

Voices of Survival: Exploring the Experiences of Victims of Robbery

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of robbery victims in rural communities of Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines, focusing on emotional, psychological, and behavioral responses. Utilizing purposive sampling, ten participants were selected based on criteria including direct experience of robbery involving force or intimidation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis revealed three core dimensions: the victims' immediate experiences during the robbery, their enduring psychological and social impact, and their coping mechanisms. Victims described intense fear and helplessness, lasting emotional trauma, disrupted routines, broken trust, and financial instability. Despite these challenges, resilience emerged through faith, familial support, and adaptive behavior. Framed within Trauma Theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Routine Activity Theory, the findings highlight the importance of trauma-informed victim support systems and community-based crime prevention strategies. The study underscores the need for culturally contextualized psychosocial interventions and policy reforms tailored to rural vulnerabilities.

Keywords: victimization, robbery, trauma, coping mechanisms, psychological impact, resilience, victim support, emotional recovery, crime prevention, rural safety.

INTRODUCTION

Robbery remains a pervasive threat in rural communities where limited resources, sparse law enforcement presence, and geographic isolation amplify vulnerability. In places like Zamboanga del Sur, robbery through ambush and predation has fostered a climate of fear and social disruption. While urban-centered studies dominate criminological discourse, the lived experiences of rural crime victims remain underrepresented. This study addresses that gap by elevating the voices of robbery survivors and examining their psychological, emotional, and behavioral responses.

Victimology and trauma literature suggest that violent crime, especially when involving face-to-face confrontation, often triggers acute stress responses, emotional instability, and longer-term psychological sequelae (Jamuna et al., 2023; Kunst & Hoek, 2024). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), hypervigilance, and depressive symptoms are common among victims (Fridh et al., 2023; Sexton, 2025). Yet the intersection of crime, place, and vulnerability remains inadequately explored in rural contexts. This study employs an interdisciplinary framework that encompasses Trauma Theory, Routine Activity Theory, and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping to investigate how victims in Zamboanga del Sur experience, interpret, and recover from robbery.

Recent works (Delgado & Ramirez, 2023; Santos et al., 2023) underscore the need for trauma-informed interventions and localized safety strategies. However, critical gaps remain in understanding how victims in specific rural regions cope with such violations. This research contributes a localized perspective and aims to support policy efforts by documenting the emotional toll, loss of security, and survival mechanisms employed by those affected.

Objectives

- a. To explore the experiences of victims of robbery in rural communities.
- b. To examine the impacts of robbery on the lives of the informants, focusing on physical, emotional, and social aspects.
- c. To identify the coping strategies employed by the informants in dealing with the aftermath of robbery.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Trauma Theory (Sexton, 2025), which conceptualizes trauma as a profound disruption in psychological equilibrium. It also draws from the Routine Activity Theory (Reyns, 2025), which explains crime through the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. Additionally, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus & Folkman, as cited by Ben-Zur (2020), provides a framework for understanding how individuals appraise threats and marshal coping responses. These theories collectively inform the interpretation of participants' narratives and the emergent themes.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative-descriptive phenomenological design was adopted to capture the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences (Alipoyo, 2022). Purposive sampling was used to select ten individuals who had personally experienced robbery involving violence, threats, or intimidation. Inclusion criteria required victims to be at least 18 years old, residents of rural Zamboanga del Sur, and emotionally stable enough to recount their experiences. Primary data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews using an expert-validated interview guide. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke as cited by Byrne (2022), with data coded and clustered into meaningful themes. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking, and expert validation of themes. Ethical clearance was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality and emotional safety were strictly maintained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of data gathered through in-depth interviews with victims of robbery who served as the study's informants. The Thematic Content Analysis framework, as proposed by Braun and Clarke as cited by Byrne (2022), emphasizes the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher engaged in horizontalization, treating each statement from the informants with equal value. All relevant responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim from audio recordings to maintain accuracy and authenticity. The data presentation was organized according to the statement of the problem, with the essence of the experience presented at the end.

Significant statements related to the phenomenon of robbery and its effects on the victims were carefully identified and reviewed. These statements were then clustered into meaningful units, grouped by common themes and ideas. Redundant or unrelated information was excluded to maintain focus on the core experiences of the participants. Through imaginative variation, the researcher examined the data from multiple angles to reveal the underlying meanings of the lived experiences. This analytical process yielded a composite description that captured the essence of being a robbery victim, as expressed through the voices of those who had experienced it.

These emergent themes are formulated as answers to the sub-problems and are summarized as follows:

Experiences of the Informant

The responses to the interview established the experiences of the robbery victims. Three emerging themes were discovered in the study: brush with fear, inner storms, and life disrupted. The following terms were covered comprehensively below:

Brush with Fear. This theme encapsulates the victims' immediate and terrifying encounters with danger, as well as the emotional toll exacted by the sudden loss of possessions and personal security. Participants vividly

recalled moments of fear, shock, and vulnerability when their ordinary routines were violently interrupted by the presence of armed perpetrators. Participant 1 recounted the abruptness of the attack: I was surprised when those three men suddenly grabbed me (SS2P1).

Similarly, Participant 3 shared how she was caught off guard as she was about to head home: I was about to go home, but I was ambushed (SS26P3). The fear intensified upon realizing that the perpetrators were armed. As Participant 1 revealed, they were carrying a weapon (SS5P1). Participant 3 echoed this fear, describing a sudden and painful sensation: Suddenly, there was a sharp poke on my side... I did not know what had poked me because it was sharp (SS30P3).

These chilling encounters left the victims not only physically vulnerable but also emotionally shaken. The abruptness of the incidents, combined with the threat of violence, triggered intense fear and helplessness. Many participants expressed that it was not just the loss of material possessions that distressed them; it was the deep psychological impact of being violated in what they assumed were safe spaces. Faced with overwhelming fear and the survival instinct, most chose not to resist. As Participant 2 recounted: That's why, ma'am, out of panic and fear, I just handed over my bag right away (SS21P2).

Participant 5 similarly shared: I gave them whatever they wanted, whatever they asked for that I had with me (SS48P5). In these encounters, self-preservation became paramount. The victims' decision to comply was not out of willingness, but out of a desperate need to survive. The experience left a lasting emotional scar, one marked not only by fear but also by the erosion of trust in their surroundings and a heightened sense of vulnerability.

Cohen and Felson's Routine Activity Theory (Reyns, 2025) revealed how the convergence of three elements, motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardianship, placed individuals at significant risk during their daily routines. In the context of robbery, this theory explained how seemingly ordinary activities led victims into situations where they became vulnerable to sudden and violent encounters. The abrupt confrontation with an aggressor not only posed a physical threat but also caused a profound emotional rupture. Victims were overwhelmed by fear, confusion, and helplessness as their sense of safety and control was instantly shattered.

The impact of robbery extended far beyond the loss of material possessions. It deeply undermined victims' emotional well-being and psychological stability. As noted by Kunst and Hoek (2024), experiencing robbery significantly disrupted individuals' sense of security, leading to lasting emotional distress. Victims who had close contact with the offender reported heightened fear, an increased sense of helplessness, and a pervasive feeling of vulnerability during the incident. Such direct exposure to danger not only amplified their perception of personal risk but also contributed to the development of acute stress reactions and post-traumatic symptoms. Melin et al. (2023) emphasized that robbery disrupted the victims' immediate sense of security and hindered their emotional and social functioning.

Driven by an instinct for self-preservation, many victims instinctively complied or sought ways to minimize harm during the ordeal. As Setti et al. (2018) pointed out, individuals in high-stress situations actively sought strategies to reduce psychological impact. However, the effects of these traumatic experiences often persisted. Many victims reported long-term hypervigilance, showing how the immediate threat evolved into a lasting psychological burden. They also experienced reduced self-efficacy, which negatively affected their ability to function normally in daily life (Giorgi et al., 2018).

Inner Storms. This theme captured the profound internal struggles that victims endured in the aftermath of a robbery. The experience unleashed a torrent of emotions: fear, anger, helplessness, and confusion that disrupted their sense of normalcy and emotional stability. These intense feelings were not limited to the moment of the crime; rather, they lingered, echoing through the victims' daily lives, relationships, and mental well-being long after the incident had passed. The initial shock from the violent encounter often gave way to deeper psychological wounds that were more difficult to process or articulate. Participant 7 illustrated this paralyzing fear when he shared: I could do nothing but tremble (SS70P7)

Similarly, participant 6 expressed the surreal detachment he experienced during the robbery: It was like your spirit separated from your body (SS115P6). The fear of one's life dominated the victims' thoughts. The shock of the unexpected violence left many feeling utterly powerless, especially in the absence of anyone they could call for help. For some, the trauma was so profound that they struggled to put their feelings into words. As participant 1 expressed: It was tough to explain what I felt or experienced (SS92P1). Even when attempting to interact with others, victims often found it difficult to function normally. Participant 4, for instance, described the emotional disconnect he felt with his team following the event: So during that time, I struggled to explain to my people that I could not properly assist them (SS42P4).

Many victims faced difficulty communicating the depth of their pain, finding it easier to withdraw or remain silent rather than revisit the traumatic experience. As a coping mechanism, several turned to companionship, seeking the presence of others as a source of comfort and safety. Being with someone offered a sense of protection that words could not provide. Participant 3 shared: I would no longer go out without a companion (SS168P3). This sentiment was echoed by participant 4, who emphasized his constant need for company: I always made sure to have someone with me (SS170P4). In the wake of the robbery, victims bore not only the weight of what was taken from them but also the invisible burden of emotional trauma. This inner storm left lasting marks on their sense of self, safety, and connection with others.

The Routine Activity Theory of Cohen and Felson, as cited by Reyns (2025), explained that crime occurs if the three elements converge. When applying to the victims' experiences, the emotional and psychological struggles are not only rooted in robbery itself but also in the sudden disruption of their daily routines and perceived sense of safety. The robbery event exposes them to a harsh reality where their everyday activities, once found safe, become reminders of vulnerability and threat. As a result, the emotional turmoil they experience stems from violating their everyday security.

A study found that robbery has a substantial impact on victims' mental health, emphasizing how recent traumatic experiences continue to shape psychological well-being. The sense of violation and insecurity left by the robbery can lead to enduring psychological symptoms such as chronic anxiety, hypervigilance, and intrusive thoughts, which often develop into more severe mental health conditions. The traumatic experience may lead to isolation and detachment or disconnection from others. Lee and Fung's (2024) findings underscore the profound impact trauma can have on an individual's emotional and social functioning, highlighting the necessity for interventions and social reintegration for trauma survivors. The psychological wounds left by criminal acts can sometimes be deeper and longer-lasting than the physical losses, altering victims' emotional stability and their ability to trust others or feel secure in familiar environments (Jamuna et al., 2023). Victims may withdraw from social interactions due to fear, mistrust, or a sense of vulnerability (Ahern et al., 2017). As victims started to perceive their environment as more dangerous, they may adopt some behaviors that would limit them to perceived threats. These behaviors are driven by heightened fear and the psychological need to regain control, which makes the victim seek constant companionship or modify their daily routines (Chadee et al., 2020).

Life Disrupted. This theme reflected the abrupt and violent disruption caused by robbery, which shattered the victims' sense of normalcy and forced them to navigate a new, unsettling reality. Once-familiar routines were suddenly rendered unsafe, and victims struggled to regain stability and control in both their personal and professional lives. Participant 2 recalled his typical routine after work, unaware that the route he considered ordinary would soon be the site of trauma: That time when I was going home from work, I passed by the back of Juanita; it's a quiet place there (SS18P2). This sense of security in routine was shared by participant 8, who expressed disbelief that such an incident could happen in a close-knit community: Before, we didn't worry about it, because there probably wouldn't be any trouble here, the people are close-knit (SS82P8).

However, the robbery upended their daily lives, replacing routine with anxiety and uncertainty. Places once considered safe became reminders of trauma, and the victims' sense of control was deeply shaken. Participant 7 articulated how the event disrupted not only his livelihood but also his emotional drive: It affected my daily life. It's disheartening that despite all your efforts, others are trying to bring you down (SS78P7). For participant 5, the robbery dealt a particularly painful blow, taking money that had been carefully set aside for

an important purpose: After we got home, I was in shock, ma'am, because the money I had saved was meant for something very important (SS49P5).

The financial impact extended beyond the initial loss. Victims were forced to reallocate resources, shift priorities, and adjust their budgeting to cope with the aftermath. Participant 1 shared: I was forced to change my budget (SS139P1). This necessity to adapt was echoed by participant 5, who recalled the additional burden of finding money just to cover basic household needs: It was really difficult, I had to find other money just to cover the household expenses (SS149P5). Ultimately, the robbery not only results in material loss but also in emotional, psychological, and financial upheaval. Victims found their lives forcibly redirected, their plans disrupted, and their hard-earned stability suddenly swept away.

The experiences shared by robbery victims underscored the fragility of daily stability when regular patterns were violently disrupted. From the perspective of the Routine Activity Theory by Cohen and Felson, as cited by Reyns (2025), victims' routines placed them at specific times and locations where motivated offenders could exploit their vulnerability. Once a robbery occurred, it altered not only a singular moment but also the broader patterns of daily life, compelling victims to reconstruct their everyday activities. These changes illustrated how crime reshaped routine behaviors in an attempt to minimize risk or adapt to a heightened perception of danger. Victims' modified routines reflected efforts to restore balance, manage fear, and regain a sense of personal security.

Routine disruption emerged as a significant consequence of robbery victimization, particularly among adolescents (Rojas et al., 2023). Victims exhibited notable signs of psychological distress, which often translated into tangible changes in their daily behaviors and routines, an adaptive response to the perceived threat. Altering routes to school, avoiding certain areas, or reducing social interactions were behavioral shifts that reflected a breakdown in previously stable and predictable activity patterns. These modifications were frequently driven by anxiety, fear of re-victimization, and a diminished sense of control over one's surroundings. The study emphasized that such disruptions were not merely reactive but also represented coping mechanisms unconsciously adopted to re-establish a sense of personal safety.

Morall et al. (2023) found that many victims developed heightened vigilance and persistent anxiety, which led to notable changes in their everyday functioning. Some began avoiding staying home alone, experienced altered sleeping patterns due to fear of repeated intrusions, or even relocated entirely. Others became fixated on checking locks and monitoring surveillance systems, disrupting otherwise routine transitions such as leaving or returning home. These newly adopted behaviors were rooted in the desire for safety and reflected a broader loss of normalcy and predictability in daily life.

Victims frequently reported feeling hyperaware and anxious, which impaired their ability to interact with others or complete tasks with their prior level of focus and efficiency (Junger et al., 2023). In workplace settings, employees who experienced robbery described feeling unsafe in their environment, prompting changes in work behavior and a reevaluation of how routine tasks were approached. Some employees became reluctant to take shifts at particular times or locations, while others required reassignment or temporary leave to manage their emotional distress. These individuals struggled to regain a sense of security and routine, particularly when confronted with reminders of the traumatic event. Jones and MacLean (2022) observed that many victims experienced an immediate breakdown in their sense of mobility and freedom. They commonly exhibited elevated levels of hypervigilance and mistrust, especially toward strangers in environments resembling the scene of the robbery. The perceived randomness of the attack significantly intensified the psychological disruption, reinforcing feelings of unpredictability and insecurity in everyday life.

Impact of Robbery on the Informant

The responses to the interview established the impact on the robbery victims. The study discovered three emerging themes: silent scars, toll of loss, and broken trust. The following terms were covered comprehensively below:

Silent Scars. This theme underscores the enduring emotional and psychological toll that robbery leaves on its victims, trauma that lingers long after the physical threat is gone. The experience often leaves behind invisible

wounds marked by fear, anxiety, and emotional distress that affect the victims' daily lives and mental well-being. Participant 7 captured the magnitude of this internal struggle, saying: It was a massive blow to me because I was traumatized... Fear is now with me (SS132P7). This lasting fear was echoed by participant 1, who emphasized the constant state of worry that lingered: Trauma and a constant feeling of worry (SS96P1). Participant 2 also recounted a terrifying moment that marked him deeply, suggesting how close he felt to losing his life: It was trauma that I got that night because they pointed a knife at me. I thought I was going to lose my life (SS99P2).

The emotional scars from such experiences often manifest in physical ways, such as restlessness and sleep disturbances. Participant 1 expressed how difficult it became to rest after the incident: It's tough to sleep when there is trauma, and you're constantly worried (SS13P1). Participant 5 shared a similar experience of sleeplessness and slow emotional recovery: I couldn't sleep until morning, thinking about it. I was traumatized, and it took a long time to recover (SS111P5). For some, the trauma became compounded by the fear of recurrence. The robbery left participant 6 in a persistent state of apprehension, as he shared: I was terrified because it might happen to me again (SS100P6). This fear extended to behaviors and movement, altering how victims interacted with their environment. Participant 2 mentioned deliberately avoiding dark places, spaces that once seemed harmless but were now triggers of fear: I keep being wary of those dark places. I no longer pass through such areas because I'm afraid it might happen again (SS24P2). These silent scars, the psychological and emotional wounds, often remain hidden from others but profoundly affect how victims see the world and live their lives. Even after the physical danger has passed, the impact of the robbery continues to echo in their thoughts, habits, and fears.

Sexton's Trauma Theory (2025) provided a critical lens for understanding how individuals processed and adapted to traumatic experiences, particularly those resulting from violent events like robbery. Its central framework was grounded in the idea that trauma was not merely a single moment of distress but a profound disruption of psychological stability, often leading to long-term emotional and cognitive challenges. Trauma had the potential to profoundly affect an individual's self-concept, worldview, and emotional regulation abilities. In the context of robbery victims, the initial shock evolved into chronic anxiety, mistrust of others, hypervigilance, or symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sexton's work suggested that these symptoms were not indicators of personal weakness but natural outcomes of profound emotional injury.

The emotional toll of robbery often extended far beyond the immediate aftermath of the incident, manifesting in long-term psychological challenges that impacted victims well into adulthood. The study by Orellana (2022) emphasized how robbery was often viewed as a singular moment of violence or threat, which could become a turning point in a victim's psychological trajectory. Victims reported elevated levels of anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and symptoms of depression long after the physical danger had passed. Even when the event had occurred years earlier, its residual emotional effects remained evident in the mental health profiles of the victims. This persistent distress often interfered with social functioning, occupational engagement, and overall quality of life, highlighting that robbery was not just a situational trauma but a potential trigger for enduring psychological vulnerability.

The psychological aftermath of robbery frequently left long-lasting scars that continued to shape a victim's mental health and behavior. Fridh et al. (2023) explored the nuanced relationship between robbery victimization and persistent psychological distress, finding that victims exhibited significantly higher levels of mental distress compared to their non-victimized peers. Symptoms of anxiety, withdrawal, low self-esteem, and, in some cases, depressive tendencies often characterized this distress. They also emphasized the importance of social and institutional responses in either mitigating or intensifying the psychological toll of robbery. Victims who felt unsupported or feared negative outcomes from police involvement were more likely to carry the trauma privately, leading to long-term isolation.

The study by Spector et al. (2018) examined the differences in psychological and occupational outcomes between employees who had experienced theft versus robbery. Their findings revealed that robbery victims, particularly those exposed to direct threats or violence, faced significantly greater and more persistent

psychological consequences. Symptoms such as intrusive memories, nightmares, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors often persisted well beyond the immediate aftermath of the robbery. Victims frequently reported a heightened sense of vulnerability, not just in the workplace but also in their personal lives (Montani et al., 2020). Robbery victims were involved in confrontations that induced acute fear and a perceived threat to life. As a result, they experienced continued sleep disturbances, heightened vigilance, and an inability to relax. Kunst and Hoek (2023) emphasized that the persistence of distress was influenced by factors such as the presence of children, the perceived severity of the crime, and dissatisfaction with police response. Victims who felt unsupported often experienced a deeper and more long-lasting emotional impact.

Toll of Loss. This theme captures the profound and lasting impact of robbery on victims' economic stability and overall social well-being. Beyond emotional trauma, the incident often triggered significant financial hardship, disrupted livelihoods, and forced individuals into cycles of debt and uncertainty, deeply straining their quality of life. Participant 1 shared how the robbery marked the beginning of severe financial struggles: After what happened, I faced a huge financial problem (SS143P1). This statement reveals that the financial burden was not momentary; rather, it persisted as a prolonged struggle that interfered with her recovery. The robbery wiped out funds critical for daily living and plans. Participant 6 emphasized this loss as he stated: I didn't have any money left. That money was supposed to be for school and our daily needs (SS120P6).

Similarly, participant 2 was left without the means to meet even the most basic needs, saying: That money was meant for paying off my motorcycle and covering daily expenses, food, everything (SS144P2). The disruption extended beyond personal needs and into small-scale enterprises and livelihoods. Participant 5 reflected on how the loss derailed business operations and household budgeting: After that, I struggled. The money I lost was supposed to support both our daily needs and our business. I had no other source it was everything I had saved for that month (SS38P4). These testimonies illustrate how the robbery not only stripped victims of immediate funds but also compromised future financial security, disrupting plans and plunging them into debt. Forced to find ways to survive, victims often turned to borrowing just to make ends meet. Participant 1 admitted: It was really difficult, ma'am. I had to borrow money because of what happened (SS145P1). Participant 6 echoed this distress, sharing how he was pushed further into financial instability: It affected me. I ended up getting into debt (SS121P6).

The financial aftermath of robbery, as these accounts show, extends beyond the initial event. It sets off a ripple effect of economic insecurity, debt, and loss of stability, adding to the emotional toll and making recovery even more challenging for the victims. Sexton's Trauma Theory (2025) posited that trauma disrupted an individual's fundamental sense of safety, control, and predictability. In the context of robbery, victims frequently experienced sudden financial loss, destruction of property, or even the loss of livelihood. This unexpected disruption not only induced psychological trauma but also created severe socio-economic repercussions. The theory underscored that such psychological disturbances directly impaired an individual's capacity to participate fully in economic activities, thereby intensifying financial instability.

Robbery, beyond its immediate physical and emotional consequences, imposed substantial socio-economic and financial burdens on victims. Abubakar and Onyegbulem (2024) examined the effects of property crimes, including robbery, on victims' socio-economic and psychological well-being. They found that victims often endured financial hardships due to the loss of property and income, which resulted in reduced investment capacity and increased vulnerability to poverty. The psychological aftermath marked by fear, anxiety, and trauma further hindered victims' ability to engage in economic activities, deepening their financial instability. As Faruk and Abdullahi (2021) noted, the lingering fear and insecurity discouraged victims from participating in economic endeavors, further deteriorating their financial conditions. This not only inflicted immediate harm but also disrupted long-term economic security and social functioning, with many victims experiencing a sharp decline in income. In cases where victims were unable to sustain employment or required prolonged support, the financial burden often shifted to social institutions, highlighting the systemic nature of robbery's socio-economic consequences.

The study by Manansala and Valerio (2024) provided further insight into how exposure to robbery significantly disrupted victims' financial stability and socio-economic well-being. Their findings emphasized

that victimization often led to decreased productivity and increased absenteeism. The emotional toll manifesting as fear, anxiety, or symptoms of post-traumatic stress negatively affected decision-making and suppressed entrepreneurial drive, particularly when victims perceived a continued lack of safety in their surroundings. Robbery victims frequently suffered immediate financial losses, including stolen cash, damaged property, and emergency-related expenses (NORC, 2024). Many also faced considerable out-of-pocket costs for medical treatment and mental health care, especially when physical injuries or psychological trauma necessitated long-term care. In most cases, these expenses were not covered by insurance, leaving victims to shoulder the financial burden independently.

Broken Trust. The emotional aftermath of traumatic experiences such as robbery often includes fear, helplessness, and anger. These intense emotions not only disrupt personal well-being but also fracture an individual's trust in others and diminish their sense of safety within the community. When familiar environments become associated with danger, victims often find it difficult to feel secure again, especially when the perpetrators are perceived to be from within their neighborhoods. Participant 1 expressed this deep sense of betrayal and erosion of trust within her immediate surroundings: I no longer trust my neighbors because, even though they are neighbors, they can still be the ones to harm you (SS97P1). The incident not only robbed her of her possessions but also shattered the basic expectation of safety within her community. This feeling was similarly shared by participant 7, who recounted: I lost my trust in people (SS129P7). Trust, once broken by violence or betrayal, becomes incredibly difficult to rebuild. Victims begin to question not only strangers but even people they used to rely on. They experience constant vigilance and a heightened sense of vulnerability. Participant 1 reflected on how the robbery left her questioning the very foundation of her safety: It had a big impact on my sense of safety and trust in the community (SS11P1).

Participant 7 further elaborated on how the traumatic event affected not only her personal trust but also the broader reputation and security of the entire locality: The damage caused by that event is severe and has deeply affected us. People lose trust, and if anyone visits our area, they become hesitant because our town lacks security (SS76P7). These accounts illustrate that the psychological wounds left by robbery extend beyond individual trauma; they ripple outward, weakening the social fabric and collective trust within the community. When security is compromised, both literal and emotional walls go up, leaving individuals more isolated and distrustful of the very environment they once called safe.

According to Sexton's Trauma Theory (2025), trauma did not merely involve the recollection of a distressing event; rather, it fundamentally reshaped an individual's core beliefs and emotional responses. Trauma often left individuals in a sustained state of heightened alertness, wherein emotional reactions were intensified, and trust in others, especially within the community, was severely compromised. This breakdown of trust reflected a defense mechanism, rooted in the mind's effort to prevent further harm. Sexton's theory suggested that such emotional reactions and fractured trust were not transient but persistent, resisting resolution over time.

Robbery, as a violent and deeply personal form of crime, frequently triggers profound emotional and psychological responses in victims, significantly eroding public trust in institutions (Uddin, 2024). Victims often reported experiencing acute fear, vulnerability, and betrayal, not only directed toward the perpetrators but also toward the systems meant to offer protection. Many expressed feelings of abandonment or frustration, particularly when law enforcement responses were delayed or perceived as indifferent. This perceived institutional failure contributed to a breakdown in trust, wherein individuals ceased to believe in the competence, reliability, or fairness of police agencies, judicial systems, or local authorities. These enduring emotional struggles contributed to a broader sense of disillusionment, as victims came to feel not only victimized by criminals but also neglected by the state.

Mukherjee's (2024) research examined the wider implications of crime on social trust and found that individuals who had experienced robbery displayed significantly diminished confidence in others. Victims internalized a deep and lasting sense of vulnerability, particularly when the crime occurred in public spaces previously regarded as safe. These psychological effects were not confined to the immediate aftermath of the incident; instead, they persisted over time, influencing how individuals interacted with others and perceived the safety of their environments (Magwood et al., 2019).

Coping Strategies of the Informant

The responses to the interview established the impact on the robbery victims. The study discovered three emerging themes: inner strength, anchored by others, and steps of recovery. The following terms were covered comprehensively below:

Inner Strength. This theme highlights the personal journeys of resilience and emotional growth that victims undergo in the aftermath of robbery. Despite their pain, victims found ways to cope, whether by reframing their losses, leaning on faith and gratitude, or taking proactive steps to protect themselves in the future. These coping mechanisms demonstrate the strength and determination individuals draw upon to heal and move forward. For many, the first step in recovery was maintaining perspective. While the robbery resulted in the loss of valuable items and money, several participants focused on what could still be salvaged: their lives, their peace of mind, and their future. Participant 4 illustrated this mindset: Money can always be earned back, so I did not let my emotions take over (SS165P4). Participant 3 shared a similar sentiment, recounting the advice she received to stay hopeful and believe in eventual recovery: They also said that it would all recover in time (SS163P3). Despite experiencing fear and material loss, many victims expressed gratitude for having survived the ordeal unharmed. This gratitude became a source of emotional strength, helping them shift their focus from what was lost to what was preserved. Participant 6 recalled this feeling clearly: When I got home, I felt a bit relieved because nothing bad happened to me (SS117P6). This sense of relief and thankfulness was echoed by participant 7, who emphasized the power of prayer and appreciation for life: I just prayed and gave thanks that I wasn't dead. And that's probably the most effective thing I've noticed (SS79P7).

In the wake of trauma, gratitude became the cornerstone of many victims' healing. It empowered them to take preventive actions, both emotionally and practically. Some invested in safety measures to protect their families and rebuild a sense of security. Participant 1 shared: I also installed security cameras (SS17P1). Similarly, participant 4 adapted his financial habits for added security: Better to do online transactions instead of using cash (SS169P4). These insights reveal that while robbery caused significant distress, it also awakened an inner resilience among victims. Through perspective, gratitude, and proactive adaptation, they found ways to reclaim control over their lives and reaffirm their strength in the face of adversity.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman, as cited by Lim et al. (2023), emphasized the dual processes of primary and secondary appraisal. During the primary appraisal, individuals assessed the robbery as a significant threat to their safety, financial stability, and emotional well-being. This was followed by secondary appraisal, wherein victims evaluated their ability to cope with the stress brought about by the incident. Many demonstrated active coping strategies by installing surveillance systems, transitioning to online transactions, and restructuring their financial plans to adapt to the altered reality.

Mucci et al. (2020) provided valuable insights into how shared exposure to traumatic events such as robbery influenced psychological outcomes. Victims who experienced robbery alongside others exhibited distinct coping responses compared to those who endured the trauma in isolation. Shared exposure created a social context through which victims collectively processed their experiences, facilitating emotional validation, mutual understanding, and support. This collective coping promoted adaptive responses, such as verbalizing emotions, seeking reassurance, and engaging in shared debriefing. Victims who actively acknowledged and managed their emotions, particularly those who leaned on familial or community support systems, reported more rapid emotional recovery and lower levels of prolonged psychological distress (Velden et al., 2023). In contrast, maladaptive behaviors such as denial, avoidance, or emotional suppression hindered recovery and mirrored the emotional disruptions typically seen in robbery victims, who often experienced fear of recurrence and a sense of personal violation.

The emotional repercussions of robbery could be both immediate and enduring, prompting victims to adopt coping strategies to manage psychological distress (Littleton et al., 2023). Emotion-focused coping involved regulating the emotional response to the incident and was commonly employed in situations perceived as uncontrollable, such as during or directly after a robbery, when emotional stability took precedence over problem-solving. On the other hand, problem-focused coping entailed direct action to address the stressor, including improving home or workplace security, filing police reports, consulting legal professionals, or

attending therapy. According to Taylor et al. (2022), criminal victimization survivors achieved more favorable psychological outcomes when they employed adaptive coping strategies within supportive environments. Victims who felt emotionally supported tended to face their trauma proactively rather than avoiding it. Adaptive strategies, including realistic appraisals, proactive problem-solving, and utilization of community resources, contributed significantly to psychological resilience. Robbery victims who engaged in such coping mechanisms were more likely to regain a sense of control and reported fewer symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Hobfoll et al., 2021).

Anchored by Others. This theme highlights the essential role of family, friends, and spiritual faith in helping individuals cope with the emotional aftermath of a traumatic experience such as robbery. Strong relational bonds and supportive networks serve as emotional anchors, providing stability, comfort, and a sense of safety that are vital to resilience and recovery. Many participants found solace in the unwavering presence of their loved ones. Participant 3 emphasized the importance of her close relationships: I have my circle of friends and my family is always there (SS161P3). Participant 1 also shared her proactive approach to seeking both emotional and professional support: I seek help from my family and also ask for help from a therapist (SS151P1). These support systems were not just sources of comfort but also guidance. Participant 4 described how he leaned on others' wisdom to overcome challenges: I listened to their advice that every problem can be overcome as long as the right people are there to help (SS166P4).

Beyond familial and social support, spiritual faith emerged as a powerful coping mechanism. Many participants turned to prayer, believing in divine protection and healing. Participant 4 shared how prayer, encouraged by others, helped him find peace: They advised me to just pray to God that everything will be okay and to trust in God completely, knowing that He will never abandon us. (SS152P4) Participant 7 echoed this deep reliance on faith, finding that prayer gradually eased her trauma: I just pray and trust in God, believing that He won't leave us. Over time, the trauma you feel will eventually fade away (SS133P7). For participant 6, the experience itself became a turning point that reinforced his belief in divine presence and protection: Then it was only afterward that I realized and said to myself, I felt that God was there and watching over me (SS118P6).

Together, these narratives show that social and spiritual connections play a transformative role in the healing process. Whether through the comforting presence of loved ones, professional help, or faith in a higher power, victims of robbery found strength, hope, and a path toward emotional recovery through the support of others. Despite the trauma inflicted by the robbery, many victims turned to prayer as a source of strength. Their faith in a higher power provided hope and courage to confront the emotional aftermath. Through spiritual belief, they maintained the conviction that justice and healing would ultimately prevail. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping offered a meaningful framework for understanding how victims responded to such traumatic experiences. This model posited that the experience of stress was influenced by how individuals appraised the threat and the coping resources available to them. In the context of robbery, victims engaged in a cognitive appraisal process, first assessing the severity of the incident and then evaluating their capacity to manage its effects. Many drew emotional strength not only from internal coping mechanisms but also from their relationships with family, friends, and community members, emphasizing that coping was a socially mediated process rather than an isolated psychological event.

Mucci et al. (2020) examined this phenomenon, revealing that shared exposure to traumatic events, such as robbery, often fostered increased peer support and strengthened interpersonal bonds. The presence of external support systems served as relational anchors that helped stabilize victims' emotional well-being. Those who received empathetic and consistent support were more likely to re-establish trust, openly process the trauma, and adopt adaptive coping strategies. These relational anchors played a pivotal role in emotional recovery by reinforcing the victims' sense of safety, agency, and connectedness. Waal and Preston (2017) found that victims frequently received consolation from those in their immediate environment who had also experienced the trauma. Simple gestures such as a comforting touch, verbal reassurance, or expressed concern acted as emotional stabilizers. These acts not only served a psychological purpose but also reinforced social bonds, enabling victims to reframe their experience as part of a shared struggle rather than a solitary ordeal. Post-robbery interactions within workplaces or communities often strengthened solidarity, enhanced collective

resilience, and encouraged communal coping mechanisms. Victims who benefited from such relational support were more likely to verbalize their emotions and regain a sense of trust and security more quickly than those who lacked such support.

Aggravated robberies, especially those involving violence or the threat of harm, left profound psychological and social impacts on victims. Zondeka and Barkhuizen (2017) found that victims who had access to sustained social support from family, friends, or community members exhibited more adaptive psychological outcomes. Similarly, Newburn and Shiner (2018) observed that victims of street robberies often turned to informal community networks for emotional reassurance and practical assistance. These sources of support provided not only comfort but also a reaffirmation of safety and belonging. Andersen et al. (2023) emphasized that the presence of empathetic and responsive individuals significantly influenced the victims' recovery trajectory, underscoring the importance of structured support systems in post-crime interventions.

Steps to Recovery. This theme explores the actions that individuals instinctively take when faced with traumatic or dangerous situations, particularly in the aftermath of criminal events like robbery. Victims often rely on a mix of immediate survival instincts and long-term practical adjustments aimed at reducing future risk. The trauma of robbery triggers reactions that are designed to preserve life and safety, especially when faced with threats of violence. For some victims, the immediate concern was survival, which meant surrendering material possessions to the perpetrators. Participant 5 shared how the presence of her children influenced her decision-making: Since I had my child with me, I was really scared because I was carrying my child, ma'am, and I also had another child with me. It was frightening, not knowing what their true intention was, whether they wanted money or maybe a cellphone (SS45P5).

Participant 6 also emphasized how the fear of harm influenced his plea to the assailants: I just told him not to hurt me because I have children. I still have people waiting for me (SS62P6). The victims' awareness of the tactics used by the perpetrators also played a key role in their decision-making during the robbery. Participant 8 described how the assailants positioned themselves to execute their plan: Their tactic was to park their motorcycle ahead, and then they approached us (SS86P8). Similarly, participant 3's experience revealed how she instinctively understood the perpetrators' intentions when they blocked her way, yet hesitated before acting: So, I already knew their intentions at first, but I was hesitant... until I realized that if I didn't stop, we would get into an accident because they were blocking the road (SS29P3).

Reflecting on the actions of the perpetrators provides valuable insights into criminal behavior patterns, which can be crucial in developing strategies to reduce future victimization. The trauma led many victims to become more vigilant in their surroundings, actively seeking ways to prevent further harm. Participant 1 shared her proactive approach to enhancing safety: I also installed security cameras (SS167P1). Similarly, participant 7 suggested a community-based approach, emphasizing the need for vigilance and action when encountering unfamiliar individuals: If they saw someone who was new, they should confront them (SS127P7). This theme illustrates how victims, though deeply affected by traumatic events, begin to recover by taking practical steps toward safety and security. Whether through the surrender of possessions to preserve life, the vigilance in observing criminal behavior, or taking protective measures in their environments, these actions reflect the resilience and determination of individuals to regain control over their lives and minimize future risks.

Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping posits that stress is not simply a reaction to an external event but rather a dynamic process involving an individual's cognitive appraisal of the situation and the coping strategies they employ in response. This model offers a valuable framework for understanding how robbery victims' immediate behavioral reactions evolve into long-term coping practices. These behaviors can be seen as adaptive efforts to manage a perceived threat to personal safety and psychological well-being. Initially, victims assess the robbery as a threat, harm, or challenge, which then shapes the trajectory of their immediate responses, such as complying with the perpetrators, attempting to memorize details for future reporting, or seeking immediate physical safety. Once the immediate crisis has passed, victims begin evaluating their resources and options for coping. This process is evident in how they assess their ability to regain control after the event. Practical responses such as altering daily routines, installing security measures, or avoiding certain areas reflect problem-focused coping strategies aimed at preventing future incidents.

Experiencing a robbery is not merely a moment of crisis; it often marks the beginning of a lasting shift in behavior, routines, and overall well-being. Di Fabio and Kenny (2018) explored the effects of robberies and thefts on individuals working in industries vulnerable to such crimes. Their study found that victims often displayed heightened hypervigilance at work, such as double-checking security locks, changing opening and closing procedures, and avoiding solitary shifts. These behaviors, which were intended to prevent future victimization, also reflect an internalized fear that persists long after the event. Victims frequently alter their routes, avoid locations associated with the crime, or withdraw from social engagements as part of an ongoing effort to ensure personal safety and prevent recurrence (Orellana et al., 2022). Many young victims, for example, began carrying self-defense tools, installing security apps on their phones, or staying vigilant in public spaces. Additionally, some victims leaned on close-knit support systems, such as friends and family, who provided emotional reassurance and, in some cases, physical accompaniment in public settings.

Wollinger (2017) identified three common victim responses following such incidents: relocating, enhancing personal security measures, or opting not to take action. These behavioral choices are closely tied to the emotional processing of the event. Similar responses can be observed in robbery victims, who often endure the added trauma of face-to-face threat. In response, victims tend to exhibit adaptive behaviors aimed at reducing their vulnerability. Although these proactive measures may not be foolproof, they represent an instinctual response to perceived danger and a desire to regain control over their environment. On a practical level, victims often seek external support to address the aftermath of the robbery. Mogire and Birech (2023) highlight the critical role of community-based initiatives in providing immediate assistance and fostering a sense of collective responsibility. These community-driven efforts not only aid in the recovery process but also contribute to preventing future incidents by enhancing communal vigilance. By adopting effective coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in healthy activities, and taking practical steps to enhance safety, adolescents and other victims can better manage the distress caused by robbery and work toward emotional recovery (Lindström & Rosvall, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Robbery victims in rural Zamboanga del Sur endure far-reaching emotional, psychological, and socio-economic effects. Their experiences reveal the fragility of safety, the depth of trauma, and the strength of human resilience. Faith, family, and community serve as lifelines in recovery, but institutional support remains inconsistent. The study advocates for trauma-informed responses, improved rural policing, and community-based prevention. Policies must reflect the lived realities of rural crime victims to foster sustainable recovery and community trust.

Ethical Consideration

Institutional ethics procedures were adhered to in this investigation. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee. Following an explanation of the study's objectives and the voluntary nature of their involvement, informed consent was acquired from the participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld during the entire investigation.

Conflict Of Interest

The writers disclose no conflicts of interest. In line with university regulations, they want to use this publication as a foundation for their request for institutional incentives from their university.

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