannot go to the sea” (*Molihok nalang sa balay, manglimpyo, manglaba kay dili mana kaadto sa lawod*).

This practice provides economic flexibility and food security, ensuring that families have something to sell, butcher, or consume when fishing is disrupted. These tasks serve as a meaningful way to divert their attention from disappointment and anxiety which mirrors the findings of Balaan (2021), who documented similar coping patterns among fisherfolk in Bacacay, Albay, where households rely on informal support systems to navigate income fluctuations and climate-related disruptions.

With a level of agreement of 85% (three out of four) among the participants and 100% for researchers, these photos were interpreted as Livelihood Diversification. While most participants emphasized the importance of practices such as poultry raising and household services in sustaining daily needs when fishing is disrupted, researchers unanimously recognized these strategies as adaptive mechanisms that strengthen resilience.

This shared perspective highlights that alternative sources of income and productivity are not only practical responses to economic uncertainty but also essential for maintaining stability and perseverance. As participant A emphasized, “This really has a big connection to our life. It helps with our daily needs” (*Dako gyud kaayo ni og kalabutan sa among kinabuhì. Maayo nalang sa pang adlaw-adlaw*). By engaging in these activities,

fisherfolk are able to reduce the immediate pressures of livelihood insecurity, while also fostering a sense of control over their circumstances.

This is further supported and reflected by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which explains how individuals are shaped by multiple layers of their environment. Poultry raising is linked to the *exosystem* through institutional and community support, while household services highlight the *microsystem* of family cooperation and mutual assistance. Together, these systems show that resilience emerges not only from individual effort but also from the interaction of family, community, and broader structures.

Similarly, these practices connect with Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory, particularly the distinction between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Poultry raising represents problem-focused coping, as it directly addresses economic challenges by providing food and income alternatives. Household services, on the other hand, reflect emotion-focused coping, as they help manage stress and anxiety by transforming idle time into purposeful activity. The combination of these strategies demonstrates how fisherfolk balance practical solutions with emotional relief to sustain resilience in the face of adversity.

Borrowing food or money from neighbors



The photos illustrate how fisherfolk breadwinners cope with unstable fishing conditions by borrowing food or money from neighbors or purchasing on credit from local stores. This practice reflects resilience and perseverance, showing how fisherfolk creatively manage uncertainty while sustaining their households through social connectedness. As participants shared, “Borrowed rice” (*Nangutang ug bugas*) and “asked for bananas from neighbor so that there is something to eat” (*Nangayo og saging sa silingan aron naay makaon*). These everyday acts of solidarity highlight that even amid poverty, mutual help (*pagtinabangay*) becomes a critical resource for survival.

Participants emphasized that borrowing and mutual assistance are not economic exchanges but more of community interdependence. As participant A explained, “We look for a way so that there is something to eat” (*Nangita ug pamagi aron naay makaon*), showing their determination to endure despite limited means. Participant B added, “We really approach the neighbor because mutual assistance still exists now” (*Moduol gyud mi sa silingan kay naa man gihapon ang pagtinabangay karon*). Through this practice, families manage daily uncertainty and reduce stress amid hardships.

Furthermore, participants also acknowledged that reliance on borrowing arises from systemic barriers such as lack of livelihood opportunities, low education levels, and the seasonal nature of fishing. As participant C reflected, “There are really not many opportunities here yet... most of us have not finished school” (*Wala pa g'yuy mga oportunidad kaayo diri... kasagaran namo wala kahuman ug eskwela*). These words underscore the structural challenges that prevent fisherfolk from achieving economic stability.

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants (4 out of 4) and 67% among the researchers (2 out of 3), these photos were interpreted as borrowing food from neighbors as a coping strategy. The participants emphasized that this practice sustains daily needs and reduces stress during periods of livelihood insecurity, while researchers recognized it as an adaptive mechanism rooted in community solidarity. This shared perspective highlights that borrowing is not only a practical response to scarcity but also a vital expression of resilience and mutual support. As one participant reflected, “This is a reminder for others that mutual

assistance really still exists no matter how difficult the things we go through” (*Kini sya pahinumdom para sa uban nga naa gyud gihapon ang pagtinabangay bisag unsa kalisod sa atung mga naagian*).

When fishing is hindered by storms or low catch, their immediate recourse is not formal financial institutions but social networks of kinship and neighborhood support. This mirrors the findings of Balaan (2021), who documented similar coping patterns among fisherfolk in Bacacay, Albay, where households rely on informal support systems to navigate income fluctuations and climate-related disruptions.

Borrowing from lending companies (5-6)



The photo presents fisherfolk’s financial vulnerability and adaptive coping among fisherfolk who rely on informal lending systems such as “5-6” during periods of low income or when fishing becomes impossible. The participants described this practice as “release from 5-6” (*release sa 5-6*) and “*nangutang*,” encapsulating the critical role of debt as a survival mechanism in coastal communities. Participant A shared, “That’s where we turn, we borrow money” (*Anha nami dangop mangutang*), revealing that these financial arrangements, though burdensome, serve as immediate relief in the absence of steady earnings.

Participants elaborated on how these loans sustain their households through crises. Participant B remarked, “That is a huge help” (*Dako kaayo na og tabang*), while participant C added, “There is still interest, but you will really be saved because you get to hold money” (*Naa gihapon interest, apan maluwas gyud ka kay makagunit man ka ug kwarta*). Despite the strain of high interest rates, these financial coping strategies provide temporary security for fisherfolk breadwinners, especially when families face emergencies or lack resources for food, fuel, or medical needs.

This condition exists because of persistent economic insecurity. As participants stated, “Due to the lack of income” (*Tungod sa kakulang sa income*) and “When there is no catch, or the catch is barely enough for the viand, that’s why we borrow so that there is something to use when things become tight” (*Kanang walay kuha, or ang kuha kay kulang ra gani pang sud-an, maong mangutang para naay magamit sa panahon nga magka-apiki*). These sentiments highlight the precarious nature of fishing, where daily income is unpredictable and savings are often impossible. Consequently, fisherfolk turn to 5-6 lenders or microfinance companies, sometimes preferring formal institutions that offer minimal benefits such as insurance coverage: “If we go to the lending company, we have benefits like hospitalization, there’s death insurance benefit” (*Og adto ta sa lending company, naa man tay hospitalization, naay death insurance*).

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants (4 out of 4) and 100% among the researchers (3 out of 3), these photos were interpreted as borrowing from lending companies as a coping strategy. Both participants and researchers emphasized that while these loans are burdensome due to interest, they remain essential for survival, providing immediate relief during crises. This shared perspective highlights that debt is not merely a financial transaction but a coping mechanism that sustains households in the absence of stable income.

This dependence on informal credit mirrors broader patterns documented in existing research. Kondo (2003) described the Bombay 5-6 system as a last-resort financing method for micro-entrepreneurs, including fisherfolk and vendors, who operate on minimal and unstable earnings. These findings confirm that informal lending is both a lifeline and a liability, providing immediate relief while perpetuating cycles of indebtedness.

Socioeconomic Coping

Borrowing food or money from neighbors and borrowing from lending companies (5-6) illustrate how fisherfolk breadwinners turn to alternative coping strategies such as borrowing from informal lending systems like “5-6” and borrowing rice (*manibo*) during periods of low income or when fishing becomes impossible. These practices reflect both financial vulnerability and adaptive perseverance, showing how fisherfolk manage uncertainty while sustaining their households. As Participant A shared, “That’s where we turn, we borrow money” (*Anha nami dangop, mangutang*), while Participant B emphasized, “That is a huge help” (*Dako kaayo na og tabang*). Participant C further explained, “There is still interest, but you will really be saved because you get to hold money” (*Naa gihapon interest, apan maluwas gyud ka kay makagunit man ka ug kwarta*).

Similarly, borrowing rice was described as a practical fallback when cash is unavailable, ensuring that families have something to cook and consume during difficult times. It means helping each other (*pagtinabangay*) such as leaning on neighbors, sharing what little is available, and finding ways to manage when fishing isn’t enough.

One participant noted that “When there is no catch, or the catch is barely enough for the viand, that’s why we borrow so that there is something to use when life becomes tight” (*Kanang walay kuha, or ang kuha kay kulang ra gani pang sud-an, maong mangutang para naay magamit sa panahon nga magka-apiki*) and “Due to the lack of income” (*Tungod sa kakulang sa income*). These statements highlight how debt and borrowing, despite their burdens, become survival mechanisms that provide immediate relief in the absence of steady earnings. One study emphasized that weak implementation of existing policies and lack of alternative livelihood forced many fishing families to rely on informal loans and unstable income resources (Umengan & Maderazo, 2023).

With a level of agreement of 100% among the participants and 67% (two out of three) among the researchers, these photos were interpreted as Socio-economic Coping. All participants consistently emphasized that borrowing, whether money or rice, is a necessary fallback when fishing income is disrupted, while researchers acknowledged its adaptive function but also noticed its long-term risks of debt. This shared perspective highlights that informal credit systems and food borrowing are not only immediate responses to economic uncertainty but also essential mechanisms for survival in contexts where formal financial access is limited.

This finding supports Kondo (2003), who described the Bombay 5-6 system as a last-resort financing method for micro-entrepreneurs operating on unstable earnings. Similarly, Reyes et al. (2021) found that coastal communities in Bohol resorted to informal borrowing to manage income shocks caused by bad weather and depleted fish stocks. Ayade et al. (2024) also reported that fisherfolk in Tandag City rely heavily on informal lending due to irregular income and limited access to formal credit.

The practice is further supported by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which implies borrowing as part of the exosystem, which includes financial institutions, community lending networks, and neighborhood rice-sharing practices. The effects of these borrowing practices directly affect the *microsystem*, where household survival and family well-being depend on the ability to secure food, cover medical expenses, or meet daily needs despite unstable earnings.

Similarly, it aligns with Lazarus and Folkman’s Stress and Coping Theory (1984) wherein borrowing money represents problem-focused coping, as it directly addresses financial shortfalls by securing immediate resources. Borrowing rice reflects both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, as it ensures food security while reducing stress and anxiety during crises. The combination of these strategies demonstrates how fisherfolk balance financial and food alternatives with emotional stability, sustaining resilience despite the risks of indebtedness.

From Escape To Empowerment: Strengthening The Mental Resilience Of Fisherfolk Breadwinners

Fishing communities play a vital role in sustaining the nation’s food supply and local economies, yet fisherfolk remain among the most socioeconomically vulnerable sectors in the Philippines. For many coastal families,

fishing is not only a livelihood but a way of life that is deeply intertwined with identity, responsibility, and survival. Within these households, the breadwinners carry the dual weight of economic provision and emotional endurance. However, persistent financial instability, environmental unpredictability, and social marginalization have placed an immense psychological burden on these individuals, often resulting in chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue.

Findings from this study revealed that fisherfolk breadwinners often rely on emotional escape mechanisms, such as passive leisure (watching televisions) and avoidance behaviors, to temporarily ease distress brought by livelihood hardships. While these coping methods provide short-term relief, they fail to address the underlying emotional exhaustion that arises from years of uncertainty and economic strain. This dependence on escape-oriented behaviors underscores a pressing need to develop interventions that redirect coping strategies toward more adaptive and productive forms of psychological resilience.

The program “From Escape to Empowerment” seeks to respond to this need by transforming escape mechanisms into constructive coping approaches that nurture mental well-being and community resilience. Grounded in Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) Stress and Coping Theory and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, this initiative emphasizes that psychological health is shaped not only by individual emotional regulation but also by the strength of one’s social and environmental support systems. Through psychoeducation, group reflection, and livelihood integration, the program encourages fisherfolk to reframe stress as a challenge rather than a defeat, cultivating empowerment through awareness, connection, and purposeful action.

Objectives

- To reduce reliance on maladaptive emotional escape mechanisms by introducing psychologically enriching coping strategies.
- To promote mental health awareness, emotional regulation, and stress management among fisherfolk breadwinners.
- To foster community-based resilience through shared livelihood and peer support networks.
- To strengthen socioeconomic coping mechanisms through collective, skill-based activities that enhance both income and well-being.

Target Audience

The program *From Escape to Empowerment* targets fisherfolk breadwinners of Barangay Langtad, Argao, Cebu, specifically those whose families rely solely on fishing.

Key Message

True resilience begins with a peaceful mind, a purposeful hand, and a helping community.

Program Components and Activities

1. *Mind Over Waves: Mental Health Literacy and Stress Management Workshop*

Conduct group psychoeducation sessions led by psychology professionals and volunteers focusing on emotional regulation, stress recognition, and healthy coping techniques such as mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and cognitive reframing.

Psychological Basis: Cognitive-behavioral principles are applied to increase emotional awareness and equip participants with practical tools for stress management.

2. *From Escape to Empowerment: Productive Coping Workshop*

Organize skill-based sessions that encourage participants to convert leisure-oriented coping (e.g., watching television) into productive and restorative activities, such as coastal artmaking, home gardening, or small-scale poultry raising.

Psychological Basis: Anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model, this activity redirects emotion-focused coping into problem-focused and meaning-oriented coping strategies.

3. *Pagtinabangay Circles: Peer Support and Reflection Sessions*

Establish small support groups that meet weekly to share personal challenges, coping experiences, and emotional reflections, facilitated by trained psychology students or barangay mental health workers.

Psychological Basis: Rooted in Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, this activity strengthens interpersonal connections and social support, reducing isolation and emotional fatigue.

4. *Livelihood and Well-being Integration Program*

Partner with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and non-governmental organizations to offer livelihood diversification training (e.g., backyard poultry, fish processing). The program also integrates educational seminars on responsible fishing practices, such as the regulation of standard fish sizes for catch and the proper management of undersized fish. Participants will also engage in group counseling and stress management sessions aimed at enhancing psychological well-being.

Psychological Basis: Integrates problem-focused coping by promoting self-efficacy and reducing economic stress through productive engagement.

5. *Family Resilience Day*

Hold monthly community events that involve family bonding activities such as games, storytelling, and communal meals, highlighting the importance of togetherness and emotional support.

Psychological Basis: Encourages emotion-focused coping through positive emotions, enhancing family cohesion and collective psychological resilience.

Measurement of Success Indicators

Psychological Indicators:

- Decrease in self-reported stress levels and emotional exhaustion (measured through pre- and post-program surveys).
- Increase in adaptive coping behaviors, such as engagement in problem-solving and community reflection activities.

Social Indicators:

- Improved participation in community meetings, reflection circles, and support networks.
- Strengthened interpersonal trust, cooperation, and *pagtinabangay* (mutual aid) within fisherfolk households.

Economic Indicators:

- Increased number of participants engaged in alternative livelihood activities.
- Decrease in dependence on high-interest lenders or emergency loans.

Sustainability Indicators:

- Integration of mental health discussions in barangay development programs.

- Continuation of a peer-led *Pagtinabangay Support Network* beyond the program duration.

Expected Outcomes

The implementation of *From Escape to Empowerment* is expected to enhance the mental resilience and overall well-being of fisherfolk breadwinners by transforming escape-based coping into adaptive and productive strategies. Participants are expected to develop greater emotional awareness, improved stress management, and stronger social connections through psychoeducation and peer support activities. The program also aims to promote livelihood diversification and community cooperation, helping fisherfolk gain a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy in facing financial and environmental challenges. Ultimately, it envisions a community of resilient breadwinners who respond to adversity with hope, emotional strength, and collective solidarity.

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the discussion or results, implication, recommendation, limitation, and conclusion, based on the results of the study. It highlights the key challenges and coping strategies experienced by small-scale fisherfolk breadwinners, using a combination of pictures and participant reflections. The analysis revealed recurring themes that capture the economic, environmental, and emotional struggles present in the daily lives of fisherfolk breadwinners. This chapter also discusses the implications of these findings, outlines the study's limitations, and offers practical recommendations for future action and policy development.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges and coping strategies of fisherfolk breadwinners in Barangay Langtad, Argao, through the Photovoice method and guided discussions using the SHOWED framework. In addressing the study's Statement of the Problem, the findings revealed two major areas of insight: (1) the challenges encountered by the participants and (2) the coping strategies they employ in navigating these adversities. Together, these findings present a holistic picture of livelihood realities that extend beyond economic hardship and into complex psychosocial domains.

First, the study identified four overarching challenges: (1) **resource**, (2) **seasonal**, (3) **livelihood**, and (4) **economic**. These themes mirror broader national and global concerns highlighted in the Review of Related Literature. Participants consistently described high cost of fuel, declining fish catch, food insecurity, high equipment costs, and unstable income as persistent concerns, aligning with studies documenting financial precarity, ecological degradation, and institutional gaps experienced by small-scale fishers. These challenges confirm the study's assertion that fisherfolk breadwinners carry disproportionately heavy burdens, not only in sustaining their families' daily needs but also in confronting systemic barriers that restrict livelihood stability.

Second, the study revealed three main coping strategies: (1) **emotional escape**, (2) **livelihood diversification**, and (3) **socioeconomic coping**. These coping strategies illustrate how fisherfolk breadwinners respond to adversity with resourcefulness, persistence, and culturally-grounded resilience. Participants employed problem-focused coping, such as shifting fishing methods, borrowing equipment, diversifying income sources, or adjusting routines to weather conditions. These responses aligned with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory and supported by existing literature on adaptive behavior in hazardous occupations. At the same time, fisherfolk relied on emotion-focused and socially mediated coping, including prayer, humor, family cohesion, reliance on neighbors, and participation in *pagtinabangay* (mutual aid). These strategies demonstrate how coping is shaped by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems: family, community, cultural values, market conditions, and institutional structures all interact to influence how fisherfolk manage stress.

A significant new contribution of this study is the documentation of coping strategies that intertwine psychological resilience with cultural expectations of breadwinning. While previous literature discusses economic and environmental coping, fewer studies highlight the emotional suppression, sense of duty, and quiet endurance that fisherfolk exhibit. Such behaviors are deeply rooted in Filipino values such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), self-sacrifice, and familial obligation. The Photovoice method enabled these less

visible coping patterns to emerge, making the psychosocial dimensions of their resilience a novel addition to existing research.

The integration of challenges and coping strategies shows that fisherfolk do not merely endure hardships, but they actively negotiate them through a combination of ingenuity, communal support, and emotional perseverance. However, the results also reveal that many of these coping strategies are compensatory rather than sustainable, reflecting gaps in institutional support and the absence of accessible mental health resources. This insight reinforces the study's emphasis on addressing both livelihood and well-being, highlighting the need for programs that nurture not only economic resilience but also psychological health.

Further, this study affirms that the experiences of fisherfolk breadwinners are shaped by the combined pressures of economic instability, environmental unpredictability, and heavy psychosocial responsibilities. By presenting both the challenges they face and the coping strategies they employ, the study offers a comprehensive and humane understanding of fisherfolk resilience. These insights highlight the importance of designing interventions that integrate livelihood support, community empowerment, and mental health frameworks. The findings also call for sustained, multi-sectoral efforts to uplift fisherfolk households, and such efforts that acknowledge their struggles, honor their resilience, and ensure that the emotional, social, and economic dimensions of their well-being are equally valued.

Implications of the study

The findings of the study present several important implications for local communities, governmental bodies, and development stakeholders engaged in assisting small-scale fisherfolk breadwinners. By analyzing the challenges and coping mechanisms of fisherfolk breadwinners, the research emphasizes the necessity for targeted, inclusive, and sustainable interventions that tackle both their immediate livelihood issues and the systemic factors influencing their daily lives.

To begin with, the findings highlight the vital need to enhance access to essential resources. The shortage and increasing costs of fuel, along with the limited affordability of fishing gear, significantly hinder the ability of fisherfolk breadwinners to maintain their livelihood activities. Addressing these challenges necessitates organized institutional interventions, such as fuel subsidy programs, cooperative resource-sharing initiatives, and accessible financing options for the purchase and repair of equipment. Strengthening these aspects can improve the productivity and income stability of fisherfolk, thus mitigating their economic vulnerability.

Moreover, the study underscores the significant effects of seasonal and environmental fluctuations on fishing operations. These challenges emphasize the need for adaptive, climate-responsive programs and livelihood diversification strategies that empower fisherfolk to manage unpredictable weather conditions. Incorporating risk reduction strategies, localized weather monitoring systems, and alternative income sources into community-based initiatives can enhance the resilience and adaptive capacity of fishing communities.

Furthermore, the results indicate that livelihood security has extensive repercussions beyond mere economic distress. The coping strategies identified, such as emotional resilience, community support, and family unity, illustrate the inherent strength of fisherfolk households but also reveal the scarcity of formal psychosocial support systems. This suggests a pressing need to integrate mental health and psychological support into the development of programs to safeguard the holistic well-being of fisherfolk.

Additionally, the study reveals that the widespread dependence on lending practices such as "5-6" indicates notable gaps in financial inclusion and social protection. This brings to light the necessity of enhancing financial literacy and broadening access to equitable, low-interest credit options. Such measures would enable fisherfolk to manage their resources more efficiently and lessen their reliance on high-interest loans, which frequently worsen their economic difficulties.

Finally, the study emphasizes that the challenges encountered by the fisherfolk are not merely individual issues but are rooted in larger socio-economic, environmental, and institutional structures. Addressing these challenges necessitates collaborative efforts among local government units, national agencies, and community

stakeholders. The study advocates for integrating fisherfolk well-being into coastal resource management policies. Agencies such as the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and local government units (LGUs) must design programs that balance ecological sustainability with livelihood security.

The implications of this study extend beyond the individual narratives of fisherfolk. They call for strategic, multi-level, and sustained interventions that aim to protect livelihoods, strengthen community resilience, and preserve the cultural and economic identity of fishing communities for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emphasize that the psychological well-being of fisherfolk must be viewed as central to livelihood resilience. Based on the findings of this study, addressing the emotional, cognitive, and social needs of fishing communities will not only alleviate psychological distress but also enhance motivation, cooperation, and productivity. Through integrated psychosocial interventions, participatory policy-making, and long-term mental health planning, fisherfolk breadwinners and communities can be empowered to face adversity with strength, purpose, and collective hope.

For Local Government Units (LGUs) and Development Stakeholders

Short-Term Recommendations

1. **Provide Immediate Psychosocial Support and Crisis Interventions.** Local government units, in coordination with barangay health workers and mental health professionals, should initiate community-based mental health programs that address the immediate emotional needs of fisherfolk. These may include psychological first aid, stress debriefing, and structured group support sessions to help manage acute distress caused by livelihood insecurity and environmental uncertainty. Partnerships with local universities or accredited organizations can ensure the ethical and effective delivery of such interventions.
2. **Ensure Livelihood Continuity as a Psychological Stabilizer.** Economic insecurity is a major source of psychological distress among fisherfolk. It is recommended that LGUs provide short-term assistance such as fuel subsidies, affordable fishing equipment, and emergency financial aid to maintain livelihood continuity. Ensuring economic stability can serve as a psychological buffer, reducing anxiety and supporting emotional regulation during periods of uncertainty.

Medium-Term Recommendations

1. **Integrate Psychoeducation and Emotional Resilience Training.** Conduct structured psychoeducational workshops focused on stress management, emotion regulation, and coping strategies designed for fisherfolk breadwinners and their families. These sessions should utilize evidence-based approaches such as mindfulness, cognitive reframing, and relaxation techniques to promote emotional resilience and adaptive coping. The inclusion of mental health literacy in livelihood training enhances awareness and normalizes help-seeking behavior.
2. **Develop Peer Support Networks and Community Resilience Circles.** Establish peer-led support groups, such as Pagtinabangay Circles, within fishing communities. These circles should meet regularly to provide safe spaces for emotional expression, validation, and shared problem-solving. Peer-based networks help reduce feelings of isolation and stigma while fostering collective coping and social cohesion—key determinants of psychological well-being.
3. **Implement Counseling and Livelihood Integration Programs.** Collaborate with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and non-governmental organizations to integrate counseling and stress management components into livelihood training programs such as aquaculture, fish processing, and coastal gardening. Linking economic activities with psychosocial support enhances self-efficacy, motivation, and purpose, which are essential to fostering psychological empowerment.

Long-Term Recommendations

1. **Institutionalize Mental Health Programs in Coastal Development Agendas.** Mental health and psychosocial support programs should be institutionalized within barangay and municipal development plans. Embedding these initiatives into official governance structures ensures sustained funding, continuity, and accountability, transforming mental health from a temporary response to a permanent development priority.
2. **Strengthen Family-Based Mental Health Promotion.** Develop family-centered activities—such as Family Resilience Days—that encourage bonding, emotional openness, and collaborative coping. Strengthening family relationships reinforces a support system that nurtures empathy, optimism, and resilience among fisherfolk households.
3. **Train Barangay Mental Health Workers and Fisherfolk Leaders.** Sustain local mental health capacity by training barangay health workers, fisherfolk organization leaders, and volunteers in basic counseling, psychological first aid, and suicide prevention. Building this community-level competence ensures that mental health care remains accessible even in the absence of external professionals.

For Policymakers and National Agencies

Short-Term Recommendations

1. **Provide Accessible Mental Health and Psychosocial Services.** Establish mobile mental health clinics and outreach programs in coastal communities where psychological services are often unavailable. These services should focus on assessment, counseling, and mental health education to address immediate emotional concerns among fisherfolk and their families.

Medium-Term Recommendations

1. **Institutionalize Mental Health Literacy in Fisheries Training Programs.** Integrate mental health education into existing BFAR-led livelihood and safety training. Embedding psychological well-being discussions within livelihood contexts normalizes mental health awareness, reduces stigma, and builds emotional competence alongside technical skills.
2. **Promote Financial and Emotional Resilience Education.** Develop programs that simultaneously teach financial management and stress coping skills. Understanding how to handle financial challenges effectively reduces anxiety and fosters emotional regulation, empowering fisherfolk to maintain psychological balance even during financial strain.

Long-Term Recommendations

1. **Formulate a National Framework for Fisherfolk Mental Health and Resilience.** Establish a coordinated, inter-agency framework that integrates mental health promotion into fisheries, labor, and social welfare policies. This framework should include budget allocations for community-based counseling, mental health training, and continuous monitoring of psychological well-being indicators among fisherfolk.
2. **Institutionalize Participatory Approaches to Policy-Making.** Ensure that fisherfolk voices are actively represented in policy formulation through participatory research methods such as Photovoice. This allows policymakers to understand the emotional and psychosocial dimensions of livelihood struggles, resulting in more human-centered and contextually relevant interventions.
3. **Sustain Long-Term Research on Fisherfolk Psychological Well-being.** Support universities and research institutions in conducting longitudinal studies on fisherfolk mental health, coping mechanisms, and resilience factors. Evidence-based insights from these studies will guide the design of sustainable, culturally sensitive, and empirically grounded mental health programs for coastal communities.

For Future Research

1. **Adopt a Family Systems Perspective.** Future studies should move beyond the breadwinner-centered lens and include the perspectives of fisherfolk family members, particularly spouses, children, and elderly dependents. Incorporating multiple voices within the household can yield a more holistic understanding of family dynamics, shared stressors, and interdependent coping mechanisms.
2. **Increase Participant Diversity and Sample Size.** To enhance the validity and representativeness of findings, future researchers are encouraged to include a larger and more diverse pool of participants. Expanding participation across age groups, gender identities, and fishing roles (e.g., boat owners, helpers, traders) may uncover patterns of psychological adaptation that differ based on socioeconomic or role-related factors. A broader sample can also strengthen the generalizability of results and facilitate quantitative analysis for comparative studies.
3. **Explore Multiple Coastal Settings and Contexts.** The present research was conducted in a single fishing community, which limits the transferability of findings to other localities. Future research should involve comparative studies across different geographic, ecological, and economic contexts to examine how environmental and social conditions influence mental health outcomes. Investigating diverse settings, such as island communities, urban coastal areas, and inland fishing zones, can illuminate variations in coping strategies, resource access, and psychosocial support systems.
4. **Investigate the Role of Gender and Cultural Identity in Coping.** Further studies could examine how gender roles, cultural beliefs, and local traditions shape emotional expression, help-seeking behavior, and resilience among fisherfolk. Exploring these cultural dimensions will contribute to the development of mental health programs that are not only evidence-based but also culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Proposed Intervention Plan

Program Title: From Escape to Empowerment: Strengthening the Mental Resilience of Fisherfolk Breadwinners

Target Group: Fisherfolk breadwinners of Barangay Langtad, Argao, Cebu whose families rely on fishing as their primary source of income.

Duration: 7 months

Implementing Agencies and Partners:

- Local Government Unit (LGU) of Argao
- Barangay Langtad Council
- Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)
- Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)
- Volunteer psychologists and psychology students
- Local NGOs and livelihood cooperative

Phase 1 Program Preparation And Orientation

| Objectives | Activities and Strategies | Involved Personnel | Time Frame | Resources Needed | Evaluation / Success Indicators |
|--|---|---|------------|--|---|
| To orient stakeholders about the program goals and establish | Conduct stakeholder meeting and consultation Secure permits from | Program facilitators, Barangay Officials, BFAR representative, psychology | Month 1 | Venue Audiovisual equipment Assessment tools | Signed agreements and attendance sheets Baseline data on psychological well- |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| partnerships for implementation. | <p>LGU and BFAR</p> <p>Identify 20–25 fisherfolk participants through barangay profiling</p> <p>Conduct baseline assessment on mental health, coping styles, and livelihood conditions</p> | department and student volunteers | | (survey forms, consent sheets) | being and coping patterns |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------|

Phase 2 Mind Over Waves: Mental Health Literacy And Stress Management Workshop

| Objectives | Activities and Strategies | Involved Personnel | Time Frame | Resources Needed | Evaluation / Success Indicators |
|---|--|--|------------|---|--|
| To increase awareness about mental health and teach stress management techniques. | <p>Conduct a two-day psychoeducation workshop focusing on emotional regulation, cognitive reframing, and mindfulness.</p> <p>Integrate activities such as breathing exercises, journaling, and guided visualization.</p> | Licensed psychologist, psychology student volunteers, LGU health officer | Month 2 | <p>Printed handouts</p> <p>Art materials</p> <p>Projector</p> <p>Relaxation music</p> | <p>Pre- and post-test improvement on mental health literacy</p> <p>Participant self-reports on stress reduction</p> <p>Workshop attendance</p> <p>Feedback/ Evaluation forms</p> |

Phase 3 From Escape To Empowerment: Productive Coping Workshop

| Objectives | Activities and Strategies | Involved Personnel | Time Frame | Resources Needed | Evaluation / Success Indicators |
|--|---|--|------------|---|---|
| To replace maladaptive coping behaviors with productive and meaningful activities. | <p>Conduct hands-on skill training sessions such as coastal artmaking (shell crafts), home gardening, or small-scale poultry raising.</p> <p>Include group reflection on how these activities improve emotional and financial well-being.</p> <p>Encourage participants to create “Personal Empowerment Plans.”</p> | Livelihood trainers, BFAR extension workers, NGO partners, psychology student volunteers | Month 3 | <p>Materials for chosen livelihood</p> <p>Art kits</p> <p>gardening tools</p> | <p>Increased engagement in productive leisure activities</p> <p>Participant portfolios or output (e.g., crafts, garden plots)</p> <p>Reduction in self-reported avoidance behaviors</p> |

Phase 4 Pagtinabangay Circles: Peer Support and Reflection Sessions

| Objectives | Activities and Strategies | Involved Personnel | Time Frame | Resources Needed | Evaluation / Success Indicators |
|--|---|---|------------|--|--|
| To build community-based emotional support and reduce isolation. | <p>Establish small peer groups (5–6 members each).</p> <p>Weekly reflection sessions facilitated by trained volunteers or barangay mental health workers.</p> <p>Incorporate storytelling, sharing circles, and collective problem-solving.</p> | Barangay mental health workers, psychology student volunteers | Months 3–5 | Meeting space reflection journals | <p>1. Attendance and active participation rates</p> <p>2. Improved social connectedness (measured via follow-up survey)</p> <p>3. Qualitative feedback on emotional support benefits</p> |

PHASE 5 Livelihood And Well-Being Integration Program

| Objectives | Activities and Strategies | Involved Personnel | Time Frame | Resources Needed | Evaluation / Success Indicators |
|---|---|--|------------|---|---|
| To strengthen economic coping mechanisms through sustainable livelihood training combined with mental health promotion. | <p>Partner with BFAR and NGOs to provide training on fish processing, small-scale aquaculture, or backyard poultry.</p> <p>Integrate educational seminars on responsible fishing practices, such as the regulation of standard fish sizes for catch and the proper management of undersized fish.</p> <p>Integrate counseling and stress management discussions into the training sessions.</p> <p>Facilitate microgrant or cooperative application for sustainable income.</p> | BFAR trainers, NGO livelihood coordinators, LGU development officers | Months 4–5 | <p>Training kits</p> <p>Manuals</p> <p>Financial literacy materials</p> | <p>More number of participants completing training</p> <p>Increase in livelihood income opportunities</p> <p>Reduction in loan dependency</p> |

Phase 6 Family Resilience Day: Community Bonding and Empowerment Celebration

| Objectives | Activities and Strategies | Involved Personnel | Time Frame | Resources Needed | Evaluation / Success Indicators |
|----------------------|--|--------------------|------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| To strengthen family | Monthly family event with games, storytelling, | Barangay council, | Month | Sound system | Increased family |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| relationships and promote positive emotional expression. | communal meals, and recognition of progress. Showcase products made from livelihood activities. Conduct reflection ceremony highlighting empowerment journeys. | community and psychology students volunteers | 6 | Event materials Certificates | participation Reported improvement in family communication and emotional support Continuation of peer-led “ <i>Pagtinabangay Circles</i> ” post-program |
|--|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|

Phase 7 Evaluation Phase

| Objectives | Methods and Tools | Timeline | Success Indicators |
|---|---|----------|--|
| Assess psychological, social, and economic improvements among participants. | Pre- and post-program surveys on stress levels, coping styles, and social connectedness Focus group discussions Livelihood monitoring reports | Month 7 | Decrease in self-reported stress Increase in adaptive coping and community participation Establishment of sustained support groups |

Sustainability Plan

- Formation of Peer-Led Support Network:** Continue *Pagtinabangay Circles* with barangay endorsement.
- Integration into Barangay Development Plan:** Encourage LGU to include mental health and livelihood sessions as annual initiatives.
- Partnership Continuity:** Maintain collaborations with BFAR and NGOs for follow-up livelihood enhancement.
- Community Empowerment Fund:** Allocate barangay budget or seek NGO microgrant support for sustaining materials and workshops.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the intervention, fisherfolk breadwinners are expected to:

- Exhibit improved emotional regulation and awareness of mental health concepts.
- Shift from escape-based coping to adaptive and productive strategies.
- Participate actively in peer support and livelihood groups.
- Strengthen family and community resilience, promoting a culture of mutual aid (*pagtinabangay*).
- Experience enhanced self-efficacy and psychological well-being, contributing to long-term empowerment.

Limitations

- Breadwinner-Centered Perspective.** The study focused solely on the experiences of fisherfolk breadwinners. While this provides us a valuable insight to their emotional and economic burdens, it does not include the voices of their members who may offer different coping and experiences. Future researchers may benefit from including their family members to gain a diverse and wide view of approaches for a more holistic understanding.
- Limited Participant Pool.** The sample size of the study is relatively small which may limit and affect the diversity of the data. A larger number of participants in future studies would enhance the reliability and depth of findings.

- **Single Community Setting.** The researcher conducted the study in one fishing community which limits the generalizability of the results. Exploring other fishing communities with different geographic, and economic context would provide richer insights and provide patterns or challenges that may not be visible within a single setting.

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