

Unfolding the Mental Health of Families of Victims of Killings: A Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the mental health of families of victims of killings by exploring their lived experiences. Understanding families' adversities is crucial, as it provides insight into how family members interact during psychological challenges and the grieving process, and helps identify positive changes brought about by the incident. To gather this information, a semi-structured interview was used, along with a criterion sampling technique to meet the predefined criteria. The study used a phenomenological approach with ten (10) participants from six (6) families in the City of Koronadal, Province of South Cotabato. The findings revealed several key themes: alarming stress, emotional dysfunction, cognitive distortion and memory loss, guilt, shame, and self-blame, and loss of a safe worldview. These impacts on their mental health persist within the individual following the incident. There was still fear, mistrust, and heightened emotional responses. However, due to their own personal characteristics, particularly their coping strategies and support systems, families were able to gain meaning and make sense of the world, others, and themselves. With this, while positive changes were evident among participants, providing psychosocial support is necessary for the families to have proper management of their traumas and to ensure that they are not alone in their healing process.

Keywords: mental health, psychological impact, positive changes, family dynamics, phenomenology, family members, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Homicide refers to the killing of another human being, whereas murder is defined as an unlawful homicide committed with malice aforethought (Pangan et al., 2024). Regardless of which of these scenarios is true, killing is a problem worldwide. It takes lives, especially those of innocent people, and spreads cruelty and evil in society (Herre et al., 2023). Families and friends of homicide victims are called "secondary victims." They are vulnerable to physical and psychological consequences that can have a long-lasting impact on their health and well-being (Mastrocinque et al., 2023). These "secondary victims" describe feelings of abandonment, secondary trauma, and institutional betrayal, which aggravated their loss and contributed to persistent psychological burden (Cantini-Vaisman & Einat, 2026).

The main problem lies in losing one foundation in a family unit, particularly if the loved one died unexpectedly and heinously, as the families were not prepared emotionally and financially. One of the first primary factors in the psychological experiences of families of homicide victims was the "bereavement process", which consists of "recalling the memories of the victim", also, "recognizing the positive aspects of the victim", "identifying with the victim's suffering", "feeling pain remembering the loved one", and "worry for other bereaved family members" (Sung et al., 2025).

In the Philippines, one of the challenges faced by the family members of victims of killings is the slow pace of justice. As a result of its lengthy and slow process, the effects of this situation can lead family members to feel more frustrated, anxious, and depressed. One of the cases that took ten (10) years for the victims and their families to get justice and endure the pain of the tragedy was the "Maguindanao Massacre." Family members of victims of killings may face physical, emotional, and mental challenges.

Knowing and understanding each family member's psychological impact of killings provides equal attention to

each family member's feelings, thoughts, and behavior, leading to the importance of conducting this study. The family relationship before and after the event serves as a foundation for building strong family ties amid mental challenges. The researcher aims to explore the lived experiences of families of victims of killings to gain an understanding beyond the impact of trauma and identify other factors that might shape how these families view themselves, the world, and other people at the present moment.

In the Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) theory, some individuals who are involved in a life crisis or trauma can experience positive psychological change as they cope and make sense of the event. Individuals not only need to heal from trauma but also to develop a positive outlook on life, others, and the world to achieve this growth. Therefore, the Posttraumatic Growth Theory is suitable for this study as it allows the researcher to explore how families of victims of killings deal with the traumatic loss, meaning-making process, and the possibility of psychological transformation such as great appreciation in life, strengthened relationships with others, increased personal strength, and changes in their perspective and priorities despite the adversities in their physical, social, mental, and spiritual domains.

In Sharpe et al. (2024), they described the overwhelming impact of the homicide of a loved one as extensive in how it affects the mental, physical, spiritual, and socio-economic well-being of families and friends who remain. The psychological consequences of dealing with such a traumatic loss are exacerbated for families and communities that have already been marginalized by systemic injustices that are naturally vicious in society. Black and Latino communities were more vulnerable to compromised well-being due to their excessive exposure to homicide.

Mastrocinque et al. (2023) uncovered additional themes regarding the impact of homicide on the family unit. They discovered that it is confusing for all family members to express their feelings and emotions about the incident. Children are reluctant to express and share their own sentiments because they believe they have hurt their family members more. Some children misbehave at school because of the loss of a parent/brother, or sister.

Further, Wallace-Hanlon et al. (2026) reported that grieving parents faced the challenge of a dual role, experiencing their own grief while supporting another family member, such as a surviving sibling. Furthermore, parents and older family members often took on supportive roles to help younger family members cope with the incident. During such tough times, the family was the main source of support, especially the immediate and extended family members working together to guide the grieving parents.

Support groups, counseling, focus groups, and involvement in social action initiatives were among the helpful resources for the family members to cope with their loved one who died in a homicide (Mastrocinque et al., 2023). Furthermore, attending the focus group was helpful to every family member because of similar experiences; they found great comfort in others, resumed work, and had peer support from co-workers. They can divert and distract themselves with self-help techniques such as mindfulness and meditation, which help them cope with the incident.

Masarwe (2021) reveals that one of the participants (mother/wife), creative coping after the murder of her spouse, is to stand on her own two feet "like a man", doing the role of her husband, such as providing, protecting, and defending her family. In addition, family members said that only people who have lost someone to homicide can relate to them on an emotional level.

Most past studies focus on the psychological impact of each participant following the death of a loved one; they did not delve into the extent of the participants' emotional and lived experiences. This gap highlights the need to understand the "unfinished business" or unresolved issues the participants may have towards the victim, which can also have a further impact on their mental health. Unexpressed feelings and thoughts after the incident play a significant role in shaping other aspects of its psychological impact. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the perspective of a single family member, this study highlights the experiences of all the victim's family members and their family dynamics. The investigation was carried out in the Municipality of Koronadal, South Cotabato. It was chosen because the researcher wanted to give the people of Mindanao a voice and ensure their opinions were heard in this study.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe and explore the lived experiences of families of victims of killings. In this phase of the research, the core phenomenon was how these experiences affected family members' mental health and how other factors might shape their current behavior. For this purpose, a semi-structured interview was used as a research tool to ensure the study's validity. Hence, below are some of the research questions related to the following areas: (1) What are the lived experiences of the families of victims of killings? (2) How was the mental health of each family member? How does the incident affect their current mental state and behavior? (3) What coping strategies did each family member use to keep going with their lives? What coping strategies did they use to support each other's mental health? (4) What are the reflections or insights each family member learned about the killing of their loved one?

The significance of this study lies in understanding the psychological challenges faced by families, particularly how family members express themselves during their grieving process, the coping strategies they employ, and the reflections or insights they gain, which could help foster positive transformation in the aftermath of traumatic loss. Additionally, this study emphasized the value of empathy, compassion, love, comfort, and a strong support system in those challenging times. This study also examined the social significance, demonstrating how the family has evolved into a crucial basic foundation of society. The community can observe how family members affected each other's roles in achieving their shared goal. Most importantly, it teaches human principles and ideals about valuing others' right to life and ignoring evil doings that can result in an inharmonious environment. The Psychological Association of the Philippines can gain more awareness about the importance of providing and building psychological support groups for the families of victims of killings here in the Philippines. This study can be used as a platform by the Government to come up with a strategic plan on how to sensitize the nation on mental health issues to stem the flow of crimes caused by the separation of families.

This study's results can be disseminated through social media platforms, which now make information easily accessible. The researcher will send an email to relevant organizations, such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Health, and the Psychological Association of the Philippines, to ensure the study is widely disseminated. The main benefit is for the family, which is the main source and inspiration for this study, who will gain insight into how love and family support should be expressed within families, especially amid challenges. They would also gain an understanding of the importance of taking care of their mental health and of persevering in all aspects of life. This study could give them insight into the future by helping them understand and reflect on each participant's story, thereby strengthening their faith in God. Finally, for future researchers, this study would help them gain knowledge about other possible interventions to support victims' families of killings and provide a useful reference to strengthen their analytical skills.

Moreover, the following are the limitations of the study: (1) this study is not generalizable to all the families of murdered victims because this study was conducted using a criterion sampling technique, which has an impact on the scope of the study. Participants provide quite a few references, a relatively small number of families, which have been selected based on the criteria and nature of this study. The researcher had a limited number of participants and limited access to data, and the study did not represent the entire population of South Cotabato, Mindanao. (2) The time frame might impact the participant's memory and understanding of what happened since the interview was done based on the availability and willingness of the participants. Also, the number of years since the killing of their loved one was taken into consideration, as participants' retrospective narratives influenced not only the initial experience of loss, but the processes of adjusting, coping and meaning-making that occurred over time. To address these limitations, the researcher ensured that the data collected was relevant to the study by including relevant questions in the interview guide. Based on the number of years that had passed since the death of a loved one, these questions were designed to capture the lived experiences of each family. This method allowed the researcher to produce results that would better represent the experience of the families and could be useful for families facing similar losses. Whereas, the delimitations of this study do not cover other crimes such as treason, piracy in general, and mutiny on the high seas in Philippine waters, qualified piracy, qualified bribery, parricide, infanticide, kidnapping and serious illegal detention, robbery with violence against or intimidation of persons, destructive arson, distribution, manufacturing, and possession of illegal drugs. Also, the researchers considered halting or canceling the interview if any study participants began to feel uneasy or exhibit anxiety due to the research questions.

METHOD

This section of the study provides a broad overview of the study participants, materials, and instruments, the key design, and the procedures that contribute to this study's significance.

Study Participants

The population of this research consists of ten (10) participants from six families, with one to three family members from each family, residing in the municipality of Koronadal, Province of South Cotabato. Data collection for this study was conducted using a semi-structured interview (in-depth interview). The researcher chose semi-structured interviews because they are flexible and adaptable for collecting qualitative data (Kallio et al., 2016). They were conversations in which the researcher had a plan for what she wanted to investigate, had questions to ask, and had information to consult to guide her (Fylan, 2005). Furthermore, Dejonckheere & Vaughn (2022) concluded that the technique enables researchers to gather unstructured data, explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a specific topic, and obtain in-depth information about sensitive and personal issues.

This study used a criterion sampling technique to achieve the predefined criteria. Participants were identified and recruited through family members, workmates, and friends. The researcher approached each one of them; inaccessible ones were reached via social media. The six families from South Cotabato were selected because they had experienced a homicide or murder case that fulfilled the criteria for this study. Also, because each story is unique, some gained notoriety among others, leading to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of family members who suffered from the tragedy. The participants' experiences with the phenomenon were the most important factor in this study. The researcher seeks out participants who have similar experiences but differ in personal qualities and life experiences (Moser & Korstiens, 2018).

This study included families aged between 21 and 60 years old who had lost a loved one in a crime such as murder or homicide. Since the participant's age range encompasses early and middle adulthood, and this study involves episodic memory, the researcher based this age range on Loaiza (2024), who explains that episodic memory is one of the cognitive domains that undergo age-related changes across adulthood, particularly in recalling associative and contextual details. This age group is more suitable for the study of recall of the lived experiences of families who lost a family member as a result of murder or homicide, and to reduce the impact of more advanced age-related cognitive changes. In addition, only immediate family members (spouse and children) were included, as they are the first to form a close relationship with the victim, enabling this study to identify changes in their relationships before and after the incident. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria were families who experienced other heinous crimes such as treason, parricide, infanticide, kidnapping and serious illegal detention, robbery with violence against or intimidation of persons, destructive arson, distribution, manufacturing, and possession of illegal drugs because the focus of this study was to learn more about the wide impact of homicide or murder in which the Philippines recorded about 1,121 homicide incident in 2023, which is slightly increased from 2022, according to the statistical analysis presented in Statista research (Balita, 2024), which gives the idea that this phenomenon has an impact on society especially on the family, which is basic unit in the society. However, this does not devalue other heinous crimes. It is just that the number of homicides at this time has grown, and the people involved in the situation should be aware of their mental health to understand the impact on society. Furthermore, because participation was voluntary, participants could withdraw at any time for any reason. The researcher acknowledged that each participant had the freedom to decide which questions they felt comfortable answering and to end the interview at any time, even after providing informed consent.

This research takes place in the Province of South Cotabato. The Province of South Cotabato, also known as "Timog Kutabato," is located in the SOCCSKSARGEN region in Mindanao. There were 957,476 people as of the 2020 census. The capital of South Cotabato is Koronadal City, from which six of the families/participants came. South Cotabato comprises 10 municipalities and 1 component city. Koronadal City is 23.1 km away, a 33-minute drive. This location was chosen because of its accessibility, which allowed the researcher to efficiently and effectively collect data from each participant, and because it is a secure area for roaming around the city of each municipality.

Six cases of lived experiences are included in this study. Each case had its own story to tell; they differed in how situations were handled, how feelings were expressed, and in their reactions and behaviors. However, one common factor was that the killings had a wide-ranging impact on each family's mental health. The uniqueness of each case lies in how each family member reacts to and copes with the heinous crime. The researcher also explored and determined the mental and emotional support each family member provided to others, as well as the specific coping skills they applied to themselves and to other family members.

Materials and Instruments

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview. Observations are also part of conducting qualitative research, alongside audio or video recordings, to provide detailed information. In addition, photographs provided by the participants were useful in this study, as they illustrated that the family members had personal relationships with each other and that the information collected corroborated the information provided by the participants in the interview.

Some interview questions in this research were incorporated from Lister (2005) in her study titled "Meaning-making in grieving parents: Process and outcome." Lister (2005) assessed the validity of the questions by two reviewers: one a bereaved parent who was also professionally involved in grief support, and the other a bereavement counselor. Feedback was given on the appropriateness, relevance, and language of the questions. Additionally, other sources of the interview guide for this study were developed by Parapully et al. (2016) for their study, "Thriving after trauma: The experience of Parents of Murdered Children", which explored three main areas: (1) the participant's current situation and background; (2) the murder and how it affected them, particularly the emotional impact; and (3) the participant's response to the murder, its repercussions, and what enabled him or her to turn the tragedy into something optimistic.

Design and Procedure

A Phenomenological approach was employed to achieve the goal of this study because this approach aims to understand and describe how an individual experience and make sense of a specific phenomenon. In this study, the lived experiences of families after the killing of a loved one were explored to understand how they made sense of the loss and how this loss was experienced in relation to their mental health. Furthermore, the researcher employed bracketing by rigorously analyzing the data and repeatedly revisiting the participants' statements while setting aside personal assumptions, beliefs and preconceptions.

Moreover, the data analysis in this study was grounded in theory; open coding attaches concepts (codes) to observed data and phenomena for qualitative data analysis. It is one of the procedures for dealing with text outlined by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Open coding was achieved by breaking down the data into meaningful expressions and describing them in single words or short sequences of words. These expressions were then annotated and notated with relevant notions. The codes were associated with a line, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document (protocol, case). During coding, breaking down and analyzing the language were maintained as primary objectives; however, the construction of categories that organized over time was also maintained. The final product of open coding was a list of codes and categories associated with the text, along with code notes explaining their content.

The dimensions for examining and organizing the participants' experiences were age, family roles, life experiences, and coping strategies. Although six families shared similarities in age and household responsibilities, each family demonstrated different emotional responses, reactions to situations, coping strategies and perspectives when dealing with life's challenges.

The researcher in this study gathered and integrated data to provide valuable insights into the participants lived experiences, feelings, and emotions. The researcher protected the participants from re-traumatizing as this study was about past and traumatic experiences. This was ensured by allowing participants to "pass" on any queries they found uncomfortable during the interview and by providing a psychologically safe environment in which they could express their feelings and emotions without judgment, thereby encouraging transparency and authentic responses.

In addition, the key steps and procedures in this research started with the development of an interview guide question, which was validated by five (5) analysts and received a good validation score. Then, the researcher seeks approval from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) to proceed with data gathering. Following approval, the researcher gathered the necessary information to select participants who met the criteria and to carry out the study's objective. The researcher identified the eligible participants, then proceeded to each participant's residence to distribute a letter inviting them to participate in the study in that barangay. After approval, informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from participants aged 18 and above.

After completing the consent form, participants completed a sociodemographic and information sheet. This process enabled the researcher to identify the source of information based on the audio recordings taken during the data collection process. The researcher then proceeded to ask the basic questions in the interview guide. Additional materials were collected with the consent of the participants, including photographs and audio recordings. Data gathering was done over a period of six (6) months, based on the agreed-upon schedules and availability of both researcher and the participants.

After the one-on-one in-depth interview is conducted, the researcher begins collecting qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. The information was transcribed word for word and read thoroughly to become familiar with the subject. The researcher was assisted by a data analyst, an expert in phenomenology, to ensure the study's reliability and credibility, in accordance with the guidelines. Using the Strauss (1987) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) data analysis techniques enables researchers to process collected data systematically and in an organized manner. The first phase is (1) open coding, followed by (2) axial coding, and lastly (3) selective coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). To illustrate the findings, the researcher created an APA-style table summarizing the themes and core ideas in accordance with the research questions.

Additionally, the trustworthiness of this study lies in the rigorous analysis of participants' raw interview data and in the transparency with which the literature was presented, acknowledged, and cited. The researcher demonstrated how participants' statements, thoughts, and feelings were used during the interview to capture their insights and ideas. With this, the study was conducted with credibility and purpose. Dependability lies in consistently and thoroughly adhering to research and ethical protocols, from data collection to data analysis. The researcher took notes on the participant's own views, prejudices, and observations to establish confirmability. Instead of leading the interview, the researcher followed up by asking participants for clarification. The researcher provided an account of the interview subjects and discussed the findings, accompanied by narrative quotes to support them. The transferability of this study was also achieved by using the same data-gathering methods for other heinous crime victims in other parts of Mindanao, and, through a thick description strategy, the researcher described the behavior and experiences of each family member and the entire context, which can be fully understood and evaluated by the reader.

To achieve the objective of this study, the researcher ensured that UMERC ethics were upheld throughout the process. Moreover, the researcher assured that the six (6) families had a support system from risk or harm during and after the interview. The researcher did not directly provide a psychological intervention to the participants, but created a psychologically safe environment during the interview and shared personal information with them so they could contact the researcher if they were disturbed after the interview. The researcher used pseudonyms for the participants, and audio recordings were anonymized and destroyed at the end of the study and upon publication of the findings, in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Additionally, using QuillBot software for grammar checking and phrase paraphrasing helps ensure compliance with copyright laws and helps avoid plagiarism. Considering that all the raw data, notes, and recordings were kept and made accessible in case of plagiarism.

In addition, the researcher carefully followed the institutional guidelines for identification, disclosure, and resolution of conflicts of interest. By separating personal and professional roles; being transparent about the study's sole purpose; collaborating with the adviser as a co-author of this research, UM professionals, and outside sources; following ethical protocols; and maintaining records, the study was conducted transparently and ethically. Furthermore, the researcher gave the participants a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. Finally, all measures in this research fully adhered to the UMERC, ensuring that the researcher followed the protocols, as evidenced by the UMERC Certificate of Approval (Protocol No.). UMERC-2024-

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data on the lived experiences of the families of victims of killings were summarized in Tables 1, 2, and 3 at the bottom of this page, based on the key themes and core ideas identified for each research question.

Table I.

Themes on the lived experiences of the families of victims of killings

Themes	Core Ideas
Traumatic and Complex Grief	- unbelievable; cannot accept it right away
	- like it was not real; did not make sense
	- got really nervous
	- just felt so heavy
	- Everything suddenly went dark
	- was not just ordinary crying, but wailing
	- did not even know what the offense was
	- pitying oneself; adding more to self-depression
	- could not get to sleep
	- became unhealthy in just two months
Secondary Victimization	- fighting for justice
	- no sense of security at all
	- shared all the difficulties
	- Really caused a lot of stress
	- trembling so badly; really depressed
	- had to face all of those while pregnant
Persistent Fear and Insecurity	- the terror of knowing a loved one was gone
	- constantly trembling with fear
	- fear mixes with anger
	- Anxiety lasted for almost two years
	- really felt a sense of shame
	- stopped thinking about playing
	- confused and do not understand things anymore
Social Isolation and Stigma	- took a long time to move on
	- felt like I could not take it anymore
	- seemed like I had no strength left
	- as if turned into a wilted vegetable

	- became aloof; never easily got close to men
	- Fear grew inside when it came to men
	- blamed oneself for not expressing love
	- worried for the future of the children
Unstable Family Dynamics	- Family members drifted apart
	- had to face all the responsibilities
	- painful seeing one's mother crying
	- Brother took on all of Father's responsibilities
	- no longer a father to show what a relationship is supposed to be
Socio-Economic Strain	- wondered what would happen next
	- Life became really more difficult
	- never showed to others that we were broken
	- became responsible for the work
	- started doing jobs like manicures
	- Did laundry work for others just to survive
	- had to do all the work that men usually do
	- worked hard to have money for daily needs
	- completely down, family members never know how to survive

Table 1 above presents the lived experiences of the families of victims of killings. Participants recalled their experiences upon hearing the news about the killing of their loved one and how the incident affected their relationship and roles with one another as a family. Based on the participants' statements, six (6) themes emerged: Traumatic and Complex Grief, Secondary Victimization, Persistent Fear and Insecurity, Social Isolation and Stigma, Unstable Family Dynamics, and Socio-Economic Strain.

Traumatic and Complex Grief

Upon hearing the news about the sudden death of a loved one, there was a feeling of disbelief (e.g., it was not real, or it did not make sense), nervousness, and heaviness. These initial reaction expresses more than a fleeting emotional response; it conveys a first moment of confusion and incomprehension in the sudden change to their reality. The unexpected loss heightened by crying and some members was wailing which implied the profound emotional impact of the killing. Additionally, the distress was intensified as families could not think of any offense their loved one committed. Following the loss of a loved one, some families reported self-pity and depression, which lead to inability to sleep and becoming unhealthy for two months. From these experiences, it shows complex grief as it affects their physical and emotional abilities during their grieving process.

Participant 1 (Vil) shared her initial reaction upon hearing the news about the killing of her father.

Hindi ko magpati tung una kay syempre bata pa ko, ano tana hinalunghong ko sa mga patyanay kay sa tv ko lang makita na. (ID11_RQ1_FQ1.2)

I could not believe it at first because I was still young. What did I know about killings? I only ever saw things like that on TV.

Participant 4 (Zel) also shared her disbelief upon hearing the killing of her father.

Na shock pila edad ko sa to? Grabe hibi ko dayon. Oo dira nag hibi hindi ka pati e. Hindi kami ka pati, hambal ko tuod ba ni daw na shock as in daw unbelievable denial ka nga, daw hindi ka kapati kami pinaka last nga nahambalan tanan nga tao kabalo na. (IDI4_RQ1_FQ1.2)

I was shocked. How old was I back then? I cried so hard right away. Yes, I cried right there, I could not believe it. We could not believe it. I kept saying, "Is this really true?" I was so shocked, like it was unbelievable, you are in denial, you cannot accept it, we are the last ones to be informed about the incident; everyone else already knew about it.

Secondary Victimization

Since the family members mostly shared half of their lives with the victim, they were susceptible to physical and psychological impact. With this, most of the families reported various difficulties ranging from fighting for justice to experiencing stress and having no sense of security at all. Therefore, their experienced extends with the society, influencing their ability to connect with other people and with their community. Also, with the physical symptoms of trembling, and one family member expressed that she experienced depression. These experiences illustrate the way in which psychological distress was manifested in the body, indicating the close connection between emotional distress and physical reactions to loss. Furthermore, the experience of one family member whose mother had to face all the challenges while she was pregnant after her father was murdered, highlights the impact of the loss on the family beyond the immediate bereavement.

Participant 4 (Zel) shared the feeling of no security in their family after losing their father.

Walay security nga mabatyagan mo tapos budlay-budlay ang life. (IDI4_RQ1_FQ1.4)

There was no sense of security at all, and life was highly challenging.

Participant 3 (Be) also recalled her struggles with the killing of her father.

Ano e daw nangurog gid ko gang grabe hibi ko, siguro sa amon abi ako gid ang emotional kay siguro ang magulang ko ano daw layo siya kay tatay sa pag istar niya sa balay. (IDI3_RQ1_FQ1.3)

I was trembling so badly. I cried so hard. Maybe because I was the most emotional among us since my older sibling seemed distant to my father when she stayed in our home.

Persistent Fear and Insecurity

The terror of knowing a loved one was gone made several of the families experience constant trembling with fear, anger, shame, and anxiety. These emotional responses indicate the persistent disturbance of emotional security. Additionally, some were bewildered as to why such circumstances befell their loved ones, indicating their struggle to understand the reason behind the killing. One participant stopped engaging in playful activities she enjoyed as a child after her father's death, as she had to focus on helping her family to survive. This account brings into focus the impact of this death on her childhood experiences that also disrupted her normal family roles.

Participant 5 (Lu) shared her fear and terror following the killing of her father.

Sympre kulba.. kahadlok nga wala na tatay mo, ma ano ka na lang wala na bal.an si nanay mo ga halo ang kulba kag ka ugot mismo kay sympre na bl.an mo ang imu tatay ging tiro muh wala ka kabalo kng ano sala niya. (IDI5_RQ1_FQ1.2)

Of course, there was a fear, that terror of knowing your father was gone. You start wondering what will happen to you now. Your mother knows nothing, and your fear mixes with anger because you found out your father was shot, and you do not even know what he did wrong.

Participant 4 (Zel) also shared the shame she felt upon the killing of their father.

In what way kay ang tatay ko ging patay ang tatay ko, may mabatyagan ka gid nga shame kay ging murder ang tatay ko. May shame gid siya ba maka batyag ka gid shame, nahuya gani ko mag hambal nga na ano ang tatay mo? ano, diin si papa mo? Daw nahuya ko nga maghambal kung kis.a nga ging murder. (IDI4_RQ1_FQ1.4)

Because my father was killed, I really felt a sense of shame. He was murdered, and there was a feeling of embarrassment, especially when people asked me, "What happened to your father?" "Where is your father?" I am embarrassed to say that he was murdered.

Social Isolation and Stigma

Meanwhile, social Isolation and stigma were also reported by some of the families. The "moving on" process takes longer. After the death of a loved one, spouses became worried for the future of their children. They felt like they could not take it anymore, seemed to have no strength left, and felt as though they had turned into a "wilted vegetable." These experiences of the families speak an impact of the incident to a tremendous degree of concern of surviving spouses over future generation of children, emotional emptiness and inability to respond to the loss. Some families seemed to affect their social lives and the capacity to move forward. Moreover, in the absence of a father, one participant developed a fear of men, leading to became aloof with them. This emotional loss of her father goes beyond the loss of trust towards her interpersonal relationships.

Participant 6 (Sie) expressed the fear she developed towards men after the killing:

Ano kay wala man ko father figure. Ano aloof ako. Hindi ako madali-dali wala ko naga pa sabak sa mga lalaki pareha sina sa iban nga ga hug ng wala lang ano matan.aw lang ko pero siling ng ma close. Sa tiyo hindi ko amo sina. Aloof ko sa mga lalaki hindi ko siling nga open ko sang iban. (IDI6_RQ1_FQ1.4).

Since I did not have a father figure, I became distant and aloof around men. I was not the type of woman who get easily close with men, unlike others who can freely hug them; I was not like that. I would just observe. Even with my uncles. I was always aloof with men; I am not as open or comfortable as other people.

Participant 10 (Tg) shared her physical and emotional reaction to the killing of her husband.

Daw ma ano ko, daw gulay ko nga wala na ko kusog pero ang kulba ko daw mga 2 years gid e. (IDI10_RQ1_FQ1.2)

I felt like a "wilted vegetable"; I had no strength at all, and my fear lasted for almost two years.

Unstable Family Dynamics

Beyond personal experiences, unstable family dynamics were evident among the families, as some participants reported family members slowly drifting apart and spouses and children shouldering all responsibilities, especially for a mother raising her children alone. One family member described the pain of seeing her mother crying after the killing of their father. So, the brother took on all of their father's responsibilities, and it was hard for their mother, since there was no father figure to show what a relationship is supposed to be like. These shows that the responsibility of family obligations shifted immediately, and the emotional load lingered with the remaining family members.

Participant 6 (Sie) described their family dynamics after the killing of their father.

Ang magulang ko gid ang nag salo sang responsibilidad sang tatay ko. (ID6_RQ1_FQ1.4)

My older sibling was the one who took on all of our father's responsibilities.

Participant 5 (Lu) also shared their new role in the family after the killing of their father.

Si nanay ko wala na ya ga palibog kung ano. Ang magulang ko naga palibog kng paano kami maka income. (IDI5_RQ1_FQ1.4)

My mother did not worry about how we were going to earn a living; it was my older sibling who worried about those things.

Socio-Economic Strain

Furthermore, families experienced socioeconomic strain. Most of them felt that life became more difficult as they never knew how to survive and were unsure of what would happen next after losing one provider. They imply that the loss was not just a physical and emotional challenge but also to the family's economic well-being and security. As a result, some families were forced to take on the usual duties of their father or husband. One of the participants worked as a manicurist and washed other people's laundry to earn a living, to survive, and to provide for other family members' needs. These convey the nature of economic adaptation during the bereavement, where family members had to assume additional responsibilities for the absence of their loved one's income.

Participant 7 (Pin) shared her struggles as a mother after the killing of her husband.

Ang kulba ko daw mga 2 years gid e, pero kung hindi ko mag ubra paano ang mga anak ko sa 1-year nga napatay siya mga 1-month damu ka man mga bugas asta nga nag 2 years nga nag ubra ko ga pang labada ko. (IDI7_RQ1_FQ1.4)

My fear lasted for almost two years. I realized that if I did not find a job, what would happen to my children? Our first year without my husband, we had food for about a month. However, after that, I needed to find a job. Fortunately, I was able to get a job as a laundry worker for 2 years.

Participant 4 (Zel) also shared her personal challenges after the killing of their father.

Tanan nga trabaho panglalaki kailangan namon ubrahon sag.ob mag bis.ak mag hakwat. Budlay gid kay wala pa daan kami father, wala pa kami mother. (IDI4_RQ1_1.4)

We had to do all the work that men usually do, such as carrying and lifting heavy loads. It was really tough because we lost a father, and our mother was not there either.

Table 2.

Themes on the mental health of each family member and how the incident affects their current mental state and behavior

Themes	Core Ideas
Alarming Stress	- was constantly on the edge of trauma
	- constantly trembling with fear
	- had a nervous breakdown
	- had fits of shaking and could not help at all
	- froze for a moment at times, almost paranoid
	- Suddenly panicked at an unusual sound

	- listened carefully when the dogs barked - scared with every knock on the door - afraid of being blocked or attacked - had fear inside oneself for the children - Awful, like never wanted to wake up anymore - lost a lot of weight
Emotional Dysfunction	- really full of anger toward the culprits - wanted revenge to hurt the offenders - wanted to go wild seeing them in court - would get startled, tremble, and shake easily - confused; was not able to express oneself - developed hatred toward older men - longing still there for a lost loved one - cannot help but cry for the early loss of a father
Cognitive Distortions and Memory Loss	- became paranoid; disappeared for about a year - got worried as oneself is unresponsive - always thinking about the incident - could not sleep; was restless - felt like it was a dream; I cannot believe it - could not accept that the killing had happened - let it all get into one's head - Even just talking was risky
Guilt, Shame, and Self-Blame	- People can be so judgmental - already have trust issues - should have acted differently - do not even know the reason why - accept the reality that maybe that is really where it ends - people think they might get dragged into one's situation
Loss of a Safe Worldview	- People cannot be trusted; they might change their minds - did not want to be alone; would lock the doors - enemies might come back for us - no longer have the strength to deal with things - scared when no one answers calls - never went outside by oneself anymore - afraid of every person coming near - turned head in fear at the sound of a vehicle - got confused at loud popping sounds - wanted to tie children close to oneself - Children were never allowed to go out at night - became overprotective towards their own children - needed to be around many people

Table 2 above presents the themes and core ideas on the effects of killings on the mental state and behavior of the family members of the victims. Participants shared how the killing of their loved one made an impact on their lives. They described their emotions, thoughts, and feelings several days and weeks after the death, as

well as how they view the world and the people around them. Furthermore, families revealed unresolved issues or unfinished business they had not expressed while their loved one was still alive, and how these issues affect them in the present moment.

Alarming Stress

Following the killing, most families experienced alarming stress; there was a constant trembling with fear, and they felt like they were on the edge of trauma. Some felt scared with every knock at the door, had fits of shaking, and felt helpless. At times, some would freeze for a moment, become almost paranoid, and suddenly panic at just an unusual sound. Alert when a dog barking, afraid of being blocked or attacked. These encounters suggest that the killing had a profound effect on their feeling of security, making everyday situations and environmental cues threat stimuli that was carried through their children, with some participants reported an inner fear to the safety of their family. Also, feeling awful that they never wanted to wake up, and a few experienced significant weight losses indicating emotional effects that hinder families' healthy life.

Participant 4 (Zel) recalled her stress following the killing of her father.

Simula sa to tanan nga mag tuktok sa balay kulba.an grabe e kay may kaso bi that time nag run kami case diba nakulong gani so anytime basi kami ang e harm kwanan kami pwde niya kami e harm miskan ga byahe nahadlok ko kay basi harangan kami. (IDI4_RQ2_FQ2.4)

After the incident, I felt scared in every knock on the door, as we were dealing with a case at that time. He was put in jail, but I am afraid that we could be harmed anytime. They could harm us. Even when traveling, I was scared that we might be attacked.

Participant 10 (Tg) also recalled the physical and mental challenges she faced during the killing of her husband.

Sang bag.o siya na ano mga first three months nga tuloy-tuloy nag niwang ako daw praning gani ko may kulba ka gani sa imu nga sarili sa imu nga kabataan.

Hindi ko katulog kung ako lang, hindi ko ka tulog e okay lang ko sa kwarto nga ako lang pero dapat may upod ko sa gawas pero kung ako lang isa sa balay hindi takon, hadlok ko, lalo na may taghol ga tiid-tiid asta subong gina tiid-tiid pa ko basi may tao bala. (IDI10_RQ2_FQ2.1)

During the first three months, I lost a lot of weight. I was paranoid, I felt fear for myself and for my children.

I cannot sleep if I am alone. I am fine staying in my room by myself as long as a I know someone is outside. To this day, when I hear a dog barking, I got scared and alert, thinking maybe someone is out there.

Emotional Dysfunction

In terms of their mood associated with the heinous crime, some families experienced events of negative emotional state, such as developing anger leading to a desire for revenge to hurt the offenders, an urge to act wildly seeing them in court, and developed hatred towards older men. These responses indicated that the violent nature of the death made the grieving process even more painful because they had to deal with the unresolved anger and feelings of injustice towards the perpetrators. Whereas, the exaggerated startle response, trembling, confusion, and difficulty expressing oneself during the grieving process reflects emotional burden. Longing persisted and often accompanied by crying after the loss indicating the continued presence of the loved one in the family members' emotional lives.

Participant 4 (Zel) shared her emotions towards her father's perpetrators.

^P *Revenge, amo gid na sa isip ko, ma revenge gid ko pasakitan
ke gid ning pamilya nyo wala na si Lord sa life ko tapos ga inin*

Revenge, that is really what was in my mind. I wanted revenge; I wanted to hurt his family. That was before I encountered the Lord in my life. I kept thinking about revenge, that I would get even with them. Those thoughts remained in my mind until I was in high school.

Participant 5 (Lu) also shared the hatred she developed towards men after the killing of her father.

Tapos ng daw nag hatred ako sa mga tigulang nga lalaki kay ang nag patay kay tatay tigulang mo siling mo bala nga amo na nga tao te bisantigulang na manog patay tao amo na akon isip muh na. (IDI5_RQ2_FQ2.4)

Then I also developed hatred towards older men, because the one who killed my father was an old man. So, in my mind, even they were old, they were capable of killing someone. This is what I am thinking.

Cognitive Distortions and Memory Loss

In cognition associated with the heinous crime, some families experienced negative beliefs or expectations about themselves, others, and the world, such as always thinking about the killing; feeling like it all gets into one's head with intense episodes of sadness that they could not accept the killing, and felt that it was like a dream. There was also a sense of worry in oneself, and even talking to other people was perceived as risky, leading to paranoia and unable to sleep. These recurring thoughts of the killing, increased anxiety, and distrust of others along with sleep disturbance, suggesting changes in cognition that also affected families' daily functioning as well.

Participant 7 (Pin) expressed her sleepless nights following the killing of her husband.

Hindi ako katulog kay isipon ko nga te sympre bwat ano. (IDI7_RQ2_FQ2.1)

I was unable to go to sleep because I kept thinking what would happen to us the following day.

Participant 10 (Tg) also expressed her paranoia due to the killing.

Medyo may pagka praning lang kay duro isyu sa amon sa akon. (IDI10_RQ2_FQ2.4)

I am a little paranoid because of the issues surrounding me and my family.

Guilt, Shame, and Self-Blame

For some families, negative emotional states, such as trust issues, guilt, shame, and self-blame, were experienced. The unfinished business that some family members revealed manifested in the feelings of guilt often related to thoughts about what they felt they ought to have done differently, particularly in expressing love when the loved one was still alive. Such reports indicate that some families reflect on their relationships with the murdered family member, leading them to revisit moments, actions, and expressions of affection that could no longer be changed. The shame and self-blame experienced by some family members were also linked to concerns about how others might perceive their family. Additionally, one family member had thoughts that people might get involved into their situation which increased cautiousness and mistrust. From these experiences it became clear that the guilt, shame, and self-blame were part of a continuous struggle to reconstruct the sense of self, relationships and the environment.

Participant 4 (Zel) revealed the unresolved issues she had with her late father.

That time hindi ko napabatyag nga love ko siya kay nag abot abi ang season nga gina hambalan ko ni mama nga hambali na si tatay mo nga untati ang inom, so that time sige ko ano sa iya sinuplada. Amo tong regret ko. (IDI4_RQ2_FQ2.6)

At that time, I could not express my love for him because my mother was telling me to remind my father to stop drinking. So, I would be rude and cold towards him; that is something I regret.

Participant 5 (Lu) also revealed her guilt after the killing of her father.

Balan mo ako sang una hindi ako loving kay tatay ko. Hindi ko amu sina hindi ko maexpress in action. (IDI5_RQ2_FQ2.6)

I am not loving toward my father before. I am not that kind of person who could express love through actions.

Loss of a Safe Worldview

Lastly, the killing shapes families' views of the world and of other people. After the incident, some family members came to believe that people cannot be trusted; they might do good at first, but later they might change their minds and do bad things to others. This change in their perception affected their ability to function in their daily lives; as some did not feel safe going anywhere without a companion. These feelings were associated with hypervigilance in their surroundings, such as fear of being alone, being afraid of every person coming near, locking the doors for protection because they fear that enemies might come back for them, being scared when children could not answer calls, never going outside by oneself anymore, and becoming overprotective towards their own children, also, reaching a point where they wanted to tie children close to oneself and restrict them from going out at night. Also, a startle response to the sound of a vehicle and to a loud popping sound. With these experiences, it indicates change in sense of safety and families' responses to environmental sounds also further illustrate the impact of the killing on their day-to-day perception.

Participant 1 (Pal) shared the changes in how she views people around her after the killing of her husband.

Miskan ano pa sa palibot mo hindi ka mag salig e kay miskan ano nga oras ara gid ang panulay, maayo ang utok subong sunod lain na. (IDI1_RQ2_FQ2.7)

One cannot completely trust on one's surroundings because evil can be present anytime. A person's mind can be good in one moment, but later, it may begin to think of doing something bad.

Participant 7 (Pin) also shared the safety rules she imposed at their home, particularly to ensure the safety of her children.

Oo, lock man tapos ang mga anak ko kung gab.i na hindi na sila mag gawas tapos kaon tulog na kamo aga pa kamu bwat ma mata ma iskuela, amo na. (IDI7_RQ2_FQ2.4)

Yes, we would lock the doors, and my children were not allowed to go out at night. Then I would tell them, "Eat, then go to sleep, you have to wake up early tomorrow for school."

Table 3.

Themes on coping strategies used to keep going with their lives and support each other's mental health, and reflection /insights learned about the killing of their loved one

Themes	Core Ideas
Protectiveness and Self-Control	- stopped thinking about what happened
	- tried not to think about the past
	- no longer internalize the lost loved one
	- learned to accept that he was gone
	- Life is short, love your family
Religion and Faith	- believed God has a way and a plan
	- entrusted all problems to Father God
	- got strength and comfort from the Lord
	- held on to God to be steadfast
	- thankful for being able to survive
	- realized one survives without a father
	- really needed to forgive
Pressure to Remain Strong	- tried to stay positive; just endured it
	- fought what I am feeling
	- talked to people to feel better
	- learned to manage oneself
	- stood on my own
	- lived independently
	- grew more mature, assertive, and strong
Support and Assistance	- received help from friends
	- supported by family and relatives
	- reminded to do one's best to survive
	- comforted by children and neighbors
	- encouraged by the community members

Table 3 above presents families' coping strategies to help themselves and other family members despite the effects of the killings. Families found ways to overcome the battles they faced every day. By acquiring practical and spiritual coping strategies, they were able to continue their lives together with other family members and focus on their here-and-now experiences.

Protectiveness and Self-Control

For some families, coping with the loss meant exercising self-control and protecting themselves from emotional pain of the experience. They talked about how they worked hard not to think about what had happened and tried not to think about the past to make sense of the loss of their loved one. This was a form of emotional suppression that seemed to be a way of dealing with the suffering of their loss and maintaining a sense of control over it. Moreover, reflecting on shortness and uncertainty of life made them view their loss as a reminder to express love toward their remaining family members and to appreciate their present lives.

Participant 7 (Pin) shared her coping strategies she used to move forward throughout her grieving process.

Amo tung gina isip ko na lang na, ma labada ko para maka bakal ko bugas, wala ko gina isip to pero ga balik man e. (IDI7_RQ3_FQ3.1)

I am just focusing on my work so that I can provide for my family. I try not to think about what happened, but sometimes, the incident crosses my mind.

Participant 4 (Zel) also shared her way of coping during the killing of her father.

Oo amo na ang way of coping, ng movie, gina avoid ko siya gina tanggal ko sa isip ko, wala ko na siya gina internalized. (IDI4_RQ3_FQ3.1)

Yes, I watch movies as a way of coping. I avoid and no longer internalized what happened.

Religion and Faith

For most family members their religion and faith helped them to make sense of the loss. Their belief that God has a way and plan for their lives, gave them strength and comfort. Also, entrusting all the problems to God and holding on to His promises to remain steadfast served as an aid to forgive the offenders. Also, some of them expressed gratitude for being able to survive despite the absence of their loved one. These insights imply a new sense of hope and direction as they gave over their worries and problems to God, recognizing that they cannot control everything. Furthermore, these suggest a gradual change in self-perception and priorities, recognizing their ability to endure and overcome the killing of their loved one.

Participant 4 (Zel) expressed her reflections on how her faith had changed the way she understood the killing of her father.

Simula sa to nag iba ang perception ko, ang death is pwde gali may matabo sa tao, nag iba gid ang perception ko sa life, ang death is dangerous, may danger nga makuwa ba. Then na forgive ko na siya simula tung nakilala ko si Lord didto ko nag ask for forgiveness. Ai college, college ko nakilala si Lord, didto nag start, ging carry ko to e nuh. 1st year to 4th year high school ging carry ko ang unforgiveness, resentment, pero tung nakilala ko si Lord aii kailangan gali e forgive, amo to nag forgive. (IDI4_RQ4_FQ4.2)

The incident changed my perspective in life. I realized that death can happen to anyone and that life can be unpredictable and dangerous. I was able to forgive him when I came to know the Lord and asked Him for forgiveness. I encountered the Lord when I was in college, so from my first year until my fourth year of high school, I carried the feelings of unforgiveness and resentment. I realized that I had to forgive since I got to know the Lord; that is when I forgave him.

Participant 10 (Tg) also shared the good thing about having faith in God despite the killing of her husband.

Prayer gid ang katapat niya hindi ka gid dapat madula.an pag salig. Ang tanan nga problema mo e salig mo lang kay Papa GOD. (IDI10_RQ3_FQ3.1)

Prayer is really the answer. You should never lose your faith.
Whatever problems you have, just entrust them all to God.

Pressure to Remain Strong

Another way for some of the family members to cope with the loss of a loved one was to endure the pain and try to stay positive for the other family members. The incident made them realize that they had learned to manage themselves; they knew how to live independently or stand on their own feet. They became mature, assertive, and strong, and they thrive on fighting the feelings that arise from the loss. Also, in certain ways, talking to other people makes them feel better. These coping strategies were therefore viewed as a gradual process of enduring the pain, relying on personal strength, and seeking support and comfort in the meaningful relationships provided by others.

Participant 1 (Vil) emphasized the importance of being optimistic about the killing of a loved one.

Positive kami. Amu gani ng permi gina hambal ni mommy nga "Wala na tatay niyo te ang desisyon niyo ara sa inyo kung ma ano kamu pero kung hanggat kaya niyo pa man hindi niyo sukuan, maningkamot na lang gid ta kay sin.o naman lang mag buligay kita na man lang nga pamliya". (IDI1_RQ3_FQ3.1)

We have a positive outlook. My mom always tells us, "Your father is no longer with us, so the decisions are now in your hands and as long as you can, do not give up. We have to work hard, because who else will help us? We are the only ones who can help and support one another as a family."

Participant 2 (Pal) also emphasized her self-growth after the killing of her father.

Amu lang na naging matured ko naging strong, naging palaban sa tanan amu lang gid na, amu na nga nalipay ko nga amu na natabo sa akon, aii wala hindi amu na nga natabo, kung nga.a amu na ugali ko kay nga.a kay kung hindi kami palaban diin kami puluton sini diba, lima kami mo, tatlo na kami ka graduate. (IDI2_RQ4_FQ4.2)

I became mature, strong and resilient. I feel happy about what happened to me, not that I am happy of my father's death but through that experience, I developed these qualities. If I did not learn to be strong and resilient, where would we be now? Considering that there are five of us siblings, and three of us have already graduated.

Support and Assistance

Apart from self-determination, receiving support and assistance from other families, relatives, and friends helps some families to continue to live in the present moment. Spouses were comforted by children and neighbors, while children were reminded to do their best to survive. Also, the encouragement from the community members helps families to cope with the struggles of life after the killing of their loved one. These support and assistance indicate that healing was not an individual journey and that the relationships and social connections of the bereaved family members influenced their healing process.

Participant 6 (Sie) shared the support she received from her relatives following the loss of her father through murder.

Positive lang ang gina hatag sa amon mga tiya ga bulig man sila, mga used man nila nga bags, books, sapatos, ang akon kapakaisahan dako na sila. Mga second hand bags, way nga pag hatag nila support. (IDI6_RQ3_FQ3.3)

Our aunts gave us positive outlook. They provide us with whatever they had, from second-hand bags to books and shoes, since my cousins no longer needed them. This was their way of supporting us.

Participant 2 (Pal) also shared the support she received from her extended family following the killing of her husband.

Ang bayaw ko, kag isa na ang Ginoo nga gina kapit ko gid e number one, buligi lang gid ako, number one gid ina, parehang sang una sa Quiapo, ang Nazareno gina pa blessingan ko na. Hambal ko Ginoo para gid ni sa mga bata ko buligi ako. (IDI2_RQ3_FQ3.3)

My in-law, and most of all, God, whom I truly cling to as my number one supporter. Just like before, I went to Quiapo to bless my Black Nazarene. I just prayed, "LORD, please help me." This prayer is for my children; please help me.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the results presented above were further discussed. The study was supported by different literature and studies to further explain the lived experiences, psychological impact, coping strategies, and significant reflections or insights of families of victims of killings.

Lived Experiences of the Families of Victims of Killings

Based on the presented results, families of victims of killings recalled their experiences on how they reacted after hearing the news about the killing of their loved one, their journey after the death, and changes in the relationship with their family as a result of the incident. The challenges include traumatic and complex grief, secondary victimization, persistent fear and insecurity, social isolation and stigma, unstable family dynamics, and socioeconomic strain.

The study's results revealed that the majority of the families of victims of killings experienced traumatic and complex grief. Most families were shocked at the sudden and unexpected death. Their repeated questioning of the circumstances reflected an attempt to make sense of the experience that was difficult to accept. Moreover, their grieving process was complex because they are not only dealing with psychological challenges but also physical problems.

Mastrocinque et al. (2023) stated that families and friends of homicide victims experienced posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is over 3 times higher in the general population, and prolonged or complicated grief, including 23% of adult families and friends of homicide victims 2 years after the killing of their loved one. Also, they emphasized the physical health issues experienced, such as problems with sleeping and eating, and shortness of breath or chest tightness.

The results indicated that family members of the victims of killings suffered from secondary victimization. Being part of the victim's family unit, family members faced the process of seeking justice, this experience were therefore not limited to emotional burden. Furthermore, since all the victims were male, their loss seemed to impact the families' feeling of stability and safety. In this sense, it reflects disruption to their understanding on how family would function and move forward in the absence of their loved one.

Aguilar Vargas (2024) stated that secondary victimization experienced by family members of murder victims was used to identify the standpoints of professionals and family members who were part of the criminal investigation. Also, the remaining immediate family had to face the judicial process as one of their fundamental rights to seek sanctions and punishment for the perpetrators. With this, their pace and way of life entirely change.

In the days and weeks following the killing, most families experienced persistent fear and insecurity, as presented in the results. Their sense of safety seemed to be disrupted by unexpected death, particularly the loss caused by the actions of another person. Additionally, the feelings of anger, insecurity, and fear changed their view of trust and they seemed to be more aware of the danger that could happen to them or their other family members.

Bereaved families in cold-case homicides shared that they experienced nightmares, waking up in terror, fear, and grief in the body, always thinking about how and why it happened to their loved one; a constant question of what happened (Cantini-Vaisman & Einat, 2026).

Social Isolation and stigma were identified as significant experienced by some of the families of victims of killings, based on the presented results. It seemed that there was a change on how they interact with other people. This isolation may be a defense to protect themselves from judgments, unwanted attention or additional emotional distress associated with the circumstances of the murdered family member.

As added by Sung et al. (2025), there was a change in social relationships experienced by the bereaved families of homicide victims. One of the primary factors is withdrawal from social relationships, family members hurting each other, and a decline in other areas of life, such as work and academic performance. As a result, policy recommendations were made to address the needs of these bereaved families.

Meanwhile, the unstable family dynamics in the study's results show the impact of the killing, as it changes not only the roles and responsibilities of family members but also the connection and bond after the loss of a loved one. These show how family dynamics play a major role when families face challenges and difficulties together. Family relationships reflect how the meaning of the loss goes beyond not only as an individual emotional experience but also reshaped family's way of life.

Adult siblings of homicide victims shared how their family dynamics were after the loss of their loved one. They noticed that some of their family members seemed to change after a traumatic loss. Families drifted apart by distancing themselves from each other rather than offering encouragement and comfort after the incident (Lopez, 2026).

Furthermore, results showed that some families experienced socioeconomic strain after the killing of their loved one. The loss brought financial problems and changes in family dynamics. Family members had to take on new responsibilities and forced to adapt to circumstances they did not expect. Thus, socioeconomic strain corresponds with the grieving process, as some families had to rebuild their roles, responsibilities and ways of supporting the other family members while they also cope with the physical and mental challenges as a result of the incident.

Khalifa et al. (2026) stated the struggles of a partner after a spousal homicide. There was an economic vulnerability, particularly if the spouse relied on their husband financially when he was still alive. This economic strain compounded the emotional burden and reinforced their sense of hyper-responsibility. Additionally, they stated that financial strain was linked with caregiving responsibilities and single-parent household management.

Mental Health of Each Family Member and How the Incident Affects Their Current Mental State and Behavior

Based on the presented results, the effects of killings on the mental state and behavior of families of victims unfold through four (4) themes: alarming stress, emotional dysfunctions, cognitive distortions and memory loss, guilt, shame and self-blame, and loss of a safe worldview.

Most families reported marked emotional and psychological changes after the killing of their family member. These distresses disrupt daily functioning affecting physical aspect or routine. Families' emotions of trauma and fear also affect family members' interactions with others and their sense of the world around them. They faced task of finding a normal era of change and an emotional, psychological and physical burden from the killing.

There were challenges after losing a loved one to murder. Family members encountered psychosocial, socioeconomic, and mental health-related challenges, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. This psychological distress negatively impacts their quality of life after the murder of a loved one and increases due to their appearance in court trials (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Each family member had their own way of expressing their emotions during the grieving process. These results highlight the emotional intensity of their experiences led to difficulties in controlling their emotions indicate that each family member was trying to make sense of the loss in their own way, based on their relationship with the victim and understanding of the circumstances surrounding the death.

During the grieving process, mothers or spouses usually repress sorrow to avoid overly burdening their children with their grief. While children would suppress their emotional responses when they were at home, changes occur when they are in school (e.g., misbehave), which is underappreciated as being associated with homicide (Mastrocinque et al., 2023).

Cognitive distortions and memory loss, as presented in the study's results seemed to correspond to the families' difficulty in managing and understanding the killing of their loved one. These negative thinking patterns influenced their day-to-day perception of themselves, others, and the world. Also, due to the killing, there was heightened suspicion, thinking that other people might harm them, which contributed to increased caution in talking and connecting with other people.

Lebel et al. (2024) stated that cognitive factors are one of the factors that affect the mental health of family members of the homicide victims. The posttraumatic factors arise after the trauma and can also affect cognition, such as an individual's view in the world. With this, they emphasized the importance of cognitive restructuring and anger management to be included in the therapeutic process of the bereaved family members.

Thinking about expressing love toward the victim when he was still alive manifests in feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame. These feelings were often heightened because of the sudden and unexpected death, as family members were left without the chance to foresee the death or to prepare themselves for the loss. Therefore, the guilt and self-blame can be a way of coping to make sense of what they could have done with what could no longer be changed.

The secondary primary factor in the psychological experiences of bereaved families was the "psychological acute stress symptoms", which comprised somatization, re-experiencing, insomnia, fear, self-blame, anxiety, anger toward the perpetrator, and anger toward judicial institutions (Sung et al., 2025)

Furthermore, some families' loss of a safe worldview as presented in the study's results. This negative belief rests on the notion that people cannot be trusted and that the world is dangerous. In response to the harm that might occur to their families, practical measures against the world's schemes were taken, such as locking doors, seeking companionship, and becoming overprotective of their children. These behaviors could be seen as a way to regain a sense of safety and control in an environment that had become perceived as uncertain and potentially threatening.

Wilson et. al. (2025) stated that the impact of the homicide on family members includes changes in their view of the world. Their experiences opened their eyes to the dark side of the world; for some, there was heightened worry about the safety of their loved ones and greater awareness of injustices.

Coping strategies used to keep going with their lives and to support each other's mental health and reflection, or insights learned about the killing of their loved one.

In accordance with the Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) theory as the theoretical framework of this study, the four themes: protectiveness and self-control, religion and faith, pressure to remain strong and support and assistance reflects positive changes that were develop in the families despite the impact of the killing. Spouses and children learned to adapt with their new life without one of the family's primary pillars which increases their personal strength and develop great appreciation in life. With the support and assistance, they received from

their friends, relatives, and community, families were able to strengthened relationship with others and help change their perspective which redirects their priorities to this present moment.

For some families of victims of killings, protectiveness and self-control emerged as their way of coping, based on the results presented in this study. They came to recognize to try to control their thoughts and feelings from being consumed by the circumstances. With this, families gain greater appreciation in life by not dwelling on the past and keeping their minds from getting stuck in the incident resulting to gradual redirection towards their here-and-now experiences.

Families of victims of killings (homicide) develop a need to have control in their lives and not let the incident dictate their lives. Participants in this study shared that their positive changes were also because of how they reflect on their strengths and focus on the things they can control, which allowed them to develop growth towards the incident (Wilson et al., 2025)

Relying on the spiritual realms seemed to offer a meaningful way of coping with the loss of a loved one. Religion and faith provide a framework to make sense of and response to the anxiety and fear that families experienced after the incident. In this way, spirituality became part of most families meaning-making, enabling them to increased personal strength and strengthened relationship with others.

Sharpe et al. (2024) found that relying on religion and spiritual aspects helps black survivors of homicide victims in Canada lessen their feelings of grief and despair. They also testified that they gained realization and purpose towards the incident, and some were engaged in religious fatalism as their coping mechanism.

Most families seemed to have a strong sense of responsibility to remain strong and resilient to provide support to one another. This way of coping develops maturity, assertiveness, and independence to take on new duties and seek out new source of support. These reflect changes in their perspective and priorities to adjust and adapt with their new life without the presence of the victim, indicating a strong sense of growth against the traumatic experiences.

Additionally, in relation to the study of Sharpe et al. (2024), due to a lack of culturally responsive care for the families of homicide victims, particularly black families in Canada, there was pressure to be resilient because families had no choice but to redirect their angst while tending to the needs of their grieving family members, which reflects the experiences of the families of victims of killing in this present study.

Lastly, based on the study's results, the support and assistance received from families and friends help family members overcome the challenges of their journey and guide their healing process. The support, reminders, and encouragement from relative strengthened their relationships with other people, signifying the importance of lending a hand to those families who feel crushed by the cruelty and evil in the society.

There was value in relying on social support (family, friends), seeking emotional help (talking, psychological support), and investing in individual activities focused on self-care, health management, and leisure to alleviate pain and health issues following the incident (Souza et al., 2024).

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUDING REMARK

Based on the study's results, this section presents implications for practice and future research, as well as concluding remarks. This study aims to identify and explore the lived experiences of families of victims of killings. Understand how these experiences made an impact on the mental health of the families and uncovered specific factors that shape their current behavior.

Implication for Practice

Based on the findings, the following are the implications for practice that emerge: (1) The study's results emphasized the impact of the killings on the mental health of the families of victims. The RA 11036 (Mental Health Law Act) implies covering the rights of the families to access a psychosocial support in the barangays or the city they belong to, and protecting the human rights of families to have a healthy state of mind, as well

as an intervention program by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Develop appropriate and responsive psychological interventions, such as exposing the families, particularly the children, to arts and other intrapersonal activities to express their feelings and emotions throughout their bereavement process. (2) The Department of Health (DOH) may be able to help families of victims of killings access medical aid they might need, particularly for those experiencing physical symptoms during the grieving process. (3) Additional support services within the Department of Justice and the Philippine National Police (PNP), can help protect and promote a just verdict to the families of victims of murder or homicide. (4) Mental Health practitioners should conduct psychological first aid, trauma-informed and grief-informed assessment to screen family members for traumatic grief, anxiety, depression, sleep problems and ongoing distress following the killing of a loved one. Also, provide family counseling to assist family members to communicate and support each other during the grieving process, changes in family roles, and learn healthy coping strategies. (5) Policy makers should implement programs to expand community-based mental health services including financial and social assistance to the families such as “Pangkabuhayan or Livelihood Program” to reduce socioeconomic strain for the families. Also, establish “Bayanihan” to the resident of the families for the practical and emotional support networks with trusted community members. Families might need childcare, transportation, housing and legal referrals that can support families with their psychological recovery. (6) Policy makers should provide a long-term program for families of victims of killings since the impact of the killing persist for months or years. They should adopt policies recognizing the trauma, complex grief and other psychological challenges. Most importantly, follow-up mental health services should be provided to these families to monitor their ongoing physical and psychological well-being and address emerging needs.

Implication for Future Research

The findings of this study support further studies that might contribute to the development of intervention programs for the families of victims of killings. First, expanding the scope of the families might capture a more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences, particularly in their mental health. Second, future research might use psychological tests for empirical evidence and enhance the validity and credibility of this study. Third, future research may explore the services that families receive from healthcare professionals, religious institutions, and other community organizations to understand how these services are provided and to identify gaps in current services, thereby strengthening organizations' capacity to support families throughout their grieving process. Fourth, future research could examine the relationship between prolonged grief disorder and mental health challenges that families of victims of killing experienced following the killing of their loved one. Lastly, future research might focus on comparing the mental health of families who lose a loved one due to natural causes with those who have lost a loved one in a sudden death, such as homicide or murder.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to the presented results and findings of this study, the researcher found that families of victims of killings experienced a profound and lasting impact after the killing of their loved one, particularly on their mental health. The psychological impact includes trauma, persistent fear, Isolation, alarming stress, emotional distortions and memory loss, a feeling of guilt, shame, and self-blame, and loss of a safe worldview. With these challenges, families' experiences contributed to diminished social trust and increased psychological distress. Moreover, the unexpected death of a loved one strongly affected the family dynamics and socioeconomic status, as roles and responsibilities suddenly changed and shifted, resulting in each family member working together while in a state of grieving.

However, even though each family member's grief and loss were traumatic and complex, the coping strategies, reflections, and insights allowed each of them to be aware of their mental health and well-being. Some family members gained new insights, such as recognizing that life is short and that loving and valuing other family members is important. They were also able to strengthen relationships with others by accepting support and assistance from relatives and friends. Some family members also developed personal growth, learning to manage themselves, and became mature, strong, and able to stand on their own. While religion and faith were also significant sources of forgiveness, hope, belief, and strength to help manage and sustain them in the here-and-now experiences beyond the traumatic incident. The findings of this study support the Posttraumatic Growth Theory as the theoretical lens of this research because these experiences show that most of the families

develop positive changes in themselves, the world, and others after a traumatic and distressful event.

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